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Secondary Teachers' Experiences of Supports to Improve Literacy for Long-Term English Learners

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2023

Abstract

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by

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MA, University of Wisconsin Whitewater, 2003

BS, University of Wisconsin Whitewater, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Reading, Literacy, Assessment, and Evaluation

Walden University

November 2023

Abstract

The population of English learners (ELs) in the United States continues to grow.

However, ELs demonstrate lower academic achievement when compared to non-EL

students. The problem addressed in this study is that many teachers do not feel prepared

to utilize strategies and supports to improve Long Term English Learner's (LTELs') low

literacy skills. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary

teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. Krashan's second

language acquisition theory was used to guide this study on how students acquire a

second language. The first research question was about secondary teacher's experiences

of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. The second research question was about how

secondary general content area teachers' experiences compare to secondary EL teachers'

experiences. Purposeful sampling was used to select six secondary general content area

teachers and six secondary EL teachers for a total of 12 study participants to share their

experiences through semistructured interviews. Data were coded using In Vivo Coding to

identify themes and categories. This study may serve as an impetus for social change by

informing educators and school districts on teacher experiences of supports needed to

improve literacy for LTELs, which may lead to improvement in addressing LTELs'

academic needs to gain the necessary English proficiency skills to exit an EL program

and raise academic achievement.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. To my parents for making the sacrifice to immigrate to the United States to provide me with a brighter future. Thank you!

To my husband Mario, and my daughters Samari and Marisa. Thank you for your support, patience, and understanding during this journey. This certainly was not an easy endeavor, but you helped me get through this! ¡Los amo!

To all the English Learners, especially Long-term English learners. May we continue to work towards providing you with the quality education you deserve. I see you! Reach for the stars! ¡Sí, se puede!

To my family and friends who took this journey with me. Thank you for your support, understanding, and encouragement.

Acknowledgments

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to all the individuals who played a significant role throughout this doctoral journey. Thank you to my committee chair, Dr. Billie Andersson, for your unwavering support, expertise, and guidance. Thank you for believing in me and words of encouragement. Thank you to my committee member, Dr. Suzanne O'Neill, for your input and contributions to this dissertation.

My heart is so grateful to my family for their constant encouragement and understanding. To my husband, Mario, you may be happier than me that I'm finally done. Thank you for your patience! To my beautiful daughters, Samari and Marisa, I can't thank you enough for your support and understanding. I know it was not easy to have to always see me with my computer as I worked any chance I could. You understood and supported me. ¡Mami termino!¡ Mil gracias!

A huge thank you to my NTOY19 Walden crew. I don't know what I would have done without your support. Thank you for walking on this journey with me and uplifting each other.

Thank you to my village, to all my family and friends who chipped in one way or another to make this journey lighter. You know who you are. Whether it was you taking my daughters while I had my writing days, you cooking a meal so that I would not have to worry about dinner, or offering words of encouragement, it meant the world to me. I could not have done this without your support. Thank you!!

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The population of English learner students (ELs) in the United States is one of the fastest-growing student populations (Artigliere, 2019) and grew by almost 35% between the 2000 and 2020 school years. Additionally, during this 20-year time frame, the number of ELs increased in 45 states. (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). ELs make up 10% of the total student population in public schools in the U.S (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021). Despite consistently reflecting a national increase in the EL student population, ELs have continued to demonstrate lower academic achievement when compared to non-EL students (Artigliere, 2019; Clark et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2022).

ELs are a diverse group of students from a wide range of educational backgrounds, various migration experiences, and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Dávila & Linares, 2020; Lahance, 2019). A subgroup of ELs in dire need of attention due to academic risks is Long-term English Learners (LTELs; Clark et al., 2020; Luna, 2020; Shin, 2022). Although the term LTELs emerged about 2 decades ago, there is no standardized official definition of LTELs or national data on the make-up of LTELs in the United States (Brooks, 2020; Clark et al., 2020; Shin, 2020; Strong & Escamilla, 2022; Umansky & Avelar, 2022; Uysal, 2022). The emerging consensus is that LTELs are middle or high school ELs who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for 6 years or more but have reached a plateau in their English language development, which prevents them from demonstrating English proficiency (Clark et al., 2019; Shin et al.,

2022) and prohibits them from reclassification to exit an EL program (Luna, 2020; Uysal, 2022).

Although LTELs have attended U.S. schools for 6 years or more, they often struggle academically and remain stagnant in demonstrating English language development (Clark et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2022; Umansky & Avelar, 2022). Substantial research exists on ELs, but there is an urgent need to conduct more research on LTELs (Clark et al., 2022; Shin, 2020; Uysal, 2022). In this study, I explored secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. This study has the potential to influence LTELs' literacy growth by adding knowledge to the gap in the literature around teacher experiences on supports to improve literacy achievement for LTELs, which may lead to more LTELs reaching English proficiency.

In this chapter, I provide background on who ELs and LTELs are. I explain the unique characteristics of LTELs as a subgroup of ELs, the challenges teachers face in addressing LTELs' academic needs, and the critical role teachers play in supporting literacy achievement for LTELs. In this qualitative study, I explored secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. Due to the vital role teachers play in providing instruction that improves literacy development (Kim, 2021; Venketsamy & Sibanda, 2021), I focused on secondary general content area and EL teachers' experiences from three different regions of the United States.

This chapter also includes details of the study, including the problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions, the conceptual framework, and the nature of the study. I conducted in-depth interviews with three content teachers and three EL

teachers from three different regions of the United States, including 12 total participants. This chapter also includes possible assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and definitions of key terms and concepts central to the study. The chapter concludes with the potential significance of the study, which may result in LTELs' literacy growth by adding to the gap in the literature around teacher perceptions of supports to improve literacy achievement for LTELs. Contributing to closing the gap in the literature around LTELs may lead to teachers being more mindful of LTELs' various academic needs and seek ways to address their needs to foster language development.

Background

According to the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), ELs are defined as students whose primary language is other than English and are eligible for programs and services to improve their language development and academic achievement based on performance on a standardized English-language assessment (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, and Lau v. Nichols are civil rights laws that require states and school districts to provide ELs with appropriate instructional programs to address ELs' language and academic needs (Civil Rights Act, 1964; Equal Education Opportunities Act, 1974; Hopkins et al., 2022; Lau v. Nichols, 1974). Despite ELs bringing a wealth of assets and strengths into classrooms and all the federal accountability measures in place, districts across the nation continue to struggle to raise achievement for ELs (Artigliere, 2019), leading to a significantly lower graduation rate of 69% for ELs compared to 86% for all students (Johnson, 2020; Shin et al., 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

One of the fastest-growing subgroups of ELs is LTELs. Although there is no standard definition of LTELs, the emerging consensus is that LTELs are middle or high school ELs who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for 6 years or more but have reached a plateau in their English language development, which prevents them from demonstrating English proficiency (Clark et al., 2019; Shin et al., 2022) and prohibits them from reclassification to exit an EL program (Luna, 2020; Uysal, 2022). Research has demonstrated consistently shared characteristics amongst LTELs, such as strong oral social skills known as basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) but weak English writing, reading skills, and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Soland & Sandilos, 2021; Umansky & Avelar, 2022), weak language skills in their home language and English, lower academic achievement, low personal expectations, disengagement with school, and at risk for dropping out (Clark et al., 2020; Johnson, 2020; Shin et al., 2022). Additionally, research has revealed that school systems are not well equipped to address LETLs' academic needs, which contributes to students maintaining LTEL status (Shin, 2020; Umansky & Avelar, 2022; Uysal, 2022). These factors have led to a persistent achievement gap in all academic areas for LTELs and teachers' uncertainty about addressing LTELs' literacy needs (Luna, 2020). There is emerging research that questions the dominant research on LTELs, which emphasizes a deficit approach and instead suggest viewing LTELs more holistically by taking into account students' multifaceted linguistic abilities (Brooks, 2020; Flores & Lewis, 2022; Strong & Escamilla, 2022). Although there is a wealth of research on ELs, there is limited research on LTELs, therefore it is imperative to conduct more studies to fill the gap in research

and potentially improve learning outcomes for LTELs (Artigliere, 2019; Clark et al., 2020; Shin, 2020).

Teachers play a critical role in providing students with quality instruction that facilitates language development (Irby et al., 2020; Owens & Wells, 2021; Venketsamy & Sibanda, 2020). Research demonstrates that it is vital for LTEL secondary teachers to be purposeful in content area instruction that engages LTELs in the subject matter, emphasizes content vocabulary, and exposes students to the natural language of their peers and teachers to improve literacy achievement (Irby et al., 2020; Luna, 2020). However, studies have found that most secondary teachers view themselves as subject matter experts and do not feel equipped to instruct ELs or LTELs (Luna, 2020; Ohara et al., 2020; Olds, et al., 2021)

Because teachers are responsible for implementing pedagogical practices that make content comprehensible and for creating an environment that is conducive to learning on a daily basis, there is a need to understand the perception of teachers working with LETLs. While researchers have focused on elementary school teachers' perception in working with ELs (Oh & Mancilla-Martinez, 2021; Owens & Wells, 2021; Umansky & Dumont, 2021) researchers have insufficiently examined secondary teachers' perception on supports to improve literacy achievement for ELs or LTELs (Fu & Wang, 2021; Hopkins et al., 2022; Olds, et al., 2021). Studies show that teacher experiences, beliefs and attitudes are vital indicators of quality education (Kim, 2021; Oh & Mancilla-Martinez, 2021; Umansky et al., 2021). Exploring teachers' experiences on supports to improve literacy achievement for LTELs can significantly influence addressing LTELs

language and academic needs, which may lead to English proficiency and improved literacy skills that LTELs can use throughout their lives.

Problem Statement

The problem that I addressed in this study is that many teachers do not feel prepared to use strategies and supports to improve LTELs low literacy skills. Although a standard definition for LTELs does not exist, the growing consensus in research-based literature is that LTELs are middle or high school ELs who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for 6 years or more but have reached a plateau in their English language development, which prevents them from demonstrating English proficiency (Clark et al., 2019; Shin et al., 2022) and prohibits them from reclassification to exit an EL program (Luna, 2020; Uysal, 2022).

LTELs are one of the fastest-growing student populations, yet they often demonstrate lower academic achievement than the general EL population and non-ELs (Clark et al., 2020; Soland & Sandilos, 2021; Umansky & Avelar, 2022) and encounter a school system minimally equipped to address their academic needs (Luna, 2020). These factors have led to a persistent achievement gap in all academic areas for LTELs and teachers' uncertainty about addressing LTELs' literacy needs (Flores & Lewis, 2022; Johnson, 2020; Shin, 2020).

Students must develop literacy skills for effective communication and academic success (Stauss et al., 2021; Stevenson & Huffling, 2021). LTELs have limited literacy skills in English and need support in improving their literacy skills to raise academic achievement (Mokharti, 2021). Students who struggle to meet the literacy standards

necessary to graduate high school are more likely to drop out, which is particularly concerning for LTELs (Sinclair et al., 2019).

Teachers play a critical role in providing LTELs with quality instruction to strengthen and improve their literacy skills. However, little is understood regarding secondary teachers' perspectives of supports to improve literacy for LTELs (Byfield, 2019; Old et al., 2021; Owens & Wells, 2020). Most LTELs will receive instruction or support from general education teachers and EL teachers. General education teachers are expected to be prepared to provide quality instruction and learning opportunities for all learners; however, research shows that many general education teachers do not feel prepared to work with ELs, even more so LTELs (Deng et al., 2021; Fu & Wang, 2021; Stairs- Davenport, 2021). There is a need to examine general content teacher's and EL teachers' experiences in supporting literacy for LTELs because both roles significantly influence LTELs educational experience (Giles & Yazan, 2020). Focusing on secondary teachers' experiences has the potential to have a significant social influence because the findings can inform teachers on how to support LTELs in strengthening their literacy skills which may lead to students reaching English proficiency and meeting the literacy standards needed to graduate from high school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. While there is significant current research on ELs, LTELs form a subgroup of ELs and only recently have started to receive attention (Artigliere, 2019; Clark et al., 2020). This study is unique because minimal

research exists on LTELs, and much of the research on ELs was focused on the elementary level (Oh & Mancilla-Martinez, 2021; Owens & Wells, 2021). This study adds to the gap in research around secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs.

Research Questions

I used the following research questions to guide this qualitative study:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do the experiences of secondary general content area teachers compare to the perceptions of secondary EL teachers for improving literacy for LTELs?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework for this study includes Krashen's second language acquisition theory (1981), focusing on how students acquire a second language and develop literacy skills. Krashen highlighted the importance of teachers providing lots of comprehensible input in an encouraging environment to foster language acquisition (Krashen, 1981). One of the most notable aspects of the second language acquisition theory is that for significant language development to occur, teachers should step beyond students' current language proficiency level by one level (i+1; Krashen, 1981). Krashen also stated that a focus on grammar should be limited and instead engage students in meaningful interactions with their teachers and peers. Krashen emphasized the

importance of classrooms being engaging and non-threatening to encourage risk-taking and motivate students to practice using English in a safe environment.

Krashen's second language acquisition theory facilitates logical connections to the nature of my study because Krashen's theoretical work offers guidance on pedagogy that fosters language development (Krashen, 1981). Krashen's theory has been used widely to guide work related to language development for ELs. Krashen's second language acquisition theory informed the creation of my research questions because my study aims to explore secondary teachers' perception of supports to improve literacy for LTELs, which is directly related to language acquisition. I used Krashen's second language acquisition theory to develop my interview questions to gain insight into teachers' experiences of literacy development for LTELs. The conceptual framework and its connection to this study are explained in further detail in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This is a qualitative study with multiple in-depth interviews with secondary general content area teachers and EL teachers from three distinct locations in the United States. Using in-depth interviews is an effective approach to examine participant's experiences related to a phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I explored secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. I constructed interview questions based on Krashen's second language acquisition theory in an open-ended format. I used transcripts and coding to identify themes and analyze the data to improve understanding of secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs.

Definitions of Terms

Several terms are critical to understanding this study. To ensure readers clearly understand the meaning of these terms and their context, they are defined below. These special terms are used throughout the study and are related to the problem.

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skill (BICS): BICS refers to the language ability required for verbal face-to-face communication (U. S. Department of Education, 2018). It is the social language used daily.

Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP): CALP refers to the language ability required for academic achievement (U. S. Department of Education, 2018). It is the academic vocabulary needed in school.

English Learner (EL): An English Learner is a student whose primary language is other than English and are eligible for programs and services to improve their language development and academic achievement based on performance on a standardized English-language assessment (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

Language Proficiency: The degree to which the student exhibits control over the use of language, including the measurement of expressive and receptive language skills in the areas of phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics and including the areas of pragmatics or language use within various domains or social circumstances. Proficiency in a language is judged independently and does not imply a lack of proficiency in another language (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Long-Term English Learner (LTELs): There is no standard definition of LTELs, but the emerging consensus is that LTELs are middle or high school ELs who have been

enrolled in U.S. schools for 6 years or more but have reached a plateau in their English language development which prevents them from demonstrating English proficiency (Clark et al., 2019; Shin et al., 2022) and prohibits them from reclassification to exit an EL program (Luna, 2020; Uysal, 2022).

Scaffolding: Scaffolding refers to guidance, support, or assistance provided to students by an educator that allows the student to perform a task they would not be able to do alone. The goal is to foster the student's capacity to perform the task independently later on (Colorín Colorado, 2023).

Translanguaging: Translanguaging refers to pedagogies that draw on students' home, heritage, and community languages as central to their identities and learning (David et al., 2022).

Assumptions

Several assumptions were vital to this study. I assumed that the study participants would understand the purpose of the study and the interview questions. I also assumed that the study participants could provide genuine and authentic responses that correctly express their perceptions and experiences in supporting literacy for LTELs. I assumed that there would be diverse experiences and responses shared.

Scope and Delimitations

This study included six secondary general content area teachers and six secondary EL teachers for a total of 12 study participants from three different regions of the United States. Four teachers were from the East Coast, four teachers from the Midwest, and four teachers from the West Coast. I used purposeful sampling to include secondary general

content area teachers and EL teachers with experience working with LTELs. Due to much of the existing research regarding LTELs focusing on the elementary level, this study focused on teacher experiences at the secondary level.

I used semistructured, in-depth interviews, which I conducted with Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval, as the primary data collection tool. Including general content area teachers and EL teachers in the study fostered analysis of differences and similarities in perceptions between the two groups of teachers. I used transcripts to analyze, code and identify common themes for qualitative analysis. The study yielded findings that can be transferable to other school districts with similar demographics of LTELs (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Limitations

Several limitations may impact this qualitative study. A sample size of 12 participants is small; however, my aim in the study was to explore secondary teachers' experiences for transferability to other school districts with similar demographics. Another limitation may have been possible bias in participants' responses. I attempted to reduce participation bias by creating open-ended questions and was mindful of the way the questions were worded. It was critical that I asked questions objectively and was aware of my body language and facial expressions to maintain a neutral stance. To establish the confirmability of the study's findings, I used an audit trail and did not deviate from the interview protocol (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Significance

This study fills a gap in research on instructional strategies supporting literacy for LTELs at the secondary level to help them reach English proficiency. Much of the current research focuses on ELs, but minimal research focuses on LTELs. This may be due to LTELs being a subgroup of ELs that only recently started to receive attention (Luna, 2020). Even less research focuses on secondary LTELs because much of the research focuses on ELs at the elementary level (Olds, 2021). This study is unique because it addressed an under-researched student population. Although ELs are one of the fastest-growing student populations, ELs often have lower achievement test scores in reading and math (Soland & Sandilos, 2021). It is essential to equip students with strong literacy for effective communication and academic success (Stauss et al., 2021; Stevenson & Huffling, 2021;). This study has the potential to significantly impact the trajectory of LTELs by informing educators on critical supports to improve LTELs' literacy skills which may help them reach English proficiency and be college and career-ready so that they experience success in life.

Summary

LTELs is a subgroup of ELs that is one of the fastest growing student populations in the United States, yet significantly lag behind their peers academically (Clark et al., 2020; Soland & Sandilos, 2021; Umansky & Avelar, 2022). While there is no standard definition of LTELs there is a growing consensus that LTELs are students who have attended school in the United States for 6 years or more, but have reached a plateau in their English language development which prevents them from demonstrating English

proficiency and prevents them from exiting an EL program (Clark et al., 2019; Luna, 2020; Shin et al., 2022; Strong & Escamilla, 2022; Uysal, 2022). Although research is abundant on ELs, there is limited research on LTELs (Byfield, 2019; Old et al., 2021; Owens & Wells, 2020).

Teachers play a critical role in providing students with a quality education and addressing students' academic needs. To support literacy improvement for LTELs and help them reach English proficiency, it is imperative to explore secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs (Giles & Yazan, 2020). This study may influence social change by informing educators and school districts on teacher experiences of supports needed to improve literacy for LTELs, which may lead to improvement in addressing LTELs' academic needs to gain the necessary English proficiency skills to exit an EL program and raise achievement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers'
experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. Many ELs begin their education
in U.S. elementary schools and reach middle or high school without demonstrating
English proficiency. Over five million students are considered ELs in the United States
(U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Researchers have found that although ELs bring
numerous assets and strengths to the classroom, ELs consistently underperform
academically compared to non-EL peers (Sahakyan & Ryan, 2018). A subgroup of ELs
that underperform even more so than the general EL population and who are at high risk
of dropping out of high school is LTELs (Clark et al., 2020; Luna 2020; Shin, 2020).

There is no standard definition of LTELs, but the growing consensus is that
LTELs are middle or high school ELs who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for 6 years
or more but have reached a plateau in their English language development that prevents
them from demonstrating English proficiency (Clark et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2022) and
prohibits them from reclassification to exit an EL program (Luna, 2020;Uysal, 2022).

When ELs become LTELs, the risk increases of the student dropping out of high
school; therefore, it is an issue in dire need of attention. Much of the early research on
LTELs shows that researchers emphasized a deficit approach in describing students and
attributed their LTEL status to having low academic abilities, low motivation, and
deficiencies in English and their native language (Shin, 2020; Strong & Escamilla, 2022;
Umansky & Avelar, 2022). In recent studies, researchers have shifted the emphasis from

LTELs' deficiencies to examining the school systems that have failed LTELs and have led students to the LTEL label (Brooks, 2020; Shin, 2022).

Teachers play a critical role in a student's educational experience. Few studies have been conducted to examine general content teacher perceptions regarding ELs (Byfield, 2019; Oh & Mancilla-Martinez, 2021), and even fewer studies have been focused on teacher perceptions regarding LTELs. In this study, I filled the gap in research on secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. The limited research shows that teachers' beliefs and attitudes directly influence pedagogy for linguistically diverse students (Byfield, 2019; Umansky & Demont, 2021). Researchers have also demonstrated that many general education teachers do not feel prepared to work with ELs (Deng et al., 2021; Stairs-Davenport, 2021). A growing number of studies have shown that leveraging teacher collaboration between general content education teachers and EL teachers can improve outcomes for ELs (Giles & Yazan, 2020; Villavicencio et al., 2021). To influence social change for LTELs, it is imperative to explore secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy, which can help improve outcomes for students and prevent them from dropping out of high school. Chapter 2 includes the literature search strategy, the conceptual framework, a literature review, and a summary.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review includes peer-reviewed scholarly articles published in the past 5 years, as well as books. I used the Walden University Library to access articles through SAGE Journals, ERIC, Thoreau Multi-Database Search, Education Source, and

Teacher Reference Center. I also used Google Scholars to expand my search. My initial

search included the following keywords and a combination of terms related to the study:

Long-term English learners, English learners, English learner classification, second

language, second language learning, instructional strategies, literacy skills, language

development, language proficiency, language assessment, reclassification, bilingualism,

teacher perception, teacher attitudes, teacher views, and *self-efficacy.*

During the research process, it became clear that minimal research has been

conducted on secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs.

I expanded my search to include English Language Learners and English as a Second

Language. The results of my initial search confirmed the need to conduct more research

on LTELs because much of the literature focuses on ELs. It is vital to note that articles

focused on Krashen and laws relating to services required for ELs date back to 1974. I

used Google Sheets to organize the literature, which helped me identify the EL

classification and exit process, characteristics of LTELs, why some ELs become LTELs,

the ramifications of becoming an LTEL, teacher experiences, the role of professional

development, and supports to improve outcomes for LTELs as key categories.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study consists of Krashen's second language

acquisition theory (1981), which focuses on how students acquire a second language.

Krashen's second language acquisition theory was appropriate to frame this study

because LTELs are students who have not been able to demonstrate English language

proficiency. Understanding best practices in acquiring a second language is imperative to improve LTELs' literacy and English proficiency.

Krashen (1981) described acquiring a second language in a classroom as similar to how young children acquire their native language with meaningful interactions. Krashen's second language acquisition theory notes that language acquisition is a subconscious process, thus being acquired subconsciously through meaningful interactions (Krashen, 1982). Krashen's theory addresses the importance of teachers providing lots of comprehensible input in an encouraging environment to foster language acquisition (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021). Comprehensible input means teachers use gestures, visuals, objects, and scaffolding to make the content understandable for students. One of the most notable points of the second language acquisition theory is that for significant language development, teachers should step beyond students' current language proficiency level by one level (i+1; Krashen, 1981). Krashen also stated that a focus on grammar should be limited; instead, students should engage in meaningful interactions with their teachers and peers.

Another critical component of Krashen's second language acquisition theory is the affective filter. Krashen explained that an individual's emotions could assist or interfere with learning a new language (Krashen, 1986). Krashen further explained that learning a new language differs from learning content in other subject areas because it requires individuals to practice in front of others. As a result, speaking in a new language can cause individuals to experience anxiety, embarrassment, fear, and anger, which can impact the affective filter and block learning. Krashen emphasized the importance of

classrooms being engaging and non-threatening to encourage risk-taking and motivate students to practice using English in a safe environment. To facilitate language development, teachers must use pedagogy that engages students, fosters comprehensible input, creates a safe learning environment, and provides students with opportunities to use English in meaningful ways. Krashen's second language acquisition theory was an appropriate conceptual framework to guide this study because it is a theory that researchers have used in studies related to second language development and teaching.

It is vital for teachers to understand the process of second language acquisition to improve literacy for LTELs. Olds et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study to explore elementary general education teachers' reported application of EL instructional strategies and their perception of how those strategies support EL academic achievement. Krashan's second language acquisition theory was one of the theories utilized to frame their study. Olds et al. (2021) determined that teacher perceptions help understand which EL needs' teachers prioritize during instruction and their reasoning behind it. The findings also showed that teachers used and applied familiar instructional strategies to the whole class.

Additionally, Christian et al. (2023) conducted a study framed by Krashen's second language acquisition theory to understand the lived academic experience of ELs in a 10th grade sheltered English class. Christian et al. (2023) determined that teacher expectations significantly influenced students experiencing academic success or engaging in a cycle of failure. Christian et al.'s and Olds et al.'s studies serve as examples of how Krashen's second language acquisition theory was an appropriate framework for

researchers to use to guide studies related to teacher experiences in working with ELs and LTELs.

Krashen's second language acquisition theory (1982) was relevant to this study because the study's purpose was to explore secondary general content area teachers' and EL teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs and second language acquisition affects literacy development. For teachers to facilitate second language acquisition, it is vital for them to understand how a second language is acquired, the importance of fostering meaningful interactions for students, providing lots of comprehensible input, and awareness of the affective filter (Krashen, 1986; Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021). Krashen's second language acquisition theory addresses the idea of teachers using scaffolds such as gestures, visuals, and objects to support language development. I explored teachers' experiences related to improving literacy for LTELs; therefore, the study related to Krashen's second language acquisition theory by focusing on the connection between teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs and how students acquire a second language. I was influenced by Krashen's second language acquisition theory when I analyzed the study's data by considering how second language acquisition affects LTELs' language development.

EL Classification and Exit Process

Six-Step Process

With one in 10 students in public schools in the United States classified as EL and ELs being one of the fastest-growing student populations (Irwin et al., 2022), it is essential to understand the EL classification process and its implications on student

learning and language development. The ESSA (2015) established requirements to hold states accountable for reporting data on the academic performance of ELs and has implications for identifying and providing students services (Bond, 2020; Every Student Succeed Act, 2015; Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). Under the ESSA, states must establish a uniform statewide protocol for identifying and classifying students as EL and exiting them once they have demonstrated English proficiency (Sugarman, 2020).

Despite the guidance from the ESSA to establish a process to classify and exit ELs from an EL program by removing services when students demonstrate English proficiency, research shows that most states provide few mandates for implementing a classification and exit system (Johnson, 2019; Johnson, 2020; Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). Although procedures vary by state and district (Johnson, 2020), students usually move through a six-step process from initial EL identification until demonstrating English proficiency to be reclassified and exit an EL program (Clark et al., 2020).

Step 1 is EL screening. In most situations, students and families are interviewed and complete a home language survey to determine whether the family speaks another language other than English at home. Students who speak another language move to Step 2 and take an English screener proficiency assessment. Students who pass the initial English screener are classified as *initially fluent English proficient* (IFEP) and are exempt from the remaining steps (Johnson, 2020). Students who do not score high enough are eligible for language services and support.

Students who demonstrate a need for language services move to Step 3. Students are assigned an English proficiency level, and school professionals determine the

appropriate services for the student. The available personnel affect the EL program design at each particular school (Clark et al., 2020). In Step 4, students identified as EL take an annual proficiency test to assess their English growth throughout the academic year. Language assessments typically assess students in four domains reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students take the annual proficiency assessment until they reach a threshold that demonstrates English proficiency.

When school personnel receive the annual testing results, they implement Step 5, the analysis of scores. If the test score shows that a student has yet to reach the score to demonstrate English proficiency to exit, they remain in the EL program and re-take the test the following year. If the test scores reveal that the student has made significant language gains and meets the state's or district's agreed-upon threshold score demonstrating English proficiency, then the student moves to Step 6 and exits the EL program. The student is reclassified to become a former English language learner (Johnson, 2020, Clark et al., 2020). It is imperative to note that 11 states have additional criteria to determine if a student is ready to exit an EL program (Sugarman, 2020). The additional criteria may include teacher recommendations, English language arts (ELA) literacy scores, or overall academic progress. There are many variations and ongoing developments in states' and districts' classification and exit processes (Johnson, 2020).

Consortiums and Language Assessments

It is important to note that most states are members of one of two consortiums to support assessments and evaluations for ELs: World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) or English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century

(ELAP21; Sugarman, 2020). WIDA and ELAP21 provide assessment materials, including screener evaluations, annual assessments, and language standards. There are 41 states in WIDA, the largest consortium, which uses the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS) Test to determine students' English proficiency level (WIDA, 2022). The seven states in the ELAP21 consortium are Arkansas, Iowa, Nebraska, Ohio, Oregon, Washington, and West Virginia (Giles et al., 2020). Connecticut, New York, and Texas are not part of either consortium and use the LAS Links assessment to determine English proficiency and classify students (LAS Links, 2023). The remaining states use language assessments developed by their state (Sugarman, 2020).

Having inconsistencies throughout the United States on language assessments and procedures to classify and exit ELs may affect students' educational experience. Due to many variations in procedures, a student can be classified as EL and qualify for language services in one state but not in another (Sugarman, 2020). Such varying practices also impact how long a student may be considered EL. For example, in the ELPA 21 consortium states students must score at least a Level 4 in all language domains to be reclassified as English proficient. On the other hand, states in the WIDA consortium do not have an agreed-upon ACCESS score that students must reach for reclassification. Some states use a minimum score of 5 out of 6, while others use scores in the 4.0 – 4.8 range out of 6 (Sugarman, 2020). It is imperative for district leaders and educators to understand how the classification and exit process may impact students.

Characteristics of LTELs

Early Research and LTEL Common Characteristics

LTELs are a unique subgroup of ELs because of the number of years they have attended U.S. schools (Brooks, 2020). Although there is no standard definition of LTELs the growing consensus is that LTELs are middle or high school ELs who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for 6 years or more but have reached a plateau in their English language development, which prevents them from demonstrating English proficiency (Clark et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2022) and prohibits them from reclassification to exit an EL program (Luna, 2020; Uysal, 2022).

In seminal research on LTELs, researchers found that students generally had weak academic language skills and gaps in reading and writing, which led to students struggling academically (Olson, 2010). Studies have shown that LTELs significantly lag academically behind other ELs and non-EL students (Artigliere, 2019; Shin, 2020). A characteristic that differentiates LTELs from other ELs is that although they have weak reading and writing skills, LTELs have strong oral-social English skills, known as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) (Csorvasi & Colby, 2021; Shin, 2020; Soland & Sandilos, 2021). It is common for LTELs to sound like proficient English speakers. Many times, LTELs express feeling more comfortable speaking in English than in their heritage language (Umansky & Avelar, 2022). A leading factor in LTELs having strong social English skills is that many LTELs were born in the United States and have had significant exposure to English throughout their lives (Umansky & Avelar, 2022).

Some studies have shown that LTELs tend to have a lower socio-economic background than their peers, and males tend to become LTELs more so than females (Shin, 2020). Some of the most concerning characteristics of LTELs that continue to indicate an urgent need for attention and further research are low personal expectations, disengagement with school, and the high risk of dropping out of high school (Clark et al., 2020; Johnson, 2020; Shin et al., 2022).

Recent Studies and The Role of Assets-Based Mindset

Although much of the research on LTELs presented a significant achievement gap between LTELs compared to their peers, there is growing criticism that many researchers used a deficit approach when examining LTELs (Brooks, & Smagorinsky, 2022; Cabral, 2022; Usayl, 2022;). Although there is agreement that LTELs have strong oral social skills, researchers have presented LTELs as a heterogeneous group lacking abilities in English and their native language (Shin, 2020; Umansky & Avelar, 2022). There is a growing shift from using a deficit approach to highlighting the assets LTELs bring into classrooms and instead questioning the educational system that has failed students and led them to LTEL status (Brooks, 2020; Johnson, 2020; Strong & Escamilla, 2022).

Maneka Deanna Brooks is a leading researcher advocating for a change in the approach used to conduct research regarding LTELs and believes in challenging the LTEL label (Brooks, 2020). There is a growing consensus that the LTEL label is a product of inconsistent procedures and policies and is not a true reflection of students' abilities (Brooks, 2020; Cabral, 2022; Johnson, 2020). LTELs have attended schools for many years and walk into classrooms with knowledge and language skills that are critical

to leverage. When using an asset-based approach, the characteristics used to describe LTELs differ vastly from the deficit approach.

In more recent studies, researchers emphasize the importance of recognizing LTELs as individuals with multifaceted linguistic abilities (Brooks, 2020; Johnson, 2020). Researchers shifting from viewing LTELs from deficit characteristics to an assets-based mindset brings to the forefront the need to examine the policies and school systems that have failed to address the needs of ELs and have led students to the LTEL label (Clark et al., 2020; Strong & Escamilla, 2022; Uysal, 2022). It is urgent to employ a system-level, not only a student-level analysis of the current state relating to LTELs in the United States (Strong & Escamilla, 2022).

<div align="center">**Why Some ELs Become LTELs**</div>

Many factors can influence why ELs may become LTELs. It is imperative for policymakers and educators to investigate the root cause of the challenges that LTELs may experience in schools and address these issues to improve outcomes for LTELs. Researchers have found that the key factors contributing to ELs reaching the LTEL status are inconsistent reclassification systems, lack of teacher preparation to work with ELs, inappropriate services, and the intersection with special education (Chin, 2021).

Inconsistent Reclassification System

Identifying students as ELs is meant to ensure that students receive the appropriate services to provide equitable educational access and opportunity (Umansky & Avelar, 2022). However, due to inconsistent reclassification systems, ELs risk either remaining in an EL program too long and becoming LTELs or exiting too early and not

being prepared for the mainstream classroom (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). Researchers also found that most states provide few mandates on implementing classification and reclassification systems, which results in a wide variation of criteria used for students to demonstrate English proficiency (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2022).

Many states use scores from English proficiency assessments as the primary data to determine if an EL meets the threshold for reclassification to exit an EL program (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2022; Umansky & Avelar, 2022). However, emerging research shows that English language assessments hold ELs accountable for idealized notions of English that even native English speakers would not meet the English proficiency threshold in assessments (Clark et al., 2020; Strong & Escamilla, 2022; Umansky & Avelar, 2022). Solely using language proficiency assessments to determine reclassification has a significant impact on ELs educational trajectory. Many students experience frustration when enrolled in the same ESL course and taking the same language assessment year after year, and they develop an overall negative outlook toward school (Clark et al., 2020).

In addition to language proficiency assessments, some states like California also require students to meet specific criteria on California's ELA standards-based achievement test, which means higher-performing students may be classified as ELs for even longer periods of time, resulting in many students becoming LTEL (Clark et al., 2020; Luna, 2020; Thompson et al., 2022). California has the highest percentage of LTELs in the nation (Luna, 2019), with 46% of EL students in secondary schools classified as LTELs (Shin et al., 2022). For many ELs, language proficiency tests and

standardized assessments function as the primary gatekeepers from reclassification to reap the benefits of more authentic social and academic interactions in the larger school community (Clark et al., 2020).

In recent studies, researchers have found the need for alternative pathways to reclassification, such as Individualized Language Plans, portfolios, and multiple data measures, for ELs to demonstrate English proficiency (Umansky & Avelar, 2022; Uysal, 2022). The current inconsistencies in how students are classified and reclassified may lead to some students being classified as EL and becoming LTELs in some states but not others (Sugarman, 2020). As a result, an inconsistent reclassification system plays a major role in some students becoming LTELs.

Lack of Teacher Preparation to Work with ELs

With one in 10 students in public schools in the United States classified as EL (Irwin et al., 2022), it is likely that most general education teachers will work with ELs at some point in their careers (Deng et al., 2021). However, most of the nation's public school teachers are white and do not share students' heritage or linguistic backgrounds (Okhremtchouk & Sellu, 2019). Although there was a time when ELs regularly attended sheltered EL classrooms due to national policies such as the ESSA (2015), more and more students are in inclusive settings, and teachers are expected to provide accessible instruction to all students (Cho & Herner-Patnode, 2020; Mills et al., 2020). However, growing research shows that many general education teachers do not feel prepared to work with ELs (Deng et al., 2021; Okhremtchouk & Sellu, 2019; Stairs-Davenport, 2021). Studies on teacher preparedness to work with LTELs are scant. The current

research is primarily based on teacher preparedness in working with the general EL population.

It is common for ELs to have teachers who lack the education to address ELs linguistic and academic needs, especially LTELs (Clark et al., 2020; Mokhtari et al., 2021). An essential factor contributing to teachers feeling underprepared to work with ELs is that EL instruction is often not prioritized in preservice teacher education programs (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). Even with the ESSA (2015) implementation, only 14 states require teacher education programs to provide preservice teachers coursework related to working with ELs (Fu & Wang, 2021). In Deng et al.'s study examining teachers' perception of their preparedness to work with multilingual learners (2021), Deng et al. found that teachers who had previous graduate or undergraduate coursework related to working with ELs had a more positive perception of their competency and preparedness to work with ELs than teachers who did not (Deng et al., 2021). In another study, Yough (2019) examined the effect of an intervention to increase preservice teachers' efficacy to teach ELs. Yough found that teachers who participated in the intervention had a higher sense of efficacy for instruction ELs than preservice teachers who did not participate in the intervention. A growing number of studies show the need for teacher preparation programs to include coursework to prepare teachers to effectively work with ELs (de Jong & Naranjo, 2019; Deng, et al., 2021; Yough, 2019).

The lack of emphasis on ELs in teacher preparation programs has led to many teachers throughout the nation needing to understand how to effectively address the linguistic needs of ELs in the general classroom setting and to support language

development (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). Many teachers also need to gain knowledge of the overall classification, reclassification, and the types of services provided to ELs (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). Most secondary teachers view themselves as content experts and place the responsibility of instructing ELs on the EL teacher (Luna, 2020; Lowe Haupt et al., 2020). It is imperative for general education teachers to understand the critical role they play in providing ELs with a quality education.

There is growing consensus that an urgent need exists to prepare general content teachers, not just EL teachers, to address the linguistic and educational needs of ELs (de Jong & Naranjo, 2019; Deng et al., 2021; Fu & Wang, 2021; Harklau & Ford, 2022). General education teachers can play an instrumental role in helping students reach language proficiency and preventing students from becoming LTELs. Therefore, it is vital to address teachers' uncertainty about improving instructional practices for ELs (Owens & Wells, 2021). Administrators play a vital role in helping general education teachers take responsibility for ELs by providing them with professional development (Deng et al., 2021; Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). School leaders must make preparing teachers to serve ELs a priority.

Inappropriate Services

A significant factor in ELs becoming LTELs is the inappropriate services failing to address students' linguistic needs (Clark et al., 2020; Mokharti et al., 2021; Shin et al., 2022; Strong & Escamilla 2022). Many EL programs tend to take a one-size-fits-all approach instead of serving the unique range of interests and needs of LTELs (Shin, 2020). ELs are a heterogenous group (Lahance et al., 2019) with several subgroups

ranging from newcomer students who have recently arrived in the United States to LTELs who have been classified as ELs for 6 years or more (Brooks, 2020, Shin et al., 2022). Despite the subgroups of ELs having distinctly different needs, many districts treat ELs as homogeneous groups with undifferentiated services (Umansky & Alvelar, 2022).

Researchers have found that the most common differentiation in EL services occurs in English language development (ELD) courses offered according to students' English proficiency level (Johnson, 2020; Umansky & Avelar, 2022). However, many of the ELD classes focused on newcomer students and were offered mainly in urban settings (Shin, 2020). Most districts lack language programs designed for LTELs (Brooks, 2020; Johnson, 2020; Shin, 2020). As a result, many LTELs end up in remedial or intervention courses that do not prepare students for college (Shin, 2020; Umansky et al., 2021). In some instances, LTELs are placed in ELD classes with newcomer students. These ELD classes are not appropriate for LTELs and lead students to become disengaged having harmful effects on their educational and linguistic growth (Umansky & Avelar, 2022). Researchers have also found that remedial courses and inconsistent low-quality language support services exacerbate opportunity and achievement gaps for LTELs (Strong & Escamilla, 2022; Umansky & Avelar, 2022).

Neglecting to provide ELs with appropriate services to address their specific language and academic needs contributes to students' becoming LTELs and can have detrimental implications on their educational trajectory (Brooks 2020; Johnson, 2020; Umansky & Avelar, 2022). Consequently, there is a growing number of researchers urging the need to take a proactive approach to identify students' linguistic and academic

needs at the elementary level to prevent students from becoming LTELs and having a higher risk of dropping out of high school (Clark et al., 2020; Johnson, 2020; Shin et al., 2022).

The Intersection with Special Education

Due to LTELs lagging academically from their peers, they are at high risk of being misidentified for special education services (Clark et al., 2020). In studies, researchers have found that ELs are disproportionately over-represented in special education (Shin, 2021; Umansky & Avelar, 2022). LTELs are twice as likely to be identified as needing special education services than ELs at the elementary level (Clark et al., 2020). When students demonstrate high academic gaps, districts struggle to distinguish if the gaps result from students struggling to acquire a second language or due to a disability (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). Often, ELs are overidentified for special education because the linguistic and academic gaps meet the definition of the IDEA criteria for a learning disability (Clark et al., 2020). When an EL does need special education services, it is critical to make the identification as soon as possible because waiting too long for testing or services may contribute to students becoming LTEL (Clark et al., 2020).

There is a growing number of students who are dual identified as EL/LTEL and special education. Researchers have found that even when students are properly identified, they are often in instructional tracks that do not provide them with adequate language support (Umansky & Avelar, 2022). Often general education teachers, special education teachers, and EL teachers do not know what to do when students are dual-

identified as needing language and special education services (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). The intersection between EL/LTEL identification and special education is an area that requires further research to improve services for dual-identified students (Clark et al., 2020; Lowenhaupt et al., 2020; Umansky & Avelar, 2022).

The Ramifications of Becoming a LTEL

Becoming an LTEL can negatively impact the quality of education a student receives (Johnson, 2019). The majority of researchers focusing on LTELs have found that LTELs experience an inequitable opportunity to learn because they are often in less rigorous courses that do not prepare students to be college and career-ready (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020; Mendoza, 2019; Shin, 2020; Umansky & Avelar, 2022). It is common for LTELs to be in remedial or credit recovery classes that exacerbate students' academic and language gaps (Johnson, 2019; Shin, 2020).

The exasperation of LTELs' educational gaps negatively affects students' self-confidence and outlook on school (Umansky & Dumont, 2021). Researchers have found that the LTEL label may have psychological effects that impact students' academic performance (Shin, 2020). In schools where LTELs have to take ELD classes, they often feel isolated because they are denied access to the full curriculum offered in mainstream classes (Uysal, 2022). Researchers examining the experiences of LTELs found that the negative connotation of the LTEL label can discourage students and causes students to disengage from school and their academics leading to poor academic performance (Shin, 2020).

In addition to having a negative effect on students, the LTEL label also has a negative effect on teacher perception of LTELs. The LTEL label often causes teachers to have a lower perception of students' academic skills (Umansky & Avelar, 2022; Umansky & Dumont, 2021). The LTEL label carries a stigma that leads counselors and teachers to lower their expectations for LTELs contributing to students' low academic achievement (Johnson, 2019).

The lack of access to rigorous courses that support students being college and career-ready, the negative impact on students' self-confidence, and the low expectations from school personnel all play a critical role in causing LTELs to be at high risk of dropping out of high school. Due to the detrimental effect that becoming an LTEL can have on a student's educational trajectory, current research shows the urgent need to conduct more studies on LTELs (Brooks, 2020; Clark, 2020). While research is needed at the secondary level, it is also imperative to conduct research at the elementary level to prevent ELs from becoming LTELs (Johnson, 2019; Lee & Soland, 2022; Shin et al., 2022).

Teacher Perceptions

Teachers play a paramount role in the quality of education that students receive, yet there is a dearth of research on teacher perceptions in relation to LTELs. There is growing research on teacher perception of the EL general student population, but there is an urgent need to conduct research that focuses on teacher experiences working with LTELs. Researchers have found that general education teachers have a negative perception of the EL students in their classrooms, which has a negative effect on students'

academic achievement (Kim, 2021; Lowenhaupt et al., 2020; Umanksky & Dumont, 2021). In many instances, general education teachers do not view themselves as responsible for ELs' language development instruction (Deng et al., 2021; Kim, 2021; Luna, 2020).

Teachers' negative attitudes and beliefs about ELs result in inadequate instruction, harming students' academic performance (Guler, 2020; Kim, 2021; Murphy & Troff, 2109). Studies reveal that teachers' negative attitudes towards ELs stem from frustration over unclear policies and insufficient training to work with ELs (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). Other factors that contribute to teachers having a negative perception of ELs is lack of time to address students' language needs, lack of training on EL education, insufficient materials for teaching ELs, and lack of knowledge in second language acquisition (Guler, 2020; Kim, 2021).

The literature indicates that teachers who took courses specific to ELs, had experience working with ELs, or had professional development related to ELs and culturally responsive pedagogy tended to have more positive attitudes about ELs (Huerta et al., 2022). Understanding teachers' experiences with ELs is critical because researchers have found a link between teachers' perceptions to instructional choices and outcomes for students (Murphy & Torff, 2019). Researchers have also found that even when teachers have a positive attitude toward ELs, they still express frustrations when ELs are in their classrooms because they feel they do not have enough resources to address students' needs (Guler, 2020). Many teachers feel it is the responsibility of the EL department to educate ELs (Luna, 2020; Lowenhaupt et al., 2020).

The continuously growing number of ELs in mainstream classrooms and the negative teacher perceptions of ELs are indications that it is imperative to prepare mainstream teachers to effectively work with ELs (Gular, 2020; Huerta et al., 2019; Lowenhaupt et al.2020). It is also critical to build teachers' understanding of the various subgroups of ELs and prepare teachers to address the needs of LTELs in general education classrooms. Teachers of LTELs need to provide thoughtful and deliberate instruction to students by making instruction meaningful (Luna, 2020). Further research is needed on teacher experiences and preparing teachers to work with LTELs to improve students' academic achievement.

The Role of Professional Development

School and district administrators play a pivotal role in helping general education teachers take responsibility for educating ELs (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). Since so many teachers lack the needed preparation to provide instruction that addresses the needs of LTELs, administrators can foster learning through professional development (PD). Extensive research on teacher experiences of ELs shows that teachers have negative attitudes toward ELs in their classrooms and many misconceptions (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020; Kim, 2021; Kim & Feng, 2019). Some teachers hold misconceptions about the role of EL teachers, bilingualism, and second language acquisition (Vera et al., 2020). Providing teachers with quality PD to support the learning needs of ELs can help shift teachers' attitudes and dispel misconceptions.

With the growing number of ELs in general education classrooms, many teachers have expressed the desire for more PD to effectively address the unique needs of ELs

(Stairs-Davenport, 2021; Vera et al., 2020). There is growing research on examining effective PD approaches to foster learning for general education teachers to work with ELs. Stairs-Davenport (2021) conducted a study where the purpose was to identify themes around questions K-12 general education teachers had about differentiating instruction for ELs and what topics they would like included in PD. Stairs-Davenport identified five themes that teachers wanted to learn more about: adapting curriculum and assessment, differentiating instruction, building community in the classroom, distinguishing between language differences and disabilities, and where to start in working with ELs (Stairs-Davenport, 2021). Stairs-Davenport's study is an example of the importance of gathering teacher input to guide PD offerings.

Additional studies show that while teachers want PD related to instructional strategies, teachers also desire to learn more about integrating ELs into the larger school community (Vera et al., 2022). Vera et al., (2022) conducted a multi-phase study to examine teachers' needs for PD to support achievement for ELs and found that teachers are looking for ways to support students in a larger context. For example, teachers expressed a desire to learn conceptual frameworks, interventions to help ELs learn literacy through their content, and how to involve parents and families of ELs more in students' education (Vera et al., 2022). When teachers express a desire to learn more about how to support ELs in a larger context, it is imperative for administrators to listen to teachers and provide them with quality PD to address teachers' needs (Stairs-Davenport, 2021; Vera et al., 2022).

Although historically the number of ELs typically proliferated in urban areas, a pressing issue facing educators today is the rapid growth of ELs in rural areas (Ankeny et al., 2019; Coady, 2019). Addressing the educational needs of ELs are exasperated in rural areas due to the limited resources available (Coady, 2019). Ankeny et al. (2019) conducted a study that examined the effectiveness of PD in a rural area to support teachers in working with ELs. Ankeny et al. found that the PD offered allowed teachers-leaders to reflect on their perspectives towards ELs and identify steps to affect positive change for ELs in their rural setting. Ankeny et al.'s (2019) study serves as an example of the critical role that PD can play in supporting teachers in improving educational outcomes for ELs.

As demographics continue to change and the number of ELs continues to grow in general education classrooms, quality PD is vital in preparing teachers with the latest effective pedagogy, curricula, and ideas to support learning for ELs (Ankeny et al., 2019; Irby et al., 2020). Administrators must prioritize providing teachers with quality PD that is relevant and teacher-driven to improve instruction and educational outcomes for ELs (Stairs-Davenport, 2021). Ensuring that K-12 teachers can provide ELs with high-quality services and programs is an investment in our society and American education (Li & Peters, 2020).

Supports to Improve Outcomes for LTELs

LTELs are a heterogenous group with unique needs (Clark et al., 2020). Although seminal research focused on LTELs' lack of skills, in recent studies, researchers have shed light on the need for school systems to improve the quality of education offered to

LTELs (Brooks 2020; Johnson, 2020, Umansky & Avelar, 2022). Due to the persistent low academic achievement of LTELs, it is imperative to highlight research-based supports that demonstrate effectiveness in improving outcomes for LTELs.

A critical support teachers can easily implement in their classrooms to support literacy for LTELs is embracing translanguaging (Artigliere, 2019; Brooks, 2020; Luna, 2020). Using translanguaging means that teachers build from students' multilingual abilities and encourage students to freely utilize their linguistic repertoire to complete a communicative task (Brooks, 2020). Leveraging students' linguistic assets is an excellent way to support literacy development for LTELs (Artigliere, 2019; Brooks, 2020; Byfield, 2019). In addition to supporting literacy, when students use translanguaging they feel that their home languages are valued and visible (Artigliere, 2019; David et al., 2022). When educators value translanguaging, it helps them shift from the old deficit view of LTELs to viewing their language and culture as assets (Cho et al., 2020).

In addition to embracing translanguaging, it is essential to learn students' backgrounds and learn about their proficiency levels in their native language. For students who feel comfortable in their native language, it is beneficial when districts offer additive language programs such as dual language programs (Csorvasi & Colby, 2021). Dual language programs offer students courses with instruction in their native language, which significantly supports academic language development. Offering additive programs are important because students can transfer academic skills learned in their native language courses to English which can improve literacy development in both languages (Csorvasi & Colby, 2021). The more teachers can learn students' proficiency in

their native language, the better teachers can determine what supports can address students' needs (Clark et al., 2020; David et al., 2022).

A tool that is growing in popularity to address the unique needs of each EL is the use of Individualized Language Plans (ILPs). ILPs include data about each student's strengths and academic needs and include goals and action steps to ensure student's needs are met (Uysal, 2022). Similar to IEPs, ILPs should be developed as a team with the input of students, their families, and skilled educators (Umanskly & Avelar, 2022; Uysal, 2022). It is paramount for ILPs to be meaningful and implemented effectively to support language development for ELs/LTELs (Umansky & Avelar, 2022).

One of the most crucial supports teachers can implement is building relationships with families of LTELs. Interacting with families fosters an appreciation for different cultures and makes families feel valued (Clark et al., 2020). Teachers can arrange family literacy nights or seek ways to engage families in-class activities, strengthening the home-school connection (Byfield, 2019; Clark et al., 2020). By collaborating with families, LTELs can see that their teachers and families are working together for the student's educational benefit, leading to increased motivation to improve academically (Csorvasi & Colby, 2021). Families are influential in affecting their child's education and are a great resource for schools; therefore, it is vital for schools to be more inclusive by recognizing and valuing the assets that families possess and collaborate with them (Stauss et al., 2021).

Another critical factor that teachers must consider is motivating students. Although studies have shown that LTELs are at high risk of dropping out of high school

due to low motivation (Artigliere, 2019; Clark et al., 2020; Johnson, 2020), studies have also shown that teachers can collaborate with counselors to utilize practices that can motivate students (Clark et al., 2020). For example, teachers and counselors can ask students what they would like to do after high school and help them reach their goals. Based on the student's interest, students can be connected to internships or other school-to-work partnerships that can inspire students to graduate high school (Clark et al., 2020). Despite much of the research showing that teachers face frustrations in working with ELs/LTELs, it is essential to note that there are supports teachers and school leaders can implement to improve outcomes for LTELs.

Summary

The purpose of identifying students as EL is meant to ensure that students receive the services they need to experience academic success (Umansky & Avelar, 2022). However, researchers have concluded that it is undeniable that LTELs are a subgroup of ELs that are in dire need of further research due to students' low academic achievement and high risk of dropping out of high school (Brooks, 2020, Clark et al., 2020, Johnson, 2020; Shin et al., 2022). Although in seminal research researchers focused on student deficiencies, emerging studies show the inequities in the school system that lead ELs to become LTELs (Brooks, 2020; Johnson et al., 2020; Strong & Escamilla, 2020).

LTELS face many challenges in our current educational system, and educational leaders are responsible for prioritizing improving the quality of our school system to address LTELs academic needs (Clark et al., 2020). Although teachers play a pivotal role in the instruction that LTELs receive, the research on teacher perception of LTELs is

almost nonexistent (Oh & Mancilla-Martinez, 2021; Strong & Escamilla, 2020). In many studies on general education teachers' experiences of ELs, researchers focus on the general EL student population. Therefore, a clear gap exists on teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. Researching teachers' experiences is needed and has the potential to create social change by transforming the trajectory of LTELs' academic experience.

Chapter 2 explains the literature search strategy, an overview of Krashen's second language acquisition theory, which is the conceptual framework that guided this study, and an extensive literature review. The in-depth literature review focused on the EL classification and exit process, characteristics of LTELs, why some ELs become LTELs, the impact of becoming an LTEL, teacher experiences, the role of professional development, and supports to improve outcomes for LTELs. Chapter 3 includes information about the research design, the methodology, and data analysis.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The problem is that many teachers do not feel prepared to utilize strategies and supports to improve LTELs' low literacy skills. LTELs are a subgroup of ELs in dire need of attention due to academic risks and high drop-out rates (Clark et al., 2020; Luna, 2020; Shin, 2022). Researchers have found that many general education teachers feel unprepared to work with ELs (Deng et al., 2021; Okhremtchouk & Sellu, 2019; Stairs-Davenport, 2021). Because teachers play such a pivotal role in LTELs instruction, it is imperative to research teacher experiences working with LTELs (Oh & Mancilla-Martinez, 2021; Strong & Escamilla, 2020). Included in this chapter is the research design, rationale, and my role as the researcher. I also describe the methodology, participant selection process, data collection tools, and data analysis plan. I conclude the chapter by addressing potential ethical concerns, issues of trustworthiness, and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

I used the following research questions to guide this qualitative study:

RQ1: What are secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs?

RQ2: How do the experiences of secondary general content area teachers compare to the experiences of secondary EL teachers for improving literacy for LTELs?

This basic qualitative study used in-depth interviews to explore secondary general content area teachers' and EL teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. Using a qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because as

Ravitch & Carl (2021) explained, the goal of qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon in contextualized ways to convey how people make meaning of their own experiences and my goal was to understand teachers' experiences. Qualitative research is constructivist and involves the belief that knowledge is developed through individuals' experiences and interactions (Burkholder et al., 2020). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs and aligns with the qualitative research approach.

Although in quantitative research, researchers also seek to understand and describe a phenomenon, behavior, or issue, it is done by using numerical data and statistical analysis (Burkholder et al., 2020). Qualitative researchers use interpretive research methods to understand individuals, groups, and phenomena in contextualized ways (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I chose to conduct a basic qualitative study because I focused on secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. A qualitative approach was more appropriate for this study because I used in-depth interviews as a tool to gather data that allowed me to understand teachers' experiences. In basic qualitative studies, the goal is to gather rich descriptions of study participants' experiences, not numbers or measurements (Kostere & Kostere, 2021). It is difficult to quantify teachers' experiences, therefore I opted against a quantitative study.

I used semistructured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to obtain rich and detailed information regarding teachers' experiences. Using in-depth interviews was appropriate for this study because it is a tool that matches my research questions. When conducting a study, it is essential to match the research tools to the research

questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Using in-depth interviews aligned with a qualitative study and my research questions. Interviewing general content area teachers and EL teachers in the study fostered analysis of differences and similarities in experiences between the two groups of teachers. Using in-depth interviews was an effective approach to examining participants' experiences related to a phenomenon.

Consideration of Other Designs

All qualitative research is descriptive; however, different qualitative designs help researchers accomplish descriptions in different ways (Burkholder et al., 2020). It is imperative to understand each type of qualitative study research design that could potentially be an appropriate selection to address the study's research questions. I considered a case study, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and grounded theory research designs for this study. When conducting a case study, researchers seek to better understand a bounded unit around a phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2020). I decided not to use a case study design because researchers need a substantial time period to conduct a detailed investigation exploring multiple data sources (Burkholder et al., 2020; Kostere & Kostere, 2021). Similar to case studies, researchers also examine a bounded unit in ethnography. The difference is that ethnography requires the researcher to be embedded in a cultural group or community for an extended period (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I disregarded using ethnography because the purpose of my study is not related to a cultural group. In phenomenology, researchers seek to understand the experiences of a set of individuals concerning a phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2020). In narrative studies, researchers seek to understand the meaning of individual experiences and tell

participants' stories (Burkholder et al., 2020). I chose not to use phenomenology or narrative design because, in both designs, researchers may need to conduct multiple lengthy interviews to gather rich data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). When using grounded theory design, researchers focus specifically on theory development. I disregarded using grounded theory because the purpose of my study was not related to developing a new theory. Having a clear understanding of phenomenological, narrative, and grounded theory research designs led me to disregard these designs for my study.

Understanding the purpose, the unit of analysis, and data collection tools for each research design is vital in selecting a design that will best help a researcher answer the research questions (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). After carefully considering each research design, I decided that a basic qualitative study was the best approach to answer my research questions. The basic qualitative design uses only one data source, and I could focus on secondary teachers' experiences as my unit of analysis by conducting semistructured in-depth interviews. A qualitative research design was the design that best matched my study because it aligned with the purpose of my study, the conceptual framework, and the research questions.

In all qualitative research, researchers are interested in understanding how people construct meaning from their experiences and make sense of their lives (Kostere & Kostere, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The primary purpose of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings using only one data source (Kostere & Kostere,2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Basic qualitative studies are the most common method of qualitative research in education, where researchers collect

data through interviews, observations, or document analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In a basic qualitative study, researchers analyze one data source to identify recurring

patterns or themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researchers interpret the data to

develop an understanding of the phenomenon (Kostere & Kostere,2021; Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers achieve validity by carefully selecting a

methodology that facilitates collecting and analyzing high-quality data that aligns with

the study's goals and context (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative study I used in-depth interviews to explore secondary general

content area teachers' and EL teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for

LTELs. Using a qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because a goal

of qualitative research is to contextualize a phenomenon to convey how people make

meaning of their own experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The researcher plays a

paramount role and is the principal instrument in qualitative research (Burkholder et al.,

2020). The researcher connects the dots between all the intersecting parts of a study

(Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Due to the significant role of a researcher, it is critical to

acknowledge researcher subjectivity due to the unique perspectives each researcher

brings to a study (Burkholder et al., 2020). Researchers' experiences and identities as

human beings may influence a study since we tend to make meaning and interpret others'

experiences based on our own (Saldaña, 2021). It is vital for researchers to actively and

critically monitor biases and positionality to maintain the reliability and validity of a

study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). My role in this study included developing open-ended

questions to ask participants, developing a plan for recruiting participants, interviewing secondary teachers, and serving as the primary instrument for data analysis. I ensured following Walden University Institutional Review Board's (IRB) guidelines for qualitative research.

My study included six secondary general content area teachers and six secondary EL teachers for a total of 12 study participants from three different regions of the United States Four teachers were from the East Coast, four from the Midwest, and four from the West Coast. All participants were teachers I did not know and with no personal or professional relationships. All participants were from school districts where I am not employed and am not affiliated with. As a result, I did not have any supervisory power over any participants. Participants were made aware that their participation is voluntary.

I have been an EL teacher for 20 years in the Midwest. My interest in focusing on ELs is founded in my personal experience as an immigrant who had to learn English as a second language. My interest in researching LTELs stems from observing many of my current EL students who are LTELs and their challenges. As the sole researcher, it is imperative to continually assess any bias and assumptions (Ravitch, 2021). I assessed my bias and assumptions to increase the quality and validity of my study. I separated my role as a researcher and my role as an EL teacher to maintain as objective as possible.

Methodology

In this section I included a thorough description of the methodology of this study. I included the participation selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, and the data analysis plan.

Participant Selection Logic

Selecting participants for a study requires a clear understanding of the research questions' goals concerning the population and context included in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I employed purposeful sampling and deliberately selected participants because of their experience working with LTELs. This study included six secondary general content area teachers and six secondary EL teachers for a total of 12 study participants from three different regions of the United States. Four teachers were from the East Coast, four from the Midwest, and four from the West Coast. Due to much of the existing research regarding LTELs focusing on the elementary level, this study focused on teacher experiences at the secondary level. All participants were from districts with a percentage of LTELs enrolled in their schools.

Participants met specific criteria and addressed the research questions. The inclusion criteria for this study included secondary general content area teachers and EL teachers who work with at least five LTELs and have taught for at least two years. The set criteria are clear and I explicitly verivied the participants meeting the selection criteria.

In qualitative research, the goal is to answer research questions thoroughly and ethically; therefore, it is appropriate to have a smaller sample size (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I gathered rich data from the 12 participants, identified themes to code, and achieved data saturation to answer the research questions. I knew I reached saturation when my analysis yielded no new information, and there were no unexplained phenomena (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Instrumentation

Interviews are an excellent way to gain rich, deep, and individualized data that provides insight into participants' lived experiences and perspectives about a phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I conducted semistructured interviews to learn about secondary general content area and EL teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. I used the interview protocol in the Appendix, which is aligned with the conceptual framework and the research questions. The questions are open-ended to obtain examples, detailed experiences, and narratives (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

How interview protocols are structured and the sequence of interview questions impact the information that can be gathered and the information learned (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The interview protocol I created consists of an opening statement, the interview questions, and a closing statement. The opening statement included the interview's purpose, informed participants of approximately how long the interview would take to complete, and reminded them they could decline to answer any question or opt out of the interview at any time. I also allowed participants to ask me any questions before starting the interview. I began the interview with demographic questions, which are easier to answer and helped build trust with participants. The creation of the subsequent questions was guided by the learning from the literature review and Krashen's second language acquisition theory. In the closing statement I thanked the participants for their time and for sharing their experiences and perspectives. I also informed them that I would share the transcript with them to ensure I accurately captured their experiences.

Dependability, credibility, and confirmability are vital elements to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of a qualitative study. I discuss dependability, credibility, and confirmability in further detail in the Trustworthiness section. To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of my study, I elicited feedback from my dissertation chair and committee member on the wording, sequence of questions, and relevance. Conducting interviews takes practice, feedback, and reflection and requires being conscious of verbal and nonverbal messages that interviewers give off during the interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I practiced conducting interviews with colleagues to ensure I felt comfortable and asked questions as objectively as possible.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The participants for this study were recruited from three different regions of the United States based on the inclusion criteria: they are secondary general content area teachers and EL teachers who work with at least five LTELs and have taught for at least 2 years. Four teachers were from the East Coast, four from the Midwest, and four from the West Coast. I sought teachers who met the inclusion criteria of working with at least five LTELs and have taught for at least two years. To recruit study participants, I made a social media post to Facebook groups of national classroom teachers and attached the study invitation to reach content teachers and EL teachers. In the social media post I asked them to contact the researcher by email to participate in the study. I used purposeful sampling to select 12 participants from national Facebook groups of teachers who met the inclusion criteria. I used snowball sampling when I did not have enough participants through purposeful sampling.

Once I selected the study participants, I emailed them the IRB's Office of Research and Compliance's Informed Consent form. Once I received the signed consent form from the participants, I set up dates and times for the interviews. All interviews took place via Zoom. Using Zoom was appropriate and advantageous in this study due to having participants from different regions of the United States. There is a growing number of researchers using technology tools, such as Zoom, to access greater geographical areas by reducing travel costs, saving time and providing convenience (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I recorded each interview and transcribed them through Zoom. I anticipated that each interview would take about 60 minutes.

I followed the interview protocol included in the Appendix. After each interview, I thanked the participants for participating in the study and asked the best way for me to contact them to share study results so they could verify I captured their experiences accurately. I read the closing statement to ensure they knew I would share the transcript and the abstract of the dissertation with them once it was complete.

Data Analysis Plan

This study's single data collection source was the interview protocol used during in-depth interviews. I was the only researcher collecting and analyzing the data to address the two research questions. I used In Vivo Coding to analyze the transcripts and develop themes and categories. When coding, it is important to conduct first-cycle coding, which is an analysis, and second-cycle coding, which is synthesis (Saldañana, 2021). Following first and second cycle coding themes and categories emerged central to the research

problem and research questions. An advantage of In Vivo Coding is that it keeps the data rooted in the participants' own language (Saldaña, 2021).

I used Excel to organize the transcripts from each interview. I reviewed the data and began the coding process by coding for keywords and phrases the participants used. I used MAXQDA to support data analysis. The MAXQDA software facilitates organizing, analyzing, and identifying themes from interviews. Using transcripts, In Vivo Coding, Excel, and MAXQDA led to qualitative analysis to explore secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an essential component of qualitative research because it refers to ensuring the credibility and rigor of a research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability are four vital standards in assessing trustworthiness (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Researchers can apply strategies to ensure that trustworthiness standards are met to validate the credibility and rigor of a study. In this section, I explain the strategies I used to ensure the study's trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility refers to demonstrating that the findings of a study are believable given the data presented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Credibility is directly related to research design, instrumentation, and data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I chose to conduct in-depth, semistructured interviews because it was an appropriate way to gather detailed data to explore teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs.

Participants were reminded that their participation was completely voluntary, and they could decline to answer any question or opt out of the interview at any time. I also informed participants that I would share the transcript with them to ensure I accurately captured their experiences and perspectives. Allowing the participants to review the transcripts allowed me to use member checks to ensure the validity of the findings. I also used triangulation when coding and analyzing the 12 interview transcripts. It was critical for me to use reflexibility to be conscious of any biases.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings to a broader context (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To ensure transferability, I provided a thick description of the context of this study, the research design, the data collection method, and data analysis so that the study can be replicated in similar settings. With the growing number of LTELs, the findings of this study can be applicable to school district leaders, general content area teachers, and EL teachers seeking to address the academic needs of LTELs.

Dependability

Dependability refers to demonstrating consistency and stability in data collection, analysis, and reporting (Burkholder et al., 2020). I achieved dependability by reviewing the study's findings to ensure that the data supported the findings. To enhance the study's dependability, I used first and second cycle coding to code the data two times. I also used an audit trail and triangulation to demonstrate consistency in the data. I continued to

ensure alignment within all study components for a solid research design, which helped

ensure dependability (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Confirmability

A premise of qualitative research is acknowledging that the world is a subjective

place (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). However, it is important that the methods of a study are

based on verifiable procedures, analysis, and conclusions (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Confirmability refers to ensuring that if other researchers conducted the same study, they

would arrive at the same conclusions when analyzing the same qualitative data (Guba &

Lincoln, 1989). To ensure confirmability, I continued to practice reflexibility by critically

monitoring and challenging my biases. I reviewed information from member checks and

an audit trail.

Ethical Procedures

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument

(Burkholder et al, 2020). It is imperative for the researcher to ensure beneficence and

follow ethical procedures (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). IRB offices serve as a safeguard for

study participants and are a support for researchers to ensure participants' welfare is

maintained (Burkholder et al, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A critical component that I

followed was applying for IRB approval at Walden University to conduct my research

study. I did not conduct any research until I obtained IRB approval.

To address ethical considerations related to recruitment, I did not have any

participants from the school district where I teach. An advantage of not conducting

research in the school district where I teach is that I do not have a supervisory

relationship with any participants. Once I selected the participants for this study, I

included the IRB's informed consent form with the invitation. I did not conduct any

interviews until I received an email from each participant stating, "I consent." after

reviewing the consent forms. Once all the approvals and ethical procedures were met to

conduct the interviews, I reminded participants that their participation was voluntary, and

they could decline to answer any question or opt out of the interview at any time. I also

reminded participants that confidentiality is paramount and that their privacy would be

protected by having the data be anonymous.

While technology has numerous advantages, a disadvantage is that it presents

additional challenges to maintaining confidentiality (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Since I used

Zoom, I ensured that data was not stored in a cloud or any location vulnerable to a

security breach. I stored data on an external hard drive, which I keep stored in a fireproof

document safe. The laptop that I used to record the interviews and my Zoom account are

password protected. I was cognizant of any privacy issues that could arise due to

technology and actively took steps to maintain confidentiality.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I explained the research design and rationale for my study and

described my role as the researcher. I also described the methodology, participant

selection process, data collection tools, and data analysis plan. I explained strategies I

used to address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to ensure the

study's trustworthiness. I also explained the steps I took to follow ethical procedures. In

Chapter 4, I explain in-depth the findings of this research study and describe the study's

setting and participant demographics.

Chapter 4: Results

In this basic qualitative study, I used in-depth interviews to explore secondary general content area teachers' and EL teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. I also examined how the experiences of secondary general content area teachers compared to the experiences of secondary EL teachers in improving literacy for LTELs. Using a qualitative research design for this study was appropriate because I gained an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

I used the following research questions to guide this qualitative study:

RQ1: What are secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs?

RQ2: How do the experiences of secondary general content area teachers compare to the experiences of secondary EL teachers for improving literacy for LTELs?

In this chapter, I describe the setting, relevant participant characteristics, and demographics. I also describe the data collection process, including the number of participants, the data collection instrument, how the data was recorded, any variations in data from the plan presented in Chapter 3, and any unusual circumstances encountered during data collection. This chapter also includes the data analysis process, including how the data was coded and developed into categories and themes. Included are qualities of discrepant cases, how they were factored into the analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. I concluded the chapter by addressing each research question and presented data to support each finding.

Setting

The study participants were teachers from three distinct locations in the United States. Four teachers were from the East Coast, four from the Midwest, and four from the West Coast. The teachers were selected because they met the inclusion criteria of working with at least five LTELs and have taught for at least 2 years. There were no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experience at the time of the study that may have influenced the interpretation of the study results.

Demographics

Study participants included 12 secondary teachers. Four teachers were from the East Coast, four from the Midwest, and four from the West Coast. From each region, two teachers were EL teachers, and two teachers were content area teachers. There were an even number of EL and content area teachers, with six EL teachers and six content area teachers. Participants' teaching experience with LTELs ranged from 4 years to 35 years. Study participant demographic information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Number	Region	Type of Teacher	No. of Years Teaching LTELs
1	Midwest	EL Teacher	6
2	East Coast	EL Teacher	22
3	East Coast	EL Teacher	35
4	West Coast	Content Teacher	24
5	West Coast	EL Teacher	4
6	Midwest	Content Teacher	12
7	Midwest	Content Teacher	6
8	Midwest	EL Teacher	17
9	East Coast	Content Teacher	16
10	West Coast	Content Teacher	12
11	West Coast	EL Teacher	21
12	East Coast	Content Teacher	23

Data Collection

Before each interview, I reviewed the purpose of the study. I explained that each interview would be recorded, that I would share a copy of the transcript for their review for accuracy and that their privacy would be protected, and no names would be used in the study. I reminded them that their participation is completely voluntary and that they can decline to answer any question or opt out of the interview at any time. I allowed each participant to ask questions before starting the interview. None of the participants had questions, and the interviews began promptly as scheduled.

Each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes, and the interviews ranged from 40 to 60 minutes. The 12 interviews were conducted over 4 weeks, beginning at the end of August and concluding at the end of September 2023. I recorded each interview on my personal computer, which is password-protected. I tested the audio, recording, and

transcript features in Zoom before each interview. I kept my laptop plugged in with the charger the entire time to ensure I would not encounter any issues. During the interviews, I used the interview protocol and used probing questions when needed.

After each interview, I downloaded the interview transcript from Zoom and reviewed it for accuracy. I noticed that sometimes Zoom incorrectly labeled who was speaking. I made any needed corrections on each transcript and shared a copy with each participant for their review. No participants found any inaccuracies in the transcript. I uploaded the transcription files to MAXQDA to facilitate data analysis.

In my original plan presented in Chapter 3, I stated that I would recruit participants from six different high schools and contact the EL program director at each school to request the application for approval to conduct the study in their district. However, while completing Form C: Ethics Self-Check Application for Research Ethics Approval, I learned that if I followed my original plan, I would have six different partner organizations. Obtaining approval can be an extensive and challenging process. As a result, I decided to adjust my plan and recruit through social media on national teacher Facebook groups and snowball sampling.

I also stated that I would use the Nvivo software for data analysis. However, after learning about MAXQDA and practicing with the software, I decided it fit my study better. I included the plan variations in Form C and met IRB approval. The variations were appropriate, and I encountered no unusual circumstances during data collection.

Data Analysis

I used In Vivo Coding to analyze the transcripts and develop categories and themes. With In Vivo Coding I kept the data rooted in the participants' own language (Saldaña, 2021). I imported all 12 transcripts into MAXQDA to organize my data. I used In Vivo coding during the first cycle coding and selected phrases from the study participants that addressed research question one. I color-coded the participant phrases that addressed RQ1 in green. I read through the transcripts several times. I used the "Text Search & Autocode" feature in MAXQDA, where I entered the codes identified during the first coding cycle. The Text Search & Autocode feature examined all 12 transcripts and provided phrases where the participants used those codes. This feature was pivotal in ensuring I did not miss coding any relevant phrases. Once I conducted the first cycle coding in MAXQDA, the software generated an Excel spreadsheet with all the codes. Once all the codes were in the Excel spreadsheet, I no longer needed to use MAXQDA. Qualitative data analysis requires the researcher to be meticulous, paying close attention to language and engaging in deep reflection (Saldaña, 2021).

Next, I conducted second cycle coding and used Pattern Coding. During pattern coding, I observed patterns that emerged to develop categories. The categories that emerged were academic skills and academic writing, emphasis on reading and writing, emphasis on writing, feedback for improvement, and needed scaffolds. Once I identified the categories, I filtered my data and grouped all the codes by categories to identify themes. I color coded all the categories to create a visual that revealed which categories were more prevalent in the study. Two themes emerged from the categories (see Table 2).

To analyze the data for RQ2, I created a new Excel spreadsheet and organized the data by whether they were a content area teacher or an EL teacher. I made a table listing the two themes that emerged, how many content area or EL teachers expressed ideas related to each theme, and any similarities or differences I observed. During the interviews, I took notes on any observations that stood out to address RQ2 that may not be addressed in RQ1. The responses to Interview Question 2 stood out due to a significant consensus in the responses for a need for a process to make teachers aware of who are LTELs in their classes. I created a separate spreadsheet with all the responses to Interview Questions 2. When analyzing the data to address RQ2, three themes emerged (see Table 3). While conducting data analysis, I examined for any discrepant cases, but no qualities of discrepant cases emerged.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I ensured the trustworthiness of this study by addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. These four vital standards play a pivotal role in validating the rigor and quality of a study (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I applied the strategies stated in Chapter 3.

Credibility

I enhanced the credibility of this study by implementing several key strategies. For each interview, I used the interview protocol. I reminded study participants that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could decline to answer any question or opt out of the interview at any time. During the interview, I was conscious of my body language and maintained a neutral tone when asking questions. I asked probing

questions for clarification and the opportunity for participants to elaborate on their experiences. After each interview, I read each transcript multiple times to check for possible errors or discrepancies in the transcription from Zoom. I emailed each participant the interview transcripts for their review to ensure I accurately captured their experiences.

Transferability

To ensure transferability, I interviewed participants from three different regions of the United States. I provided a thorough description of the context of the study, the research design, the data collection methods, and the data analysis, which enhanced the transferability of the study. Providing a rich description of this study's vital elements will allow other researchers to emulate strategies to implement in similar settings to address LTELs' literacy needs.

Dependability

To achieve dependability, I printed my approved IRB application and referenced it frequently to ensure I was following the approved procedures. I used purposeful sampling to include participants who met the inclusion criteria. I strictly followed the interview protocol and asked the study participants to review the transcripts to verify that I captured their experiences accurately. I used In Vivo coding to keep the data rooted in the participants' own language and conducted first and second-cycle coding. I reviewed the study's findings to confirm that the data supports the findings and maintained alignment with all study components. All these steps increased the dependability of my research study.

Confirmability

The world is a subjective place, which is a premise acknowledged in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To address confirmability and reduce any biases, I invited participants to conduct member checks of the interview transcripts. I practiced reflexibility by critically monitoring and challenging my biases. I adhered to the conceptual framework, the purpose of the study, and the research questions.

<div align="center">

Results

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The problem addressed in the study is that many teachers do not feel prepared to utilize strategies and supports to improve LTELs' low literacy skills. Five themes emerged from the data. Two themes address RQ1 and are found in Table 2. Three themes address RQ2 and are found in Table 3. I discuss all themes in detail and supporting data below.

RQ1

RQ1 was: What are secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs?

Table 2

Themes Identified in the Data for RQ1

Theme Number	Description
1	Explicitly teaching academic skills along with academic vocabulary, reading, and writing can lead to LTELs' improved literacy skills.
2	Scaffolds are vital supports to improve LTELs literacy skills.

Theme 1: Explicitly Teaching Academic Skills Along with Academic Vocabulary, Reading, and Writing Can Lead to LTELs' Improved Literacy Skills

Most participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12) in the study discussed the importance of explicitly teaching academic skills along with academic vocabulary, reading and writing to improve LTELs' literacy skills. Participants shared their experience in teaching academic skills, academic vocabulary, reading and writing, and described how their instruction supported LTELs in improving their literacy skills. Participant 2 stated, "They have to practice the exact same study skills, reading, annotating, discussing, evaluating, selecting the best answers, or putting things into their own words." Participant 3 stated, "I think it comes back to emphasizing the academic vocabulary, academic writing, and academic reading." Participants expressed seeing students' literacy skills grow when engaging students in lessons involving preparing students for the academic language demands of a school setting.

A particular academic skill that several teachers discussed is annotating. Participant 1 stated, "Annotating those writing prompts was something that I think really helped a lot of kids." Participant 3 said, "Teaching them how to do that, annotating in the

class as a whole class helped." Participants also noted a significant improvement in LTEL's literacy skills when explicitly teaching academic vocabulary. Participant 11 stated, "If we give students some academic vocabulary, and then also some sentence starters or sentence frames for complex vocabulary structures, syntactical structures, that can be really useful." Participant 8 described her experience in teaching academic language to support LTELs in improving their writing skills. Participant 8 stated, "We focus on building academic language, and building their ability to organize their writing into a formalized structure, like an essay, or even just a paragraph that has to provide evidence." Participant 3 stated, "We have to raise their levels of academic vocabulary so they can succeed in both middle school and high school." The data revealed that participants find significant value in emphasizing academic skills and academic vocabulary to improve students' literacy skills.

Participants also emphasized the importance of focusing on academic reading and writing. Participant 5 described their experience working with LTELs who did not have much exposure to reading and how challenging it was to get students "caught up." Participant 5 stated, "If you haven't been reading, you got a lot of catching up to do, and it's not going to be easy." Participant 5 is an EL teacher who has experience co-teaching in an English Language arts classroom and has witnessed the imperative role that strong reading skills play in having strong literacy skills to experience academic success. As a result, Participant 5 strongly emphasizes academic reading skills for LTELs.

Participant 6 is an English Language Arts teacher who has also witnessed the pivotal role that reading plays for LTELs. Participant 6 stated, "If I know that I have a

class that's mostly long-term ELs and I see that they're struggling with academics like reading assessment, I'm like okay, we're going to focus on reading." Participant 6 stated that they provide their LTELs with a lot of choices in reading to increase engagement and foster joy for reading. Participant 6 stated, "So the best strategy that has helped me to get the greatest success is showing them those resources and providing different things that they are able to access for them to read." Participant 6 also shared that they learned English as a second language and that focusing on reading also helped their literacy skills and prepared them for the academic language demands needed to succeed in school. Their experience as a former English learner has influenced their approach to teaching LTELs.

Participant 2 expressed the need to have all teachers collaborate to support literacy for LTELs through reading. Participant 2 stated,

> If the science, history, math, English, ESL teachers, special ed. teacher, all learn how to do a particular methodology one year, even if it's just something specific for reading, and we all do it the whole year, and we all practice it, we would see a bigger difference.

Participant 2 attested to seeing students experience success in content classes when there was a strong focus on reading to support LTELs' literacy skills.

In addition to focusing on reading skills, participants also highlighted the importance of explicitly teaching academic writing skills. Participant 1 is an EL teacher who shared their observations about scores for LTELs on their state language assessment. Participant 1 stated, "Writing is usually the thing that all my long-term kids have to pass,

all my long-terms." To address the need to focus on students' writing skills, participant 1 stated, "So sentence frames. I start out really strong with them at the beginning of the year to support their writing. I try to take them away as the year goes on." In their experience, Participant 1 has observed that the LTELs they have worked with have struggled with getting started with their writing. As a result, they have made writing a priority and believe the more opportunities students have to write, the more comfortable they will feel writing, supporting their literacy skills growth.

Participant 10 was a science teacher who shared how critical it is to build students' writing skills and that their role as a science teacher is paramount in ensuring that students learn how to write using the structures used in the science field. The teacher discussed that in science, students are required to provide claims, reasoning, and evidence, and LTELs need to explicitly be taught how to write using the required science components. Participant 10 stated, "Because, for me, it's interesting. As a content teacher, yes, I want them to write." Participant 10 also said, "It's important to help support students, to encourage and push their writing, to help them capture their thoughts and ideas." Participant 10 shared specific examples that they use in their classroom to enhance students' writing skills.

Participant 5 shared their experience teaching in a school on the West Coast where the entire school placed a strong emphasis on writing. All teachers received training on using the program Writing is Thinking Through Strategic Inquiry (WITsi). Participant 5 shared many benefits in using WITsi to improve LTELs' literacy skills and stated, "That's a lot of second language acquisition involved that from the writing

perspective, we had explicit training, and we immediately saw kids improve." Participant 5 observed a direct improvement in students' writing and their approach to completing writing assignments. Participant 5 stated, "They understood what the assignment was, and then like how to do it, which is great." Participant 5 moved to a different West Coast state and discussed using their WITsi knowledge to continue their writing focus at their new school.

The theme of explicitly teaching academic skills along with academic vocabulary, reading, and writing can lead to LTELs' improved literacy skills is an overwhelming experience shared by this study's participants. Participants expressed that LTELs deserve to have a rigorous curriculum but that it is imperative for teachers to teach them the academic skills necessary to experience success and develop their language skills within the rigorous curriculum. Participant 9 stated, "They're entitled to, and they should receive the same rigorous academic materials, the goal academically, should be the same as for every child to reach their highest potential and to reach the highest goal academically." Participant 9 stated, "As a teacher, I always make sure that everyone is exposed to rigorous academic material." Participant 9 also stated, "So that lack of exposure to solid, rigorous, academic material is what many times causes this identification on long-term ELs." Data revealed that most study participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12) believe explicitly teaching academic vocabulary and academic skills can lead to LTELs' improved literacy skills.

Theme 2 - Scaffolds are Vital Supports to Improve LTELs Literacy Skills

Every study participant discussed scaffolds as a way to support literacy for LTELs. The scaffolds participants mentioned included sentence starters/frames, building background knowledge, exemplars, visuals, modeling, providing many opportunities for practice, collaboration, and translanguaging. Teachers discussed in depth the need for scaffolds and their critical role in supporting literacy for LTELs. Participant 2 stated, "The scaffolds had to be there, and the differentiation had to be very different." Participants also shared that scaffolds benefit all students in the classroom. Participant 1 stated, "It's just because these scaffolds work for everybody." Participants expressed a shared experience of scaffolds as a best practice to support all learners.

The scaffold that most study participants discussed is sentence starters/frames. (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P10, P11). Participant 10 stated, "I think the academic piece and trying to write at an academic level is an area where students can struggle. So helping them with sentence starters, keywords, and a word bank, I think, is one way to help.", Participant 3 shared that using sentence starters is a support that can lead to students using more academic vocabulary. Participant 3 stated, "Using sentence starter, sentence frames, showing them the words that they need to use in order to be successful in their reading and writing I key." When referring to the use of sentence starters, Participant 3 also stated, "Especially grades 6 to 12, like we have to get them up to. You know, we have to raise their levels of academic vocabulary so they can succeed in both middle and high school." Participant 5 was an English Language Arts teacher who also shared her experience observing positive results in using sentence starters with their students.

Participant 5 stated, "We give sentence frames, and that really helps them access the content." Participant 4 stated, "Oh, sentence frames work a lot!" Participant 11 stated, "I mean sentence frames definitely right, that bricks and mortar of language."
The data revealed that using sentence starters/frames is a significant scaffold to improve literacy for LTELs.

Participants 1, 8, and 10 extensively discussed the importance of providing LTELs background knowledge to support content access. In their experience, Participant 8 has worked with many LTELs who needed more background knowledge to understand the content to its full extent. Participant 8 stated, "Because if they don't understand the text or don't have the cultural background knowledge, they need to access it." Participant 8 was an EL teacher who has experience co-teaching and shared specific examples related to background knowledge in classes they have co-taught. When referring to assessments, the EL teacher stated,

> They're expected to write about it, which is how a lot of times the assessment is
>
> that it's related to text. And I feel like they're not going to be able to do that
>
> because maybe they didn't even have comprehension of what was going on.

To ensure students understand the context, participant 8 provided examples of how they build students' background knowledge. Participant 8 stated, "I try to focus a lot on providing cultural background knowledge to make sure that the students have the same prior knowledge to come to the plate." Participant 1 also discussed the importance of building background knowledge and stated, "So teaching everything really explicitly, building background knowledge and doing a lot of that stuff." Participant 10 discussed

expanding the concept of background knowledge further to build a common background

for students in science. Participant 10 stated,

> I really try to push the idea of not just drawing on students' background
>
> knowledge because so many times our students have different background
>
> knowledge. So if you start there, you're already starting on different foundations
>
> for each student, and so trying to provide an experience that we can then all use as
>
> our common background and build from.

Participant 10 explained that to create common background knowledge for

students, they would arrange field trips where students could experience the concepts

they would learn about together at the beginning of a unit. Participant 10 shared that if

the class was going to learn about a river, they arranged a field trip to the river, go on the

river, and learn about the river from a common background that they could build off of.

Another example Participant 10 provided is building a common background for students

by taking them to an amusement park at the beginning of the unit, where they will learn

about potential kinetic energy. Participant 10 stated, "I don't want to assume that they've

had that experience, and so, as much as I can provide experiences and allow students to

make their own connections. I think that's my big goal in my class." Participants 1, 8, and

10 share the experience of improving LTELs' literacy skills by building background

knowledge.

Participants 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 10 shared that providing students with exemplars,

visuals, and modeling are scaffolds that positively influence LTELs' literacy skills.

Participant 8 stated, "Making sure that concrete examples are given so that the students

know what they're being asked to do." Participant 8 shared that having examples allows students to make more progress on their work and literacy skills because they better understand the expectations. Participant 5 stated, "I always try to provide examples because if you just show numbers and jargon, and even if it's translated sometimes, they still don't get it." Participant 5 explained that providing LTELs with examples is a simple scaffold that teachers can use to ensure that students know what they have to do. Participant 5 stated, "When you give any assignment to really help kids see, this is what we're looking for." When asked about best practices for LTELs, Participant 5 said, "So best practice, less text, more visuals, and more examples." Participant 10 described that they use student exemplars to support students in improving their literacy skills. Participant 10 stated, "So first we calibrate with some student exemplars, and so I show some examples on the board. How would you rate this, and where would you offer support?" In Participant 10's experience, they have witnessed LTELs improve their literacy skills by having exemplars that students can analyze and incorporate into their work to build their skill set. Participants 4 and 7 discussed that in addition to providing students exemplars, they model to students what they have to do. Participant 4 stated, "So just trying to give them modeling has been a huge thing."

Participants 1, 3, 6, and 8 discussed the importance of giving LTELs many opportunities to practice their literacy skills. They all expressed that the more opportunities students have to practice writing, reading, and all the literacy skills, the more comfortable students will feel using their literacy skills and the more their literacy skills will improve. Participant 1 stated, "They have to practice the exact same study

skills, reading, annotating, discussing, evaluating, selecting the best answers, or putting things into their own words." Participant 1 shared their experience working with students who initially struggled with writing and reading, but the more opportunities they provided their students to practice, the more growth they saw in their literacy skills. Participant 3 and Participant 6 stated, "We're going to practice, practice, practice!" Participant 8 also shared her experience in seeing student growth through repetition and practice. Participant 8 stated, "Making sure that there's a lot of repetition of different aspects of what students need to understand and have learned from whatever the task is that they're considering."

Participants 2, 4, 8, and 11 expressed that using collaboration as a scaffold has improved LTELs' literacy skills. Participant 11 explained how vital it is to have students be active participants and collaborate in their learning. Participant 11 stated,

My philosophy on learning in general is that the one who's doing the talking is the one who's doing the learning. And I think this is particularly true when you're working with students who are learning a language. So I make everything as much as I can interactive and collaborative.

Participant 11 was an ELA teacher who shared their experience in using various supports to foster collaboration in the classroom. Participant 11 described having students do peer reviews when writing, reading a complex text collaboratively, and collaborative writing. Participant 11 stated, "It's all about the talking, the speaking, and listening." Participant 4 teaches where they use AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) school-wide. Participant 4 explained that AVID is a program that focuses on specific

strategies known as WICOR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, Reading).

Participant 4 spoke highly of using AVID and WICOR strategies, especially

collaboration, to improve literacy for LTELs. Participant 4 stated, "It's been really helpful

for our kids." Participant 4 explained that in AVID, students use tutorials and

collaborative study groups to work together to ensure understanding of their academic

tasks. Participant 4 stated,

> And whether it's like a think pair share where they do a little writing, but then
>
> they get that time to talk to somebody else and share their ideas or add to their
>
> ideas, and then hopefully share it out with the class.

Participants 2, 4, 8, and 11 all expressed witnessing growth in literacy skills for their

LTELs through collaboration.

 Another scaffold that participants (P5, P9, P12) expressed using is

translanguaging. Teachers shared that they allowed students to use their home language

to make connections that fostered literacy growth. Participant 5 described working with

students who sometimes struggled to express their thoughts in English. Participant 5

explained that they use the student's home language to guide their writing instead of

having students rely on translation. Participant 5 stated, "I'd honestly rather have them

write in their home language." They also said, "I believe in letting them use their home

language when they need to." Participant 12 described their experience in their social

studies classroom to ensure that students understand the content. Participant 12 stated, "I

convert my Google slides so that it can transfer directly to the different languages that the

students need." Participant 9 shared their experience immigrating to the United States and

how they used translanguaging in their own education journey. Participant 9 stated, "Yeah, you are always learning the language because once you are bilingual, that translanguaging is always there." Participant 9 described how they have used translanguaging in their classroom and explained that they witnessed students' literacy skills grow by building off of the student's native language. Participant 9 also stated, "So you have to spend time helping them grow in their home language or their families, home language and help them to see how they can constantly transition."

Scaffolds were a recurring theme throughout all the interviews conducted in this study. Although study participants discussed an array of scaffolds, sentence starters/frames, building background knowledge, exemplars, visuals, modeling, providing many opportunities for practice, collaboration, and translanguaging are the scaffolds that participants most frequently discussed. The data revealed that study participants experienced scaffolds as beneficial for LTELs and all students. Participant 11 stated,

At my last school, I would put the scaffolds in for everybody, and not everybody had to use them, but they are available to everybody, and some students wouldn't use them, or they liked a more accelerated option, but they were available.

Participant 1 stated, "It's just because scaffolds work for everybody."

RQ2

RQ2 was: How do the experiences of secondary general content area teachers compare to the experiences of secondary EL teachers for improving literacy for LTELs?

Table 3

Themes Identified in the Data for RQ2

Theme Number	Description
3	Content area teachers and EL teachers agree on the importance of teaching academic vocabulary, reading, and writing skills, and providing students scaffolds to improve literacy for LTELs.
4	Content area teachers and EL teachers experience a system that needs a process to make teachers aware of who are LTELs in their classes.
5	Content area teachers and EL teachers agree that there is a need to provide all teachers with more professional development focusing on ELs, specifically on LTELs.

Theme 3 - Content Area Teachers and EL Teachers Agree on the Importance of Teaching Academic Vocabulary, Reading, and Writing Skills, and Providing Students Scaffolds to Improve Literacy for LTELs

When analyzing the data, it became evident that there is a consensus amongst content area teachers and EL teachers on the importance of teaching academic vocabulary, reading, and writing skills and providing students scaffolds to improve literacy for LTELs. Three content area teachers (P6, P9, P12) and four EL teachers (P1, P2, P3, P8) discussed the importance of emphasizing academic vocabulary when working with LTELs. Content area teacher (P12) stated, "Then there's specific academic grade, academic vocabulary based on the subject area that is so important." EL teacher (P3) said, "You know, we have to raise their levels of academic vocabulary so they can succeed in both middle school and high school." Similar comments arose in many of the

interviews. The data shows an overall agreement that focusing on academic vocabulary is a necessary support that may lead to improved literacy skills for LTELs. There are no significant differences between the experience of general content area teachers and EL teachers in their experience of supports to improve literacy for LTELs.

Four content area teachers (P4, P6, P10, P12) and five EL teachers (P1, P2, P3, P5, P11) discussed the importance of focusing on reading and writing skills when working with LTELs. EL teacher (P11) stated, "But then, also, you know, learning, learning through reading." Content area teacher (P6) stated, "But really allowing students to experience reading is necessary." EL teacher (P1) said, "Tons of writing like explicit writing in my class." Content area teacher (P10) stated, "As a content teacher, I want them to write!" The data reveals overall agreement between the content area and EL teachers on the importance of teaching reading and writing skills to improve literacy for LTELs.

All 12 study participants discussed using scaffolds to support literacy for LTELs. Study participants described the many scaffolds they use in their classroom instruction. Many commonalities existed between the scaffolds used amongst the content area and EL teachers. The most common scaffold was using sentence starters/frames. EL teacher (P3) stated, "I really think sentence starters are really helpful." Content teacher (P4) stated, "Oh, sentence frames work a lot." The comments shared by content area and EL teachers emphasized the importance of teaching academic vocabulary, reading, and writing skills and providing students scaffolds to improve literacy for LTELs.

Theme 4 - Content Area Teachers and EL Teachers Experience a System that Needs a
Process to Make Teachers Aware of Who Are the LTELs in Their Classes.

One of the interview questions was, "What is the process at your school for making teachers aware of who are LTEL students in their class?" A total of 9 participants (P2, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12) out of 12 expressed a need of a process at their school to make teachers aware of who are the LTELs in their classes. Only three EL teachers described a process to communicate with teachers to inform them of who the EL students in their classes are. Participants 1 and 3 stated that the EL teacher shares a spreadsheet and information regarding who the LTEL students are with content teachers. EL teacher Participant 5 said that teachers can use the attendance program to see who the EL students are in their classes and can see the students' English proficiency level.

All the content area teacher participants in the study and EL teachers (P2, P8, and P11) expressed experiencing a system that lacks a process to make teachers aware of who the LTELs are in their classes. Most study participants pointed out that not having a system to make them aware of who the LTELs are in their classes is an issue that needs to be addressed. Participant 4 stated,

> We don't necessarily distinguish between long-term and students who are just coming in. I'm trying to even think how even saying this right now and like oh that might be good information to know, to be able to distinguish because it's not really given to us.

Participant 9 has taught for 16 years and stated, "I can tell you that during the years in classroom instruction, that was never information that was provided to us as teachers. We

were never provided with that." Participant 12 stated, "I think that process could provide the teacher the opportunity to customize their lessons to their specific needs." Participants explained various methods they used to find out who are LTEL students in their class. Participant 6 stated,

> I look at my roster and I'll look on Infinite Campus to see if they have an
>
> ACCESS score. And then I see, okay, I know this student took it in first grade, so
>
> they have probably been here since little or maybe even born here.

Participant 6 was a content teacher who took it upon themselves to investigate further when a student struggled in their class. Participant 7 stated,

> If anything, it's word of mouth or teachers helping each other out, saying, Oh,
>
> hey! You have so and so. And it's a lot of teachers really more looking out for
>
> their students. Teachers who had them previously emailed me or came up to me
>
> and just kind of updated me. But other than that, no, there's no system.

Theme 4 emerged from the data by having nine study participants out of 12 who expressed having a shared experience of needing a process to inform them of who are the LTELs in their classes.

Theme 5: Content Area Teachers and EL Teachers Agree That There is a need to Provide All Teachers with More Professional Development Focusing on ELs, Specifically on LTELs.

A theme that immediately stood out as I conducted the interviews was the need for professional development focusing on ELs, specifically LTELs. Nine participants (P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10, P12) out of the 12 study participants discussed the need for

more professional development. Five participants who expressed the need for more PD were general content area teachers, and 4 of the participants were EL teachers.

EL teacher (P2) stated, "We need to have focused, concentrated PD. Everybody all together on the same ship, going to the same PD that teaches this particular skill so that the kids are getting it in every single class." Participant 2 discussed observing that not all teachers know how to provide scaffolds for LTELs or how to help them improve their literacy skills. EL teacher (P8) shared a similar experience and stated, "I feel like the other teachers in the building have not been given enough professional development to understand where their responsibility lies in regards to ELs." In addition to observing a need for other teachers to have PD focusing on ELs, Participant 8 expressed the need for them to receive PD related to LTELs. Participant 8 stated, "I feel like I could even use more PD related to what recent studies have been done, related to Long-Term ELs, and what are effective best practices." Content area teacher (P12) also expressed a desire to receive PD. Participant 12 stated, "I'd love to have a conference. A major ESL conference where everyone just gets together, and each group or class or faculty shares best practices." Content area teacher (P10) also shared a desire for PD, stating, "I would love support specifically in science, instruction, science, literacy, like what that would look like. How to help support students and how to encourage and push their writing." Content area teachers (P4, P7) expressed the need to receive PD specifically on how to help LTELs improve their language skills. Participant 4 stated, "I want to know what are best practices that are specific to them because I think we focus more on just using language

and not necessarily like acquiring it. Yeah just trying to figure out where their gaps are." Participant 7 shared a similar experience and stated,

> I don't have an understanding of how to move on those 3 to 4 and up. We're more versed on the emergency side of like getting these kids incorporated into education having basics. But we don't have anything that will actually make them grow more once they reach that. So I feel like more education on that.

Participant 9 expressed how crucial it is for all teachers to receive PD related to servicing ELs and stated, "And so every teacher, in my professional opinion, every teacher should be trained to be able to efficiently service ELs and LTELs." The data revealed that overall, content area teachers and EL teachers agree that there is a need to provide all teachers with more professional development focusing on ELs, specifically on LTELs.

Summary

This study explored secondary general content area teachers' and EL teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. In Chapter 4 I included the setting, study participant demographics, data collection, and analysis procedures to address the study's research questions. In Chapter 4 I also provide evidence of trustworthiness and describes how credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are addressed. The results section describes the themes that emerged to answer RQ1 and RQ2. Data was presented with quotes from the interviews to support the findings.

In their experience, secondary teachers explicitly teach academic skills along with academic vocabulary, reading, and writing as supports to improve literacy skills for

LTELs. Secondary teachers also found scaffolds are vital for improving LTELs' literacy skills. Content area teachers and EL teachers agree on the importance of teaching academic vocabulary, reading, and writing skills and providing students scaffolds to improve literacy for LTELs. A challenge that content area teachers and EL teachers experience is a system that needs a process to make teachers aware of who the LTELs are in their classes. Content area teachers and EL teachers also agree that there is a need to provide all teachers with more professional development focusing on ELs, specifically LTELs. There are no significant differences between the experience of general content area teachers and EL teachers in their experience of supports to improve literacy for LTELs.

In Chapter 5 I summarize the key findings. I also include an interpretation of the findings and limitations of the study. Chapter 5 also provides recommendations for future studies and the implications for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this basic qualitative study I aimed to explore secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. Through this study I addressed the need for teachers to feel prepared to utilize strategies and supports to improve LTELs' low literacy skills. I conducted in-depth interviews with secondary general content area teachers and EL teachers from three regions in the United States to answer the study's research questions. I used the following research questions to guide this qualitative study:

RQ1: What are secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs?

RQ2: How do the experiences of secondary general content area teachers compare to the experiences of secondary EL teachers for improving literacy for LTELs?

Although there is a wealth of research on ELs, there is limited research on LTELs, it is imperative to conduct more studies to fill the gap in research and potentially improve learning outcomes for LTELs (Artigliere, 2019; Clark et al., 2020; Shin, 2020). Through this study I may build knowledge in the field of education by informing educators and school districts on teacher experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. The finding of this study may have implications for addressing LTELs' academic needs to gain the necessary English proficiency skills to exit an EL program and raise academic achievement.

The study's findings revealed that teachers use supports that have fostered growth in LTELs' literacy skills. The findings also revealed that general content area teachers and EL teachers have shared experiences when working with LTELs to improve their

literacy skills. Five themes emerged that address the research questions: (a) explicitly teaching academic skills along with academic vocabulary, reading, and writing can lead to LTELs' improved literacy skills; (b)Scaffolds are vital supports to improve LTELs literacy skills; (c) Content area teachers and EL teachers agree on the importance of teaching academic vocabulary, reading, and writing skills and providing students scaffolds to improve literacy for LTELs; (d) Content area teachers and EL teachers experience a system that needs a process to make teachers aware of who are LTELs in their classes; and (e) Content area teachers and EL teachers agree that there is a need to provide all teachers with more professional development focusing on ELs, specifically LTELs.

Interpretation of the Findings

While there is significant research on ELs, there is minimal research on LTELs. The lack of research on LTELs may be due to LTELs being a subgroup of ELs that only recently started to receive attention (Luna, 2020). The findings of this study are significant because I address an under-researched student population. LTELs need further research due to students' low academic achievement and high risk of dropping out of high school (Brooks, 2020; Clark et al., 2020; Johnson, 2020; Shin et al., 2022). This study confirms the knowledge referenced in Chapter 2, the literature review that teachers play a pivotal role in the instruction that LTELs receive (Oh & Mancilla-Martinez, 2021; Strong & Escamilla, 2020).

In this section, I describe the findings of RQ1 and RQ2 for this basic qualitative study. I explain how the themes that emerged for each research question relate to the

current literature and Krashen's second language acquisition theory (1981), which was the conceptual framework that I used for this study.

The interview protocol found in Appendix A includes questions aligned with Krashen's second language acquisition theory because Krashen's theory addresses the importance of teachers providing lots of comprehensible input in an encouraging environment to foster language acquisition (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021). Comprehensible input means teachers use gestures, visuals, objects, and scaffolding to make the content understandable for students. In the interview questions I asked participants to share their experiences regarding supports they have used to improve literacy for LTELs.

RQ1

In Research Question 1 I explored secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. The two themes that emerged to address RQ1 were: (a) Explicitly teaching academic skills along with academic vocabulary, reading, and writing can lead to LTELs' improved literacy skills. (b) scaffolds are vital supports to improve LTELs literacy skills. Research has shown that it is vital to address teachers' uncertainty about improving instructional practices for ELs (Owens & Wells, 2021). This study's findings revealed that teachers use instructional strategies that they believe have helped improve literacy for LTELs.

Previous studies confirm the importance of using supports to improve literacy for LTELs. Studies have shed light on the need for school systems to improve the quality of education offered to LTELs (Brooks 2020; Johnson, 2020, Umansky & Avelar, 2022).

The finding of this study revealed that LTELs literacy skills can be improved by teachers focusing on academic vocabulary, reading, and writing. Studies have demonstrated that it is essential to equip students with strong literacy for effective communication and academic success (Stauss et al., 2021; Stevenson & Huffling, 2021;).

The findings of this study also revealed that scaffolds are vital supports to improve LTELs' literacy skills. A scaffold that study participants described using is translanguaging. Previous studies confirm that translanguaging is a critical support teachers can easily implement in their classrooms to support literacy for LTELs (Artigliere, 2019; Brooks, 2020; Luna, 2020). Leveraging students' linguistic assets is an excellent way to support literacy development for LTELs (Artigliere, 2019; Brooks, 2020; Byfield, 2019). The findings of this study revealed that in addition to translanguaging, participants also use sentence starters/frames, building background knowledge, exemplars, visuals, modeling, providing many practice opportunities, and collaboration. Although these specific scaffolds were not discussed in the studies included in the literature review, they are valuable experiences that the study participants shared that add to the body of knowledge regarding supports to help improve LTELs' literacy skills.

RQ2

Through Research Question 2 I explored how the experiences of secondary general content area teachers compare to the experiences of secondary EL teachers in improving literacy for LTELs. The three themes that emerged to address RQ2 are: (a) Content area teachers and EL teachers agree on the importance of teaching academic

vocabulary, reading, and writing skills and providing students scaffolds to improve literacy for LTELs. (b) Content area teachers and EL teachers experience a system that needs a process to make teachers aware of who are LTELs in their classes. (c) Content area teachers and EL teachers agree that there is a need to provide all teachers with more professional development focusing on ELs, specifically on LTELs.

The theme of content area teachers and EL teachers agreeing on the importance of teaching academic vocabulary, reading, and writing skills and providing students scaffolds to improve literacy for LTELs is confirmed by previous studies that have shown that teachers of LTELs need to provide thoughtful and deliberate instruction to students by making instruction meaningful (Luna, 2020). The findings of this study reveal that teachers are using strategies that foster a deliberate and meaningful approach in their instruction to improve literacy for LTELs. Teachers observe improved outcomes for LTELs when they focus on academic vocabulary, reading, and writing skills and provide scaffolds for students. Nearly all general content area and EL teachers expressed using scaffolds and instructional strategies that fostered literacy growth for LTELs. Recent research identified the need to understand teachers' experiences with ELs because researchers have found a link between teachers' perceptions of instructional choices and student outcomes (Murphy & Torff, 2019).

Extensive research confirms Theme 4: Content area teachers and EL teachers experience a system that needs a process to make teachers aware of who are LTELs in their classes. Many schools take a one-size-fits-all approach and treat ELs as a homogenous group instead of serving the unique range of interests and needs of LTELs

(Shin, 2020). In this study, only three teachers, who happen to be all EL teachers, described having a system to make teachers aware of who the LTELs are in the classes. The findings of this study related to this theme are significant because ELs have distinctly different needs, and it is imperative to stop treating ELs as homogeneous groups with undifferentiated services (Umansky & Alvelar, 2022). School district leaders must develop a process to make teachers aware of who are LTELs in their classes. Previous studies have demonstrated that a significant factor in ELs becoming LTELs is the inappropriate services failing to address students' linguistic needs (Clark et al., 2020; Mokharti et al., 2021; Shin et al., 2022; Strong & Escamilla 2022).

Existing research confirms the finding of this study that general content area teachers and EL teachers believe there is a need to provide all teachers with more professional development focusing on ELs, specifically on LTELs. In previous studies, teachers consistently expressed the desire for more PD to effectively address the unique needs of ELs (Stairs-Davenport, 2021; Vera et al., 2020). Some studies revealed that general education teachers do not view themselves as responsible for ELs' language development instruction (Deng et al., 2021; Kim, 2021; Luna, 2020). As the number of LTELs continues to grow, it is vital to provide all teachers with quality PD that includes the latest effective pedagogy, curricula, and ideas to support learning for ELs (Ankeny et al., 2019; Irby et al., 2020). In this study, nine out of the 12 participants expressed a desire for more professional development. Studies have demonstrated that administrators play a critical role in providing teachers with quality PD that is relevant and teacher-driven to improve instruction and educational outcomes for ELs (Stairs-Davenport,

2021). The data from this study support the need to provide all teachers with more professional development focusing on ELs, specifically on LTELs.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. Through this study I added to the body of literature related to teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs, the study has limitations. First, the study's sample size was small, which prevents generalizations; however, my goal in this study was to explore secondary teachers' experiences for transferability to other school districts with similar demographics. To manage the possibility of participant bias, I created open-ended interview questions and was mindful of how the questions were worded. To prevent researcher bias, I practiced reflexivity and did not deviate from the interview protocol.

Recommendation

While this study added to the body of research on improving literacy skills for LTELs, the results and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 indicate that future research is needed to improve literacy skills and the quality of education for LTELs. My first recommendation is to conduct a study on best practices in improving literacy for LTELs. Study participants expressed needing to be more knowledgeable on best practices that could support LTELs in improving their literacy and language skills. Gaining a better understanding of best practices to support literacy for LTELs could lead to the development of quality professional development that studies, including this one, have shown to be necessary for all teachers.

Another recommendation is to conduct research in school districts that have efficient and effective processes to communicate with teachers and make them aware of who LTELs are in their classes. Conducting a study of this nature could help district leaders and educators improve their systems so that ELs are not treated like a homogenous group, and the various subgroups of EL students could receive differentiated services designed to address their specific educational needs.

A final recommendation is to conduct a study to explore the experiences of LTELs. LTELs could provide insight regarding supports that they find meaningful and work best for them to improve their literacy skills. LTELs could also provide insight into the barriers to developing their language skills to exit an EL program.

Implications

The results of this study indicate that teachers are using supports to improve literacy for LTELs. However, the results also indicate that teachers are experiencing systems that lack a process to make teachers aware of who are LTELs in their classes to provide supports to improve their literacy skills, and there is a need to provide all teachers with more professional development focusing on ELs, specifically on LTELs. This study's findings can raise awareness of supports teachers use in their classrooms to improve literacy skills for LTELs. This study also has the potential to influence improvements in the process of communicating information to teachers to make them aware of who LTELs are in their classrooms, which can lead to improved instruction and quality of education for LTELs.

As the population of LTELs continues to grow, it is vital to fill the gap in research related to LTELs. Continuing to research how to improve literacy for LTELs has the potential to create social change by transforming the trajectory of LTELs' academic experience. Informing school district leaders and educators on critical supports to improve LTELs' literacy skills may help students reach English proficiency and be college and career-ready so that they experience success in life.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore secondary teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. The population of LTELs continues to grow; however, many teachers do not feel prepared to utilize strategies and supports to improve LTELs' low literacy skills. To address the two research questions, I used semistructured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to obtain rich and detailed information regarding teachers' experiences. I interviewed 12 participants, including six secondary general content area teachers and six secondary EL teachers through Zoom. Four teachers were from the East Coast, four from the Midwest, and four from the West Coast. All participants had experience working with at least five LTELs and taught for at least 2 years.

The results from this study revealed that teachers are using supports to improve literacy for LTELs. Participants explained that explicitly teaching academic skills along with academic vocabulary, reading, and writing can lead to LTELs' improved literacy skills. Participants also described using scaffolds to improve LTELs' literacy skills. The scaffolds participants highlighted included sentence starters/frames, building background

knowledge, exemplars, visuals, modeling, providing many opportunities for practice, collaboration, and translanguaging. The study also found that content area teachers and EL teachers agree on the importance of teaching academic vocabulary, reading, and writing skills and providing students scaffolds to improve literacy for LTELs. Content area teachers and EL teachers expressed a shared experience of a system that lacks a process to make teachers aware of who LTELs are in their classes. The study also found that content area teachers and EL teachers agree that there is a need to provide all teachers with more professional development focusing on ELs, specifically on LTELs.

The information in this study fills the gap in research on instructional strategies supporting literacy for LTELs at the secondary level to help them reach English proficiency. Strong literacy is a crucial life skill for effective communication and academic success (Stauss et al., 2021; Stevenson & Huffling, 2021;). Continuing to explore teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs may lead to improvement in addressing LTELs' academic needs. Focusing on improving the quality of education for LTELs can transform students' lives by helping them gain the necessary English proficiency skills to exit an EL program and improve their academic outcomes.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is Ana Sarahí Monterrey. Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this interview and share your experience in working with Long Term English Learners. As you are aware, the purpose of this interview is to better understand teachers' experiences of supports to improve literacy for LTELs. Thank you for signing the informed consent form.

I will record the interview and share a copy of the transcript with you for your review. Your privacy will be protected, and no names will be used in the study. As a reminder, your participation is completely voluntary, and you can decline to answer any question or opt out of the interview at any time. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. Do you have any questions?

Demographic Questions

1. How many years have you been teaching?

2. How many years have you been working with EL students?

3. How many years have you been working with LTEL students?

4. How many LTEL students do you currently work with?

Interview Questions

1. What is your personal educational philosophy and how is your philosophy demonstrated in your teaching style?

2. What is the process at your school for making teachers aware of who are LTEL students in their class?

3. What is your understanding of second language acquisition?

4. What is your understanding of best practices in teaching LTELs?

5. How does your understanding of second language acquisition influence the strategies and supports you use to improve literacy for LTELs?

6. How do you differentiate instruction for LTELs to improve their literacy skills?

7. What instructional strategies have you found to improve LTELs' literacy skills?

8. What supports have you found to help improve literacy for LTELs? For example, do you collaborate with families, or are there any special programs at your school that focus on addressing the needs of LTELs?

9. What challenges have you experienced in supporting literacy for LTELs?

10. What does collaboration look like at your school between general content area teachers and EL teachers?

11. What additional resources or support do you need to improve literacy for LTELs?

12. Are there any other experiences or information you would like to share about improving literacy for LTELs?

Thank you so much for sharing your experience and perception about supports to improve literacy for LTELs. I will share the transcript with you to ensure I have accurately captured your experience and perspective. Please let me know how you prefer I contact you. I will also share the abstract of the dissertation once it is complete. Thank you again for your time and for participating in this study.