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Understanding Teachers' Perceptions of Best Practices for English Language Learners

Joshua Daniel Davis
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Science

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Joshua Daniel Davis

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Timothy Rodriguez, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Amy White, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz Ph. D.

Walden University

2024

Abstract

Understanding Teachers' Perceptions of Best Practices for English Language Learners

by

Joshua Daniel Davis

MA, Walden University, 2020

BS, Towson University, 2010

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

November 2024

Abstract

In a district where only 5% of ELLs were deemed language proficient, the problem was the need to understand teacher perceptions of best practices to increase English language learner (ELL) achievement in reading and writing. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teacher perceptions of best practices to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district. The framework that supported this study was the Cummins model on learners' language use because it guides teaching and assessing students' vocabulary acquisition in various contexts. The two research questions probed high school teachers' perceptions of best practices for instructing ELLs and their perceptions of their training and readiness to teach ELLs. Data for this basic qualitative study were collected through 15 semistructured interviews with high school teachers who taught ELLs in a heterogeneous setting. Data were coded, categorized, and organized into four themes: (a) teachers described a myriad of strategies to support ELL students in improving their academic reading and writing, (b) teachers articulated specific factors needed to promote ELL academic readiness, (c) teachers rely heavily on the prior training and experiences to meet the needs of ELLs, and (d) teachers articulated specific training and support needed to teach ELLs in heterogeneous classrooms. A white paper was created offering specific recommendations to district leadership about addressing teachers' needs to support ELL learning. The study may contribute to positive social change if the recommendations are implemented to support the 20,000 teachers in the district in better meeting ELLs' learning needs to allow students to effectively access more education.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my father Sam Davis and my mother Anne Davis who taught me the value of education and how to have a strong work ethic. I also dedicate this to the Verzosa family, Kay Davis, Ms. Debbie, the Watt's and Dyok families, the Lucks, my grandparents and my God Mother Jean Jackson who have all loved and supported me on my journeys. I finally dedicate this to my study buddies Nova and Kali. Thank you all for supporting me and for inspiring me in getting this doctorate.

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Section 1: The Problem

The number of English language learners (ELLs) in American public schools has increased to where one in four public school students speaks a language other than English at home, and 10% of students are classified as ELL (Smith et al., 2023). ELLs can be found in every state, with half of the United States reporting an increase in ELL student enrollment. With the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, states must annually assess their ELLs and develop accountability programs that measure their long-term language goals. The act has led to 97% of ELLs enrolling in language instructional programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). But ELLs come from diverse backgrounds, which has led districts to rethink their training to ensure that teachers have the skills to meet the demands of this demographic.

The Local Problem

The problem addressed through this study is the need to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase ELL achievement in reading and writing. There is a gap in practice in that literature on how to support literacy instruction for ELLs (Grant et al., 2021; Mills et al., 2020), but in the district being studied, there has been no significant improvement in ELLs' reading and writing scores. To understand why ELLs do not progress in their reading and writing, local research is needed to explore teachers' perceptions of their training to implement these best practices. While there are many strategies to support ELLs, many teachers are not trained in these strategies (Grant et al., 2021; Mills et al., 2020). When teachers are not given explicit professional development on a strategy or technology, they will not use it effectively in the classroom (Frey, 2019).

A lack of unified training and diversity with ELLs has led to teachers using various strategies to support ELLs, but many of these strategies have yet to be grounded as best practices to support literacy instruction (Grant et al., 2021).

Rationale

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the fall of 2010, 9.2% of students (4.5 million) were identified as ELL in the United States. In the fall of 2019, that number increased to 10.4 % or 5.1 million students. The number of ELLs in heterogeneous classrooms is expected to continue to increase (Olson et al., 2023). The study took place in a state whose ELLs population is higher than the national average, with 10.6% of the students identified as ELL (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). According to the Board of Education Academic Achievement Committee (2023), as of December 19th, 2022, 32,098 students in the Mid-Atlantic district that are being studied are classified as ELL. These students speak around 105 different languages and represent 102 countries. Most of these students are placed in heterogeneous classrooms without English as a second language (ESOL) teachers' support (Board of Education Academic Achievement Committee, 2023).

The district leadership where the study took place has acknowledged that ELL student achievement is a priority, and supporting teachers with improving student literacy is a priority. Concern about support for ELLs is evident in the Board of Education meeting notes from February 15th, 2023. The 2022-2023 ESOL strategic plan has four goals, with the first goal being to improve academic achievement for ELLs and the second being to increase the capacity of staff of ELLs. In the district being studied,

leadership has acknowledged that students are not exiting the ESOL program at the targeted rate, with 9% of students exiting each year from 2018-2020 and from 2021-2022, 8% exiting the program. Because students are not testing out of the ESOL program at the expected rate, there is an increase in students being designated long-term English language learners (LTELLs) in this district. In 2018-2019 23% of ELLs were classified as LTELLs, which has increased yearly since, with 34% of ELLs being classified as LTELLs for the 2021-2022 school year. Other research has supported a correlation between students' language proficiency and English scores (Rios, 2018), and the increase in LTELLS in the district has been cited as an indicator that students are not advancing in their reading and writing skills. If students were demonstrating proficiency in their reading and writing skills, then the number of LTELLs should not be increasing at a 10% rate. The district leaders explained that this increase in LTELL shows students are not exiting at the expected rate of four to seven years. Students should increase their language skills to exit their program within this time (Education Northwest, 2018).

ELL achievement is a concern district wide. In the academic year 2018-2019, 54% of students met the growth target, but in the 2021-2022 academic year, that number decreased to 45%. Each student's growth target is individually calculated based on their past performance on the world-class instructional design and assessment (WIDA) test. To exit the ESOL program, students are expected to score a 4.5 average on the world-class WIDA test (Menzano-Lee & Kanney, 2023). According to Education Northwest (2018), students should be proficient in a new language (L2) after 4 to 7 years. The increase in LTELLs shows that students are not becoming proficient in the expected time.

The research district has 20,000 teachers employed with various educational certifications. Some teachers are trained in ELL literacy best practices, and others are not. The district where the study will take place has 24% of teachers labeled as inexperienced, meaning they have less than four years of teaching. In addition, 32% of teachers teach a subject they have not been trained in, and 13% of teachers have emergency credentials, meaning they have had no formal training in teaching. According to the Board of Education Academic Achievement Committee, 290 staff members completed ESOL continuing professional development courses representing 1% of the district's staff. The district has noted in its February 2023 meeting that future action steps will increase school coaching and support for ESOL key strategies (Menzano-Lee & Kanne, 2023). The meeting notes confirm that the academic achievement committee feels that teachers might not have the necessary training to meet the needs of the district's diverse learners and that a plan must be created to address the gaps in teachers' understanding. The meeting notes are significant because they show that many teachers in this district do not have the experience or certifications to meet the needs of their linguistically diverse students in a heterogeneous classroom.

With the number of students classified as ELLs increasing, more research is needed to examine teachers' perspectives on their training and readiness to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom. One Mid Atlantic school district stakeholder said the district "needs to change how its teachers meet the needs of minority students." At this meeting, a workgroup was created to address the needs of immigrant students. The work group was created to study ELL best practices.

This group did not study the district teachers' perceptions and what is already known and being done. This district received a 4.7 out of 10 for its ELL achievement. These local data shows that the problem is meaningful because the district has acknowledged that there is a problem with meeting the needs of ELLs. The data also show that the district is giving itself a failing grade for how its teachers are meeting the needs of ELLs.

According to the State Report Card's Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) for grade 11, about 5% of ELLs were proficient in English from 2016-2018. MCAP data for 11th grade is mirrored with students' MCAP data from grade 10, where 5% of students were proficient in English from 2016-2018. In the summer of 2022, a chief executive officer in the Mid-Atlantic school released the end-of-school-year report indicating that 21% of students in the district are classified as ELL, which is above the national average of 10.4%, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2023). These local data shows that the problem is meaningful because the data shows that the current interventions are not impacting students' achievement literacy.

When teachers graduate from teacher preparation programs, teachers do not feel they have the skills to teach reading and writing to linguistically diverse learners in a heterogeneous classroom (Custodio & O'loughlin, 2020). Student achievement increases when teachers are trained to support linguistically diverse learners (Dang et al., 2021). If this training is tailored to the teachers' needs, more will be utilized from the training in the classroom. If teachers were trained in how to support ELLs in best practices, there should be evidence in the local data for an increase in student achievement. Teachers must employ various strategies to make ELLs successful and there is no one best practice

(Custodio & O'loughlin, 2020; Rowland, 2020). However, in the 2023 climate and culture survey, 48% of high school teachers responded that the district does not provide enough professional learning opportunities to teachers to support diverse student needs. Middle school teachers also noted that the district administrators do not support their professional learning in areas related to diverse student needs. The district administrators do provide professional development opportunities, with 70% of teachers responding that the district will support them with teaching their subject or content. It is unclear if teachers are adequately trained in these best practices because of the variety of training programs and no national teaching standards (Yoon, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teachers' perceptions of their training and readiness to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing and if ELLs are not making progress because their teachers are not trained to meet their needs.

Definition of Terms

English language learners (ELL): The district being studied explains that ELLs are students whose family's first language in the home is not English. A student is no longer classified as an ELL student when they score an average of 4.5 on the WIDA Access test (Menzano-Lee & Kanney, 2023).

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program: The ESOL program provides instruction to non-native English speakers in grades kindergarten through 12. Students are supported and regularly assessed to know if they meet their linguistic goals certified teachers trained to meet ELLs' needs.

Social emotional learning (SEL): Instruction that focuses on helping students

develop the skills to manage their emotions, build relationships and make responsible decisions. SEL is supporting student's self-awareness to help improve academic performance (Yoon, 2021)

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may be significant because qualitative information were gathered about teachers' perspectives on what they view as best practices when teaching ELLs in reading and writing. Understanding teachers' perceptions about best practices in reading and writing is essential as a plan can be created to support teachers with gaps in practice. When gaps in teachers' practices are identified and targeted, professional development is given and student achievement increases (Mills et al., 2020). With the population of ELLs increasing in this region and data showing this demographic is not improving in reading and writing, more research is needed to understand what teachers perceive as best practices. This study will be significant because the mid-Atlantic district that is being studied serves over 131,146 students each year with over 20,000 staff members at over 198 schools and centers. With over 20% of those students being classified as ELL, data from this study can be used by district leaders to understand what best practices teachers are using to support students to become college and career ready. This study may assist district leaders in learning what best practices teachers use and do not use to support this group of students. This information will allow for an understanding of how teachers view ELL instruction and what training teachers have had on how to support ELLs.

This study may promote positive social change for ELLs (Yob & Brewer, n.d.).

Social change supports a specific group of students (Thorton, 2022). Supporting ELLs will positively influence the Mid-Atlantic school district that is being studied. After data were collected on what teachers perceive as best practices, a plan can be created to support teachers in addressing any gaps in understanding. ELLs are the fastest-growing demographic in this district, and understanding how to meet ELL needs is needed to increase student achievement.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study address the need to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase ELL achievement in reading and writing by gathering qualitative data on what teachers view as best practices to support ELLs:

- RQ 1: What are high school teachers' perceptions of best practices for ELLs to learn reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?
- RQ 2: What are high school teachers' perceptions about their training and readiness to teach ELLs how to improve their reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?

The school district has teachers with different years of experience from various preparation programs and varying certifications. Qualitative data were gathered to understand their perceptions of training to support ELLs in reading and writing. Data gathered provide best practices to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district.

Review of the Literature

The increase in ELLs has led to a need to understand teachers' perceptions of

what they perceive as best practices to improve students' ability to read and write. With no nationally unified training program to prepare teachers for the classroom, more information is needed to understand what training teachers have been given to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing proficiency. By gathering qualitative data about teachers' perceptions, districts can implement professional development that addresses gaps in practice (Ankeny et al., 2019).

This literature review begins with the conceptual framework that will ground this study. This section describes Cummins's theory of language acquisition (Cummins, 1981). This section has sources that provide an understanding of how Cummins's learning models can support ELLs in improving their reading and writing. I then reviewed current literature related to the problem of ELL as it relates to ELLs not mastering state-mandated assessments. I begin the literature review with a description of the diversity of ELLs and their unique needs. I then focus on the broader problem of having no nationally unified teaching standards for training teachers to support ELLs in mastering common core standards. This is supported by a review of the literature about teachers' perceptions on their perceptions about their preparedness to meet the needs of ELLs. I then focus on how teachers need specific training to meet the needs of ELLs. I then conclude the literature review by explaining how this has affected ELLs both in the short and long term.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that will ground this study is Cummins's (1981) second language acquisition theory. Cummins described that language acquisition could

be broken into three frameworks: interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), and common underlying proficiency (CUP). BICS is used in daily communication and is the social language that students master. This language use can be found when students communicate with their friends at lunch or in daily conversations. BICS is not generally assessed on standardized tests, and Cummins explained that this can be cognitively demanding for some students if they have yet to be taught this with high context. For many ELLs in the classroom, teachers focus on providing high context for CALP words, as these words are more likely to be assessed on standardized tests such as the MCAP or WIDA Access test.

CALP is more subject-specific or technical vocabulary students would not usually use in everyday conversation. However, students use and learn this in their classes and apply it on standardized tests. Cummins (2014) explained that teachers must explicitly teach CALP to students for them to master this. To understand CALP words, teachers need to provide high context for these words for students to grasp them. Cummins described that CALP on standardized tests is usually not given high context, making it more difficult for students to apply. Cummins explained that standard tests are categorized as being cognitively demanding and context reduced.

CUP is when a student learns a second language with the support of their first language as a building block. Using a student's first language as a building block can support students with having context to understand abstract ideas. Cummins further described ensuring that students are exposed to their home language while at home to reinforce the concepts taught at school. By having students utilize their home language

they are more likely to understand the BICS and CALP of their second language. By moving students through the four quadrants of Cummins's contextual and cognitive involvement model, students can use new academic language on context-reduced and cognitively demanding tasks (Darmi, 2014). Students can learn BICS and CALP with context supported by CUP at home. Utilizing CUP has improved students' academic performance on cognitively demanding tasks such as completing a standardized test like the MCAP or WIDA access.

Cummins's (1981) model on learners' language was used to understand teachers' perceptions on if teachers are addressing ELLs' needs in literacy. The CMOLL framework relates to the study because locally, there are no qualitative data to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices for ELLs to apply their BICS and CALP in reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom. If teachers do not understand how to support students with best practices for learning BICS and CALP in the classroom, this could explain why ELLs are not performing at the same rate as their native English-speaking peers. The second research question was guided by this framework because there are no data about teachers' perceptions of their training and readiness to teach ELLs how to improve their reading and writing. If teachers have yet to be trained to teach students BICS and CALP in various situations, this could explain the lack of growth for ELLs on their MCAP and WIDA Access tests. It is also unclear if teachers have been trained to utilize a student's BICS to support their CALP when no context is provided in a highly cognitively demanding situation. With teachers in the district having various experiences and training, data needs to be gathered to understand teachers' perceptions on their

training, readiness, and what they feel is best practices to understand if more training is needed to fill any gaps in practice.

Review of the Broader Problem

Databases fundamental to this research were ERIC, Google Scholar, Education Research Complete, and SAGE Journals. The keywords used to find relevant articles were *English Language Learners or ELLs, teachers' perceptions, teacher preparation programs, Cummins, teachers' training and readiness, literacy instruction, and ELL best practices.*

Best Practices for Teaching ELLs

Teachers need to employ various strategies to meet ELLs' needs because of the diversity in this demographic (Zhang, 2020). A variety of approaches need to be taken into account when supporting ELLs in learning content knowledge and improving their language acquisition (Yoon, 2021). For students to succeed in the classroom, teachers must utilize behaviorist, innates, interactionist, and identity perspectives. There is no single best practice for supporting all ELLs (Yoon, 2021; Zhang, 2020). Thus, to meet the needs of ELLs, teachers need to be trained in various best practices. However, teachers have faced challenges ensuring their students were successful because they were not trained to meet their needs (Hashim et al., 2021). When teachers are trained and taught how to use multiple modalities during instruction, all ELLs can be successful (Gupta, 2019). Various scaffolds can be utilized to set up routines to motivate students to want to learn a second language (Gupta, 2019). To ensure student success, students also need to have their progress tracked (Murphey, 2023). For example, by giving focused feedback

on writing, students' writing improved (Rahimi, 2021). Focused, tracked feedback is a best practice to support students with improving in the four language domains.

Technology Practices

A best practice for ELLs is for teachers to use technology to support their reading and writing. A reason for technology being a best practice is multiple studies have found that when teachers use technology, students are more motivated to retain information. Korman and Oz's (2021) quantitative study on incorporating live games such as Kahoot showed a significant increase in how students performed in reading after seven weeks of intervention. The authors found that interactive games such as Kahoot effectively motivate ELLs to improve their reading and writing. Nersesian et al. (2018) conducted an 18-week study of three groups of ELLs. Students were more motivated to learn using virtual reality than traditional textbooks or 2D educational games. By using virtual reality in the classroom, students were better able to understand abstract concept words and were more motivated to learn and retain the material. As technology develops, teachers must find innovative ways to motivate their students to improve their language development.

As technology continues to evolve, teachers' perceptions on how to use technology to enhance student learning needs to be studied. Alshaya (2020) conducted a qualitative study on all ELL teachers in a northern state. The goal of the study was to gather a holistic view on the perceptions of ELL teachers on using digital games to support ELLs. The author found that teachers acknowledged that because of technological advancements teachers need to include new technology that both motivates and encourages students to want to learn. A major barrier that was identified in the study

was that teachers' attitudes towards the new technology created a barrier on if it could be used effectively. Alshaya (2020) highlighted the need for teachers to engage in more training to learn how to better infuse educational games into their classrooms. While teachers might have personal experience with the technology teachers need to have professional development that will support them with using this technology in the classroom. This is supported by Wei (2020) who found after surveying principals that teachers need to have their personal knowledge on resources explored so that they can better integrate that into the classroom. Wei also found that most professional developments are based on best practices or research-based programs with little input being used from teachers on their personal experiences or perceptions. By understanding what teachers' perceptions are on technology, school leaders can create professional development plans that leverage what teachers already know to better support their students.

Technology has also positively impacted student achievement as teachers move from print to digital texts. Wood et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study on 288 ELLs who received e-book readings three times a week for 10 to 20 weeks. The e-readings also had supplemental material in the student's native language that helped to scaffold the text. The study concluded that the use of digital texts had a substantial impact on improving students' vocabulary. Shahbazi (2020) conducted an interpretative phenomenological study examining teacher and student perceptions of using the digital platform Ilit. The study concluded that digital platforms provided targeted scaffolds to increase student autonomy and help motivate student learning. A theme that emerged

from the study was that more support was needed for teachers to incorporate digital texts into the classroom. Ghounane (2020) found that all ninety students who participated preferred to read on digital platforms. Six of the eight teachers did not enjoy teaching reading through social media but found that it was effective in improving classroom engagement. While not all teachers enjoyed using the digital platform, this aligns with the findings from Shahbazi's (2020) theme of teachers needing support with using digital texts in the classroom. Shahbazi explained that more systemic support is needed to improve teacher buy-in for digital literacy. Park (2018) found, after conducting a case study on four ELLs, that by providing online texts to students, they could better find texts that aligned with the student's cultural identity. By aligning the digital text with students' cultural identity, they were likelier to read and engage with the text. This increase in motivation was found both in the home and in the classroom, as parents were found to support their children in understanding the text. The use of digital texts has been shown to increase student motivation and have a positive impact on their reading skills.

Educational technology has been shown to increase student achievement when used constantly and when teachers have been trained to use it to support their lessons. Darling-Aduana and Heinrich (2018) found that when teachers use technology to support reading in the classroom for forty minutes a week, students will likely engage with the reading and improve their literacy. The conclusion was found after analyzing district records, teacher surveys, and Classroom observations. The authors concluded that classrooms with tablets had higher reading scores than those without. This study collaborates with the study by Aleb and Labeled (2021) that found after sampling sixty

randomly selected ELLs that those taught in a blended classroom were more likely to meet the language objectives of the course. The use of technology to promote reading was also shown by Celik et al. (2022) to support students in improving their English vocabulary. Calik et al. had 154 ELLs complete a six-week course with students engaging with digital texts and then in a think-pair-share activity. The students on post tests performed better than those that had paper texts. The quantitative data supported having students use technology to improve their vocabulary, which was later reinforced with a think pair share activity. The increase in student achievement is linked to teachers using various technologies to support student learning.

Collaboration

Teachers need to engage in various forms of collaboration for students to improve their reading and writing skills. Over three years, Bauler and Kang (2020) studied multiple co-taught ELL classrooms. The study concluded no suitable co-teaching model existed. Positive results came from classrooms where teachers were trained in collaboration. These classrooms performed better on standardized assessments than those without a co-teacher. The study on collaboration (Bauler & Kang, 2020) was supported by Cheuk (2020), who found that when science teachers collaborate with other departments on argumentative writing, students are more likely to utilize what was taught. Cheuk (2020) reviewed science, math, and ELA standards and found common themes in argumentative writing. Cheuk explained that when the eight science teachers collaborated with other disciplines, common scaffolds could be implemented, and students were more likely to improve their writing. Vintan and Gallagher (2019)

conducted semi-structured interviews with four ESL teachers. The emergent theme from the study was that ESL teachers who collaborated with content teachers were more likely to have student success in the classroom. The conclusion was found because ESL teachers found ways to help support classroom teachers with scaffolding to meet the needs of their students.

A best practice for an ELL classroom is to have students collaborate in a heterogeneous way. Sarac and Dogan (2022) found after purposefully sampling 28 ELLs and conducting a semi-structured interview, those that had classes that allowed them to collaborate felt more confident in their language skills. Johnson et al. (2020) explained that after having 713 students from forty-five classrooms engage in a qualitative study, they rated how frequently their teachers encouraged them to collaborate with their peers. Classes with students claiming they engaged in collaboration often achieved higher on the WIDA access assessment. Students also explained that they could better understand the material when their peers supported them, as it helped them understand new concepts. When students of varying language skills can collaborate, they can leverage the skills of their peers to master new concepts.

Teacher Perceptions of ELL Instruction

When teachers graduate from a teacher preparation program, many explain that they do not feel they have the skills to meet the needs of linguistically diverse learners. Twenty-three in-service teachers were surveyed by Grant et al. (2021). During the pre-survey, most teachers did not know strategies to draw on a student's cultural background and experience to support learning in the classroom. Only after attending the training did

teachers feel, they could utilize scaffolds to support students in the classroom. The findings of Grant et al. (2021) were supported by Deng et al. (2021), who conducted a meta-analysis of fifteen empirical studies over the past 25 years. The authors found that most teachers felt unprepared to work with multilingual students after graduation. Deng et al. (2021) explained that most first-year teachers did not feel as though they had the support in place to teach ELLs. Both studies highlight the need to support teachers in preparation programs to meet the needs of linguistically diverse learners.

Teachers need support in modifying their curriculum to infuse scaffolds to support ELL instruction. De Jong and Naranjo (2019) reviewed the syllabi and interviewed eleven instructors. The study's authors found that teachers need support with modifying their curriculum to support the diverse needs of their ELLs. According to the teachers in the study, the current curriculum did not meet their learners' needs and made instruction difficult. Davalla and Linares (2020) supported the study of de Jong and Naranjo by conducting a qualitative study on four middle school and high school teachers on how the curriculum meets the needs of their ELLs. The study's authors found that teachers had empathy and wanted to support students regardless of their linguistic background. The study's authors explained that teachers have little control over structural aspects of a school, such as curriculum. Fu and Weng (2023) reviewed twenty-four studies between 2009 and 2021 and found that teacher agency is lacking in curriculum development. This lack of control has impacted curriculum design and instruction that negatively impacts ELLs.

Teachers' perceptions of teaching ELLs have negatively impacted student

achievement. Murphy and Torff (2019) conducted a quantitative study that surveyed 87 ELL teachers and found that teachers have lower standards and expectations for ELLs. The study compared the results with 118 general education teachers and found that when teaching students whose first language matched the teacher's, they were more likely to receive rigorous material and appropriate scaffolds. Nguyen (2021) reviewed current educational policies in California and explained that one in five students in California public schools is not given access to college and career paths because of their classification as being ELL. Nguyen (2021) explained that ELLs are given limited access to higher-rigor courses or have been stigmatized. Teachers believe that ELLs cannot reach the same academic goals that have led to students graduating high school who feel they are not college and career ready.

Teachers feel more confident supporting ELLs when allowed to engage in targeted professional development. Ankeny et al. (2019) conducted a case study that had twenty-one participants engage in professional development opportunities to support ELLs in the classroom over five semesters. After the study, the participants were interviewed and felt more confident in meeting the needs of their linguistically diverse learners. Smith and Robinson (2020) conducted a qualitative case study on eleven teachers of English, math, science, and social studies. After conducting classroom observations, the authors concluded that teachers would implement interventions to support students after engaging in professional development that explained how to implement the strategies. The authors explained that teachers saw the value in teaching literacy but were not taught how to scaffold instruction to meet the needs of ELLs. For

teachers to meet the needs of ELLs and have a learner-centered approach, teachers need to be made aware of its theoretical foundations and how to use new best practices in the classroom (Boudjelal, 2019). Only after receiving training were teachers able to feel confident teaching from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom. Once districts align training with supporting ELLs, teachers will be more confident in meeting the needs of linguistically diverse learners.

ELL Literacy Instruction

Many districts have struggled to meet ELLs' needs by advancing their literary skills. Luna (2020) presented a literature review about pedagogical practices teachers have used to support LTELL students in improving their reading and writing. Luna (2020) explained that teachers have yet to be trained to teach these students to improve their reading and writing. Teachers are not being trained to meet the needs of this demographic; many ELLs have become LTELL. The effect of teachers not being trained to teach ELLs has led to Mendoza (2019) explaining after conducting a case study that many LTELL students graduate feeling as though they do not have the literacy skills to be college and career ready. Luna (2020) found that many teachers do not know how to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing, leading to an increase in LTELL. Mendoza (2019) explained that these LTELL students graduate feeling as though they do not have the literacy skills to be college and career ready.

With proper training, teachers can implement best practices to support ELLs' language development. Olson et al. (2020) found that 230 teachers who participated in a 46-hour training could assess their student's literacy skills and then scale up texts to

support students reading. During the 46-hour training, teachers were taught how to scaffold their instruction to advance their students' literacy skills. The study's authors concluded that high-quality professional development could help the teacher. Uribe (2019) explained after conducting a mixed methods case study that after receiving professional development, teachers could utilize nineteen new best practices in their classrooms. Participants in the study explained that they could embed multiple ELL strategies into their lessons, such as chunking, modeling, repetition, scaffolded assignments, and flexible groupings. After being trained, teachers have been shown to meet the needs of ELLs with their language development.

To have ELLs succeed, ELL teachers must be willing to utilize new and emerging technologies to support their students. Lee et al. (2022) examined thirty-six articles with over 4,354 participants. Lee et al. (2022) found that when teachers incorporate technology into their lessons, students are more likely to improve their literacy. Guofang and Zhou (2023) explained, after interviewing twelve teachers who taught during the COVID pandemic, that teachers felt more confident teaching with technology because they had spent a year receiving training on how to teach virtually. When teachers returned to the classroom, teachers felt more confident in using technology to support ELLs. Guofang and Zhou (2023) concluded their study by explaining that teachers must continuously engage in professional learning with content teachers to understand how to incorporate technology to support students' language development. Teachers of ELLs need to continuously engage in professional development to support ELLs in meeting their linguistic goals.

ELLs are not one homogenous group, requiring teachers to employ various strategies to motivate students to improve their literacy. Alexandrowicz (2021) found that many ELLs are not motivated to improve their literacy because they feel the content is irrelevant to their lives. One way to motivate students is to incorporate experiential learning into lessons. Experiential learning was shown to increase student motivation and achievement. Baecher et al. (2019) explained after conducting a qualitative study on 21 ESL teachers that the first teachers' students meet are ESL teachers. Because of this, ESL teachers need to find new and innovative ways to motivate their students. Baecher et al. (2019) concluded that after participating in a 30-hour professional development, teachers were able to create more experiential learning activities for their students. By relating what is taught to students in the classroom to real-life activities, experiential learning has been shown to improve the reading and writing of ELLs.

Teaching ELLs grammar has been a challenge for many content teachers who feel they have not been taught how to incorporate grammar lessons into their insuring. Smith (2020) found that most of the eighty-six teachers surveyed try to teach grammar regularly. While these teachers say they try to teach grammar, most said they did not know the best practices to teach grammar to a heterogeneous ELL classroom. Huseynova (2019) surveyed 136 ELLs enrolled in a grammar course and found that teachers that used corrective feedback positively impacted students' writing. To give corrective feedback, teachers need to be trained to incorporate this strategy into their lessons, but once trained, teachers can be more confident teaching grammar.

ELLs need a variety of strategies to improve their English vocabulary. Tamimi

Sa'd and Rajab (2018) conducted a mixed-method study of 145 ELLs. After triangulating the data from their answers, the authors explained what ELLs perceive as best practices for teaching vocabulary. ELLs learn vocabulary best when teachers recite, repeat, and use words in multiple contexts. Libing (2021) explained that academic achievement is linked to students' ability to learn new vocabulary words. Teachers can ensure that all students are learning by employing various strategies to teach vocabulary.

A way to support students in improving their literacy in English is to leverage a student's native language. Moody et al. (2022) conducted a case study that found participants would use their first language to summarize the story when reading in a second language. Gonzales and Tejero Hughes (2021) found that students who are literate in their native language can use phonetics-based literacy interventions to learn a second language. By leveraging students' first language, Gonzales and Tejero Huges found that the literacy skills of all twelve student student's improved in both languages after interventions took place. Another study that supported using a student's first language to improve their literacy in a second was Wackerie-Hollman et al. (2022) found that 313 Spanish-speaking students in eighty-one classrooms improved their English and Spanish literacy when given dual language support. Students were able to improve their alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness.

Teacher Training to Meet ELL Needs

When teachers complete teacher preparation programs, they feel they cannot implement best practices to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing. Grant et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative study on twenty-three in-service teachers. They

found that until they engaged in targeted professional development, teachers felt that they were not prepared to meet the needs of their linguistically diverse learners. Owens and Wells (2021) conducted a qualitative descriptive study on three schools. The authors found that before engaging in sustained professional development, there were gaps in teacher practices to support student learning. Both Grant et al. (2021) and Owens and Wells (2021) explained that teachers need additional training to ensure that lesson plans contain strategies that support students in mastering both language and content objectives. Training on how to support ELLs in language and content objectives needs to be sustained and ongoing for teachers to feel they can meet their ELLs ' needs. Grant et al. (2021) explained in the post-professional development survey that teachers felt they had strategies to support their students.

With many districts facing teacher shortages, people that would traditionally not fulfill a teacher's role have now found themselves in classrooms. Johnson and Cain (2019) explained that school counselors have received training on preparing students for college and careers via local curriculums. After conducting a mixed-method study, it was found that all ten counselors did not feel they had received training on how to support ELLs. After they were given training on ESL strategies in the reflection, teachers explained that they now felt confident meeting the needs of their linguistically diverse learners. Tuttle et al. (2021) also explained that of the eighty-two counselors surveyed, most did not feel as though they had proper training on how to support content teachers with ELL best practices. Both studies explained that counselors are not traditionally classroom teachers, many counselors found themselves in situations where they were

expected to teach ELLs. Only after receiving training did the participants feel, they had the skills to support ELLs.

In the era of high stakes testing, many teachers feel they need additional support in having their ELLs meet the standards set by common core. Cho et al. (2020) explained during a mixed-method study of 210 teachers that participants felt they did not have the skills to support ELLs with meeting the needs of ELLs to reach common core standards assessed on state tests. The survey data of the 210 teachers were supported by fifty-two qualitative interviews and reflections that highlighted the need for more training to scaffold instruction. Bleiberg (2021) explained after analyzing four grade levels of data that teachers were not meeting the needs of ELLs. The study by Bleiberg aligns with Cho et al. (2020), whose qualitative data supports teachers not believing they can meet the needs of ELLs to reach common core standards. To close the achievement gap, both studies recommend that districts implement professional development that will support teachers in having ELLs reach common core standards.

There is no unified teacher preparation program in the United States. Leider et al. (2021) reviewed teacher preparation programs in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. The authors found that there were no unifying standards, and depending on the state, it would depend on how much training you received on supporting ELL teachers. Harklau and Ford (2022) examined educational policies in the United States regarding ELLs and their teachers' ability to support them. The study's authors concluded that because of the teacher shortages and no unifying standards, teachers were not graduating with the skills to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students. Both studies explained

that teachers need to continue to engage in professional development to meet ELLs' needs. Without engaging in continued professional development, there will be no unified scaffolds as teachers have been trained on differing best practices or have not been trained.

After the 2020 COVID pandemic, there was more of an emphasis for teacher collaboration online to support professional development. He (2023) surveyed eighty-seven teachers from 25 school districts who engaged in an online professional development platform. He (2023) found that by allowing teachers from diverse backgrounds to collaborate virtually they were able to leverage their own experiences that positively impacted all participants. At the start of the professional development participants claimed that they felt unprepared to meet the needs of their linguistically diverse learners. After collaborating with colleagues from other districts and receiving targeted feedback from mentors on the online platform, teachers felt more confident in their ability to meet the needs of their linguistically diverse students. Rutherford-Quach (2023) found that online platforms allow teachers to find professional development opportunities that will help to build teachers confidence with working with linguistically diverse learners and increase teachers' strategies to support ELLs. Rutherford-Quach (2023) explained that teachers that engaged in online professional development on online platforms were able to use what they learned in the course to support student learning.

Implications

This study will provide the research district with qualitative data about teachers' perceptions of best practices for ELLs to learn to read and write and teachers' perceptions

of their training and readiness to teach ELLs to improve their reading and writing. The data that will be collected can be used to create a targeted professional development plan to support teachers with being trained to meet the needs of ELLs in reading and writing. The findings from this study could be used to support the district's curriculum development program. Findings in this study could be used to impact curriculum to include more scaffolds for ELLs and support teachers with effectively delivering the curriculum. It is anticipated that the findings from this study could be used to support teachers in meeting the needs of their ELLs in improving their reading and writing.

The findings of this study could lead to additional studies for the district. A project will be created to support the professional development team with supporting gaps in teachers' knowledge. Smith and Robinson (2020) explained that a professional development plan can be created when teachers' perceptions are considered. This study will allow the district to understand teachers' perceptions to create additional plans. A tentative direction for this project will be supporting teachers and district leadership with creating professional developments designed specifically for teachers' needs. It is anticipated that teachers in the district will have gaps in their understanding of best practices to support ELLs. It is anticipated that many teachers will not know how to support ELLs best, and this study could be used to create a training plan for these teachers. With the various certifications and training, it is anticipated that there will be a variety of perceptions about how to best support ELLs in promoting their language development.

Summary

With the ELL population in this district increasing and student achievement not increasing, a qualitative study is needed to examine teachers' perceptions of their training and readiness to support ELLs in improving their literacy in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district. The purpose of this study is supported by local evidence given by the district's Board of Education meeting notes on February 15th, 2023. It was determined that the 32,028 students classified as ELL were not making sufficient progress in their linguistic goals as outlined by the WIDA Access assessment. This meeting explained how the pre-pandemic plan was not meeting the needs of these diverse learners and that more needs to be done to accomplish goal two of increasing staff capacity. This study will support this goal by understanding what staff currently understand and will then be able to help fill gaps in practice. An extensive literature review explained that many teachers do not have adequate training and that more support is needed for teachers. The literature review showed that if teachers are explicitly trained to meet ELLs' needs, student achievement will increase. Murphy and Torff (2019) found that teachers will lower their standards if teachers are not adequately trained, negatively impacting student achievement for years to come. The Cummins framework for this study provides an outline for supporting students with improving their literacy skills as they move from high context lower cognitive tasks to low context high cognitive tasks. This framework will guide how to support teachers with filling gaps in practice as the local data shows that students are not mastering low context high cognitive tasks on state assessments such as the MCAP. This study can impact the learning of over 32,000 ELLs

and their 20,000 teachers in the district. The need for this study will be introduced in section 2 where I will explain the qualitative study's methodology and data analysis.

Section 2: The Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teacher perceptions of best practices to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district. Data were collected regarding teachers' perspectives on their training and readiness to support ELLs in their reading and writing. District leadership and stakeholders can use the project's findings to support teachers in understanding gaps in practice to support teachers with improving ELLs in their reading and writing. In Section 2 of this project study, I present information about the qualitative design and methodology. Section 2 describes participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teachers' perceptions of best practices to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district. Data were collected regarding teachers' perspectives on their training and readiness to support ELLs in their reading and writing. Two research questions were asked about high school teachers' perceptions of best practices for ELLs to learn reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom and their perceptions of their training and readiness to teach ELLs how to improve their reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom. A qualitative study was chosen to address the study's problem and purpose because it allows for an in-depth understanding of something (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

A quantitative approach was not appropriate for this study. A quantitative

approach is appropriate when the researcher wants to understand a phenomenon with numerical data, testing a theory or hypothesis (Burkholder et al., 2020). Other qualitative approaches were also not appropriate to this study. A phenomenology approach would mean the results cannot be generalized (Burkholder et al., 2020). A case study was also not appropriate for this study as case studies look at how and why a phenomenon occurs.

Data were transcribed and organized by using interviews with teachers as data sources in a qualitative interview instead of a normal conversation. The data were then coded and organized into categories and themes. After identifying patterns, themes were determined to address the study's purpose and problem (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Participants

Criteria for Selecting Participants

Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to intentionally sample a group of participants to best inform the research about the problem being examined (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teachers' perceptions of best practices to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district. Purposeful sampling ensured that participants came from various backgrounds and experiences while meeting the study's criteria for participation: Participants must be employed as a classroom teacher in the district that is being studied, be full-time classroom teachers, and teach heterogeneous classes that include both ELLs and non-ELLs.

The ideal sample size for this study was between 10-12 high school teachers. I

recruited these participants from one of two social media accounts used by teachers in this district. Prior approval from the administrators on the social media account was received. Recruiting from the sites did not violate the social media site's rules for posts. Participants selected for the study completed and returned an approved consent letter via a Google form. All participants were asked at the start of each interview to confirm that they met the study's criteria before proceeding to the interview questions.

Justification for the Number of Participants

Seeking between 10-12 participants allowed for data saturation. A qualitative researcher needs to gather in-depth participant data that can be organized into themes to explore a central phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2012). Ten to 12 participants allowed for themes to be created and avoid redundancies in the data while gathering a deeper understanding of their perspective. Too many participants would not allow for a depth of inquiry. Over 4-week period 10 participants volunteered to participate in the study.

Procedure for Gaining Access to Participants

Gaining access to the participants involved the district's two teacher social media account administrators. These social media accounts are not directly connected to the district being studied nor are they monitored by the district. The two social media groups are private groups teachers in the district use to informally communicate with each other. As the social media groups are not connected to the district being studied, I did not need to submit to the district's external research application and review department.

After receiving IRB approval 02-12-24-1022354, a message was sent to the social media account administrators requesting permission to post requesting volunteers for the

study. The administrators were provided with the study's consent form, criteria, problem, and purpose. The social media post was then created that explained the study's problem and purpose. The post included details about the criteria and asked interested participants to complete a consent form confirming that they met the minimal criteria for the study. The social media groups have four rules to allow for posts to be made: they are kind and courteous, have no hate speech or bullying, no promotions or spam, and respect everyone's privacy. The post to recruit participants did not violate any of these rules.

Group social media accounts have been used to support teachers in disseminating information and recruiting people for research studies. After posting in the groups asking for volunteers, purposeful sampling occurred to recruit 10-12 participants from various backgrounds. As the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teacher perceptions of best practices to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district, multiple perspectives needed to be considered. Participants were full-time classroom teachers in the studied district with heterogeneous classes with students classified as ELL and non-ELL. Participants expressed interest by clicking on the social media post and then a link where they confirmed that they met the minimum criteria. An email was then sent to them through their personal email, work email, or social media account depending on what they requested. I determined interest by comments to the post, direct messaging on social media to my social media, or emails to my Walden University email. Interested participants were directed to click on the social media post that would take them to a link where they would confirm they met the criteria. The consent form was then emailed to

them using the email that they provided.

Those who expressed interest and confirmed meeting the minimum criteria completed a consent Google form that explained how their privacy was to be protected, the procedure for gathering data, and how they could opt out of the study at any time. The Google form requested that participants click an “I Consent” box and an email address for me to follow up with them to set up an interview. The Google forms did not collect IP addresses. Participants that consented to the study were asked via email when would be the best time to set up the interview. I conducted all interviews via an audio recorded zoom at a time of the participants choosing.

Measures for Ethical Protection of Participants

To ensure the validity of the study, various ethical considerations were considered (see Burkholder et al., 2020; Cresswell & Poth, 2018). One such ethical consideration was to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants. Participants should not be put in a situation where their physical safety should be in jeopardy. The well-being of the participants was protected as efforts were made to ensure privacy was protected. Walden University also has a procedure for conducting qualitative research to protect participants and ensure that the collected data are trustworthy.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was gathered was by posting on social media asking for volunteers in the study. In the post participants were told how their privacy would be protected, the problem and purpose of the study, the criteria for the study, and that they were volunteering to participate. In the social media posts participants who met the

criteria were instructed to complete a consent form where we will coordinate a time to conduct the interview via Zoom. The social media advertisement had a link that took users to a Google form that asked them to check a box to confirm that they meet the study's criteria and to include an email address to set up a time for the interview. If they check that they meet the study's criteria, I then emailed them a request for a time and date to conduct the interview. At the start of the interview, I reminded them of the informed consent and asked if they had any questions before they continued in the study. I also reminded them that their privacy would be protected.

Confidentiality

Cresswell and Poth (2018) explained that one strategy that can be employed to protect confidentiality is to use aliases with transcription notes and avoid using real names. Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric code. Burkholder et al. (2020) described another strategy to protect identity is to limit access to transcripts and other research material. I protected transcripts on a password-protected computer and shared with only those directly involved in the research upon request. All data were stored on my personal password protected Google Drive. I also used my personal password protected laptop throughout the process of this study and will not put or use my district issued computer to ensure that the district being studied could not access the information. This ensured that the district being studied could not access the data or participants' information. Collected data will be destroyed after five years per Walden University's policy on data collection. Cresswell and Poth (2018) described that another way to ensure confidentiality is to remove all identifying information about the area that is being

studied. No mention of the district name will appear in the study. A review of my zoom account ensured that no recordings were saved on the zoom website and only audio recordings were saved on my password protected Google Drive.

Protection from Harm

All documents from this study will be protected so that people will not be able to identify participants. I protected the identity of the participants by assigning a letter instead of using their names in all documents. As participants will be speaking about the district they work in, ensuring that data were not leaked is vital so that participants could speak openly about their experiences. I explained to participants that all collected and reviewed data would be kept in a safe and secure location. Data will be saved for five years per Walden University protocol, but after five years, all digital data will be erased, and all hard-copied documents will be shredded.

Establishing a Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

To conduct this research study, I established a researcher-participant working relationship. To gather qualitative data, participants must feel comfortable answering in-depth questions. To do this, Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained strategies to encourage a researcher-participant working relationship. First, the researcher should introduce themselves before conducting the interview and explain the problem and purpose of the study. This was done using an interview protocol (Appendix C) and in the introductory email I sent to participants. Second, the researcher must ensure that the participant is comfortable participating in the study. Burkholder et al. (2020) described various reasons why a participant might not feel comfortable participating in the study. These reasons can

range from cultural reasons, past research experiences, or a concern that their privacy will not be protected. To mitigate this, participants were informed about ways to opt out of the study at any time so that there is no pressure to participate. All information was also kept on a personal, password protected Google Drive. I did not conduct any interviews during working hours. Rubin and Rubin (2012) also explained that conducting member checking is another way to improve a researcher-participant working relationship. This will allow the participant to feel comfortable providing data that is accurate and valid. After each interview was conducted a summary of the interview was sent to participants that outlined what was discussed. Participants were given the option to add or change what was captured if they felt that they were not accurately represented. No participant responded wanting to add or change what was sent to them.

Data Collection

Types of Data Collection and Justification

I relied on qualitative data to address the study's problem and purpose. The data source for this study was to be qualitative interviews with 10 participants who met the criteria for inclusion. These interviews were conducted via zoom. No person requested a in person interview. Interviews were audio recorded with the Zoom Recorder and AI Fireflies app. After completing the study, I reviewed both the Zoom Recorder and AI Fireflies App to ensure that no traces of the study could be found on them. Once I ensured that all recordings were not saved to them and that there was no record I deleted and deactivated both accounts. All audio recordings and transcripts were uploaded and saved on my personal password-protected Google Drive. An Excel sheet was then used to

allow for multiple rounds of coding to take place. These codes were then put into categories and themes on an Excel sheet. Rubin and Rubin (2012) described steps for qualitative data. First, all data needs to be transcribed. Interviews will then need to be reviewed and summarized so that coding can occur. Codes will be done so that common categories can be established. Once categories begin to emerge, themes can be identified that will allow for an understanding of the study's problem and purpose.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) described that a semi-structured interview should be prepared to remind the researcher of leading questions to ask and follow-up questions. Another advantage to using a conversational guide was that it allowed flexibility in the process. Rubin and Rubin (2012) described a protocol as a conversational guide; complete formal protocols are rarely used. A responsive interview protocol was not used as there was a risk that the interview would not align with the purpose and problem if I changed questions or explored new material during the interview. To ensure alignment, a semi-structured interview with vetted and validated research questions was to be used. This ensured alignment with the study's problem and purpose.

Interviews were scheduled in participants were told that the interview would last between 45-60 minutes. All participants requested to have interviews done on zoom. All interviews had an audio recording. All participants were asked before recording if they consented to having their voice recorded for the interview. All participants consented.

Justification for Type of Data and Qualitative Tradition

Interviews are appropriate for gathering data to address the study's problem and purpose. Rubin and Rubin (2012) described how qualitative interviews can be used to

explain people's perceptions of a lived experience. This aligned with the study's problem of the need to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase English language learner (ELL) achievement in reading and writing. An interview was also appropriate to address the study's purpose of examining teachers' perceptions of best practices to support English language learners in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district.

Other types of qualitative research would not be appropriate. An example would be the use of grounded theory. This research approach would not be appropriate because no new theory is going to be created from the gathered data (Merriam, 2009). I will not be creating a theory from this research but instead will be seeking to understand teachers' perceptions of their lived experiences. Another approach that would not be appropriate as described by Merriam (2009) was narrative research. This relies on the researcher listening to a person's life story and their history. This was not appropriate for this study because a narrative approach will not be focused enough to understand teachers' perceptions about their training and readiness to support ELLs in their reading and writing.

Ethnographic research was not appropriate for this study. Atkins and Wallace (2012) described that ethnographic research should be used when a researcher wants to study an individual's cultures or how their culture can impact a phenomenon. This would not be appropriate because culture was not an aspect of the study.

Purposeful sampling was the best form of qualitative research. By intentionally selecting participants that met the criteria the study's problem and purpose was

addressed. The problem of this study was the need to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase English language learner (ELL) achievement in reading and writing. By using purposeful sampling, I intentionally chose participants who met the criteria and were able to engage in a semi structured interview about their perceptions of best practices to increase ELL achievement in reading and writing. Purposeful sampling allowed me to gather qualitative data to address the study's purpose of examining teachers' perceptions of their training and readiness to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing and if ELLs are not making progress because their teachers are not trained to meet their needs.

Data Collection Instruments and Sources

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of best practices to support English language learners in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district. I collected data from semi-structured interviews to address this purpose. Interviews, according to Rubin and Rubin (2012), are an appropriate data source when you are trying to understand a person's perception of a lived experience. By having semi-structured interviews, the two research questions can be answered to address the purpose of the study, which is to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase English language learner (ELL) achievement in reading and writing. Having semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask probing questions to ensure that participants provided detailed accounts of their perceptions or clarify their responses. The semi structured interview was developed using strategies from Jacob and Furgerson (2012).

Developing and Validating the Interview Protocol

The interview protocol began with an introduction that explained the study's problem and purpose. The interview protocol will also include an introduction to who the researcher is and why the study is being conducted. The interview will be structured into two parts to address the study's research questions. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) explained that researchers should use questions such as "tell me about." The interview protocol will tell me about breaking down the two main research questions into two parts so that participants can speak on their perceptions about best practices for ELL reading and writing. The interview protocol also includes a conclusion and an explanation of next steps (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

The interview protocol was designed using the four-phase process as described by Castillo-Montoya and Milagros (2016). Castillo-Montoya and Milagros described that a researcher needs to ensure that the interview questions align with the research question. An alignment chart was created to ensure that all interview questions align with the study's problem, purpose, framework and two research questions (Appendix C). All questions for the interview followed the second phase of the protocol creation by ensuring that interview questions are inquiry based. I asked the participants to describe or tell me about their opinions or perceptions as it related to the study's research questions. Before the interview protocol was used feedback was received from a qualitative researcher to validate the alignment of the items to the research questions. Before conducting the study, the interview protocol was piloted with a recent qualitative doctoral graduate to ensure that all questions were broken up in a way that could be understood

and that data could be gathered (Castillo-Montoya & Milagros, 2016). To ensure alignment all interview questions were checked to ensure that they aligned with the study's problem, purpose, conceptual framework, and two research questions (Appendix C).

Process for Generating and Gathering Data

The data were gathered once IRB approval was obtained. Before beginning the interviews, a sample of the conversational guide was reviewed by a qualitative researcher. An interview protocol ensured that the gathered data were aligned with the study's problem and purpose. In the interview protocol, I utilized strategies described by Jacob and Furgerson (2012). Jacob and Fergerson described how an interview protocol should begin and end with a script. The interview should begin with the interviewer describing the problem and purpose of the study. The interview should then have open-ended questions such as "tell me about" instead of yes or no questions. The interview should conclude with an explanation of how the participant can review the collected data to ensure that the statements that were gathered were accurate. Before each interview, each participant confirmed that they met the minimum criteria by clicking on a link that was posted to one of two social media sites. Participants were then emailed the informed consent Google form. Once informed consent had been established, a date and time was agreed upon for the interview.

After each interview I had the recordings transcribed using AI Fireflies. I then saved the transcription in a Google document on my personal password protected Google Drive. To ensure accuracy of the transcription I reviewed the audio recording and the

transcription making corrections as needed. I then moved chunks of text from the transcript to an excel sheet. I then applied a first-round code to small sections of text on the excel sheet to track the codes. Transferring the transcript to an Excel sheet allowed multiple rounds of coding to be done to analyze the data. Multiple rounds of coding took place because all viewpoints and perspectives needed to be analyzed. During the first round of coding multiple codes were repeated and needed to be either expanded on or consolidated on during a second coding cycle. Saldana (2021) described that researchers should pre-code their data, review it multiple times, and identify codable moments. Each participant will give various perspectives on the research questions, and it was my job to identify codes so that later, these codes can be organized into categories. Rubin and Rubin (2012) described that categories can emerge after multiple interviews have been coded. These categories later evolved into themes.

To ensure that data were accurately coded and represented what the participants said member checking was conducted. After the interview, participants were be sent my impressions of the data that was collected within two weeks of the interview. This will give the participant the opportunity to add or clarify my interpretation of the data. By sending them the synthesized data participants can ensure that there were no misconceptions. I will ask participants to confirm that the data were properly synthesized and analyzed and that they see themselves in my interpretation of the data. I then allowed participants the chance to add or clarify if they felt that the interpretation was not accurate. None of the 10 participants asked to have anything added or clarified. Birt et al. (2016) explained that by conducting member checking, a researcher can ensure the

validity of their findings.

System for Keeping Track of Data and Emerging Understandings

Interviews were recorded via the Zoom audio recording feature. The Zoom audio recording was then downloaded so that AI Fireflies could begin the transcription process. I ensured that both the Zoom audio recordings were no longer available on the Zoom app and proceeded to deactivate and delete my account.

I transcribed each interview first by using Fireflies AI transcription software. Nothing was uploaded and saved on the Fireflies transcription software. The software was used solely for transcription and not analysis. No personal information was used with the AI that could be used to generate other AI products. No personal information was shared with the AI site. The software provided a generic transcription of what each participant said in the interview. I then listened to each transcript and read the transcription to ensure accuracy. The AI software was not 100% accurate, so a thorough review of all transcripts was done.

After recording and having the app transcribe the interview, the recording and transcription were then uploaded onto a password-protected Google Drive. The transcription was then put into a Google Doc. Sections of the transcription were then put into a Google Excel sheet to be organized and coded. All identifying information was removed to protect participants' identities. All data will be saved and be password-protected for five years after the completion of this study. After five years, all digital files will be erased, and all hard copies will be shredded and disposed of.

Procedure for gaining access to participants

First, I needed to receive IRB approval from Walden University. IRB approval was given and the number for this study (02-12-24-1022354). After approval was given from Walden University through the IRB process the process for gathering participants for the study could begin.

Participants for the study were recruited through social media. Classroom teachers in the district that is being studied have two social media group accounts. To post in these groups, I received prior approval from the group administrators. These group accounts have been used to support teachers in disseminating information and recruiting people for research studies. I sought prior approval from the social media site administrators before any post was made. After receiving approval, a post was made asking for volunteers. Purposeful sampling occurred to recruit 10-12 participants. Over four-week period 10 participants who met the criteria participated in the study. Three people commented on the social media post expressing interest, but claimed they did not meet the minimum criteria. I did not reach out to these people to participate in the study. the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teacher perceptions of best practices to support English language learners in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district. The study commenced after receiving IRB approval through Walden University. After a participant confirmed that they met the minimum criteria, I sent an email to them through their personal email, work email, or social media account explaining the study's problem and purpose. Participants were also given a consent Google Form to participate in the study that explained how their privacy

was to be protected, the procedure for gathering data, and how they could opt out of the study at any time. After completing the consent form a time was established to conduct the interview.

Role of the Researcher

I have been employed by the district being studied for eight years. I am currently employed at a district public school that teaches only ELLs. This may impact data collection as the researcher works at a school where the staff has had extensive training on improving the reading and writing of ELLs. I attend district-wide events and have colleagues at multiple schools. I have coached and mentored students at multiple schools in the county and have built up a strong network of professional relationships. Those who I know from these meetings did not participate in the study as this could have affected the study. As an observer and not a participant of the study I needed to ensure that my personal and professional relationships did not impact the study.

Data Analysis

The problem that was addressed through this study was the need to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase English language learner achievement in reading and writing. The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of best practices to support English language learners in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district. Qualitative research was done because the phenomenon of why ELLs were not improving in reading and writing needed to be studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Coding Procedures

Qualitative data were gathered from 10 semi structured interviews and were analyzed using qualitative methods. Rubin and Rubin (2012) described qualitative methods as listening to interviews aligned to research questions that address a study's problem and purpose. Ten people responded to the social media posts, and all responded confirming that they met the criteria and wished to participate in the study. Data collection for this study consisted of 10 interviews with full-time teachers in the district being studied that met all outlined criteria. These 10 interviews were the only data sources for this study.

After completing each interview, a first cycle round of coding was conducted. Small sections of the interview were transferred to an Excel sheet and a summarizing code was created. I created 576 first cycle codes after all 10 interviews were conducted. Examples of first cycle codes included feedback, assumption, data driven, deficit mindset, teacher skills, and district created problem.

After I conducted the first cycle of coding, I then began a second cycle coding. All coded data from the interviews were on the Excel sheet where I conducted the first cycle of codes. I used a second column for the second cycle coding. The second cycle codes allowed me to consolidate some of the first cycle codes that were repetitive or could be summarized with a similar code. An example of this was chunked text, chunking, and chunked were consolidated in my second cycle coding to have a new code of chunked reading. A second example of how codes from my first cycle coding were consolidated was during the first cycle coding I used the codes high school details,

subject specific, promoting collaboration, teacher support, collaboration and rely on others to a second cycle code of peer collaboration. At the end of my second cycle coding, I reduced the data from 576 first cycle codes to 107 second cycle codes. While the second cycle primarily involved consolidating some codes, in a few instance codes were expanded to better represent participant voice. An example of this was when participants began to list specific problems that they encountered. I expanded the code of “problem” in my first cycle code to separate out the specific problems listed in my second cycle code.

Table 1

Initial Codes and Second Cycle

Second Cycle Code	Initial Code
Build Background Knowledge	Specific Strategy, Use of background knowledge, background knowledge, building on prior knowledge, SEL Collaboration and SEL Support
Confident Teacher	Confident, confidence in training, confidence, confidence in strategies, confident in training,
Diverse Population	Specific culture, diverse population, heterogenous class, specific culture, diversity, MLS, newcomer, reason for training, transient population, high school students, ELL population

After I completed my second cycle codes, I then began to identify axial codes, or categories, to group the 107 codes. I further reduced the 107 codes through axial coding to identify 14 categories. After I placed all codes into one of the 14 categories, I began to create themes to address the research questions. Each category had between 2 and 20 second cycle codes.

Table 2*Axial Codes and Categories*

Category	Second Cycle Codes Included
Specific Best Practices	Best Practice, CER Strategy, Chunked reading, Experiential learning, Expressive writing, Feedback, Guided questions, Inclusive, and Learning platform
Social Emotional Learning Supports	SEL Collaboration and SEL Support
Collaboration	Student and teacher collaboration, Coach collaboration, Professional collaboration, Peer Collaboration, Student collaboration, Online Collaboration, Parental collaboration, Personal professional development, and Support
Teachers Deficit Perception	Negative view, Assumption, Confused, Teacher Deficit mindset, Teacher problem, Teacher Struggle, Low confidence and Teacher centered

An example of a category that emerged was “teachers deficit perception.” In this category I put negative view, assumption, confused teacher, deficit mindset, teacher problem, teacher struggle, low confidence and teacher centered. Each one of these second cycle codes was linked to a specific aspect of how teachers view themselves as having a deficit perception. Another example of a category that was created was “specific best practices.” In this category I put the codes best practice, CER strategy, chunked reading, experiential learning, expressive writing, feedback, guided questions, inclusive and learning platform. These best practices were stated by participants as showing their perception of specific best practices that they use to improve ELLs reading and writing.

Procedures to Ensure the Accuracy of Findings*Trustworthiness*

To ensure that all data collected were valid and reliable, systems were in place to ensure trustworthiness. To ensure that the data collected were trustworthy a clear audit

trail of the data were created. All data were gathered from audio recorded interviews that were transcribed and checked to ensure that the audio recordings matched the transcriptions. Member checking was also done to ensure that the data were correctly interpreted. All data from the study will be kept on a personal password protected Google drive for five years as per Walden Universities polies on research should future questions arise about the study. Another strategy to ensure trustworthiness was to utilize strategies described by Rubin and Rubin (2012). Rubin and Rubin described that by engaging in multiple rounds of coding over multiple sessions, a researcher is more likely to identify multiple patterns in the data.

Accuracy

To ensure accuracy of the data member checking occurred to ensure that the data received from the interviews were accurate. After each interview was conducted an analysis of the participants interview was sent to them via email. I then synthesized the data that was collected and allow the participant to add or clarify any misconceptions or missing aspects. Cresswell and Poth (2018) explained that when participants are ensured that their privacy will be protected, they are more likely to provide more detailed and accurate information. Ensuring participants' privacy was taken seriously throughout the study.

Credibility

Multiple procedures were put into place to ensure that the study was credible. Cresswell and Poth (2018) explained that qualitative interviews should not be rushed and if they are rushed credible data will not be gathered. This is one of the reasons the time

and duration of the interview was left to the discretion of the participant. Member checking was also done to ensure that participants felt that the data captured from the interview was accurate. In addition to ensuring the results are credible, Appendix C contains a comprehensive coding table for credibility and transparency of the coding process.

Transparency

To provide transparency each aspect of the coding process will be made available to the research institution while still maintaining the privacy of the participants. After each interview was conducted a transcript was provided. Within 72 hours of the interview being conducted the transcript as then coded and put into an excel sheet. A summary of my first cycle codes and a summary of what was discussed was then sent to the participant. This member checking ensured accuracy and validity of the data. No participant responded to requests for a change or modification. In addition all second round codes were written in Appendix C along with all categories and themes.

Audit Trail

To ensure that privacy is protected all data will be protected on my personal Google Drive and my personal computer. Both are password protected and use two forms of verification to ensure security. Transcripts will be kept on file for five years as per Walden's policy and only I will have access to this. To ensure that privacy is protected personal identifying information will not be kept in the same location as the data. This will be kept on a second personal Google Drive. Transcripts and audio files will be stored immediately after the interview on this Google Drive. All communication will take place

via email unless otherwise noted. All communication will take place using my secure Walden email account that is password protected. This will ensure a paper trail should clarification be needed about a correspondent. All coding took place on a google excel that allowed for time stamps to ensure a clear process was taken. The time stamps will also be available during the patterns and themes identification.

Member Checking

Member checking is an important aspect of ensuring the validity of qualitative data. Member checking will occur within two weeks of the interview. Within two weeks of the interviews being conducted a copy of the initial findings was sent to the participant to ensure that everything was captured accurately. As participants may not have time to read an entire transcript it was recommended to synthesize the data. For this reason, a synthesized summary of the interview was sent to the participant via email. This allowed for the participant to clarify responses and help identify where the researcher may have interpreted the information wrongly. Burke et al. (2022) explained that by conducting member checking researchers can provide more nuanced findings on research. No participant responded asking for changes or modifications.

Researcher Bias

I am still employed by the district that is being studied. No one who responded to the social media posts were someone that I had a connection with. My bias did not affect the study.

Discrepant Cases

I took discrepant cases seriously while conducting this study. All data in this

study was taken seriously and included in the codes, categories, and themes. Discrepant cases according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) can help modify or change an emerging theme while not disproving the theme. No participant provided data that would change or modify one of the emerged themes. No participant provided any data that was not directly related to the research questions. I found no discrepant cases while conducting this study.

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teacher perceptions of best practices to support English language learners in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district. The problem that was addressed through this study was the need to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase English language learner achievement in reading and writing.

After identifying 14 categories and assigning the second cycle codes to them, I began to develop themes aligned with the two research questions. I developed four themes, and each theme encompassed multiple categories. All categories were assigned to a theme. I reviewed the codes and categories multiple times to ensure that there was sufficient alignment between the codes, the categories, and the themes.

Table 3

Themes Aligned to the Research Questions

RQ1: What are high school teachers' perceptions of best practices for English language learners to learn reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?

Theme 1: Teachers describe myriad strategies to support ELLs in improving their academic reading and writing.

Theme 2: Teachers articulated specific factors needed to promote ELL academic readiness.

RQ2: What are high school teachers' perceptions about their training and readiness to teach English language learners how to improve their reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?

Theme 3: Teachers rely heavily on the prior training and experiences to meet the needs of ELLs.

Theme 4: Teachers articulated specific training and support needed to teach ELLs in heterogenous classrooms.

Theme 1: Teachers Describe Myriad Strategies to Support ELLs in Improving Their Academic Reading and Writing

Theme 1 addressed RQ 1, which focused on teachers' perceptions of best practices for ELLs to learn reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom. This theme included four categories and thirty-two codes from the second cycle coding. The categories that emerged from the codes were *generic best practices*, *specific best practices*, *WIDA assessed best practices*, and *application*.

All participants were able to explain generic strategies they used in the classroom to support students with improving their reading and writing. Twelve codes were a part of this category. A common code mentioned by teachers involved translating a text or leveraging a student's native language (N=6) to comprehend a reading. T9 explained how some of the texts they use are in Spanish and that they look for books in Spanish to accompany an English book. T9 explained that they do this with having non-Spanish speakers read Shakespear in English and those that can read in Spanish read it in their native language. T2 corroborated T9 by explaining that they "will read it in both English and Spanish." T4 also explained that they "type on a Google Doc in Spanish, and then in Google Docs it has a tool to translate". T7 explained how it is important to leverage a student's background knowledge and the teacher's cultural competency to encourage

students to want to improve in their reading and writing. Eighty percent of participants explained how they rely on repetition to help students improve in their reading and writing. T5 and T7 explained that they rely on having patience with their students to improve in their reading and writing.

A majority of teachers (N = 8) also articulated specific strategies that they used to improve their ELLs in reading and writing. Teachers explained various strategies that they use to support their ELLs. T10, T7 and T8 explained how they chunk readings to help students understand a text. T10 explained how they help students structure their writing to follow a pattern known as claim evidence and reasoning. T2 and T4 explained that they make learning more meaningful by incorporating experiential learning into their lessons. A common strategy that N=8 utilizes to support students is to give feedback back to students while they are reading and writing. T9 explained how when given feedback it is important that teachers allow peers to edit each other's work and use multiple colors to symbolize where students can improve. T7 explained how "it's also just being able to have them express themselves" regarding encouraging students to be willing to write more. No single strategy was mentioned by all participants to support students in improving their reading and writing.

All teachers were able to explain WIDA assessed best practices to support students. The codes in this category were vocabulary scaffold, reading scaffold and writing scaffold. T6 explained that they scaffold their writing instruction by giving them writing prompts every Friday and have students write about how they feel. T5 explained that they "start out with basic sentences, subject, verb and objects" and then scaffold up.

T2 and T10 explained that they focus heavily on vocabulary instruction in their rooms and rely on posters to support students. The largest code in this category was reading scaffolds with teachers explaining many variations of strategies that they use to support reading instruction. T2 explained how they use leveled texts and differentiated texts based off data. T4 explained that when collaborating with a newcomer they start by “having students identify the topic sentence of a paragraph.” T8 explained that they use a glossary to help understand new vocabulary terms.

Nine out of ten teachers were able to explain how they apply different reading and writing strategies in their classroom. T3 explained that when they are delivering instructions, they rely on data from the WIDA access test to create scaffolds. T2 and T10 expressed frustration with the data they have been given not reflecting the student’s current skill level. T1 explained that when they scaffold, they rely on cross disciplinary connections to have students learn from multiple angles. T1 also provided examples of how they have students learn content specific vocabulary. T1 explained “The word monetary sounds like are a reading question. Is a reading question, yes. But in terms of writing it, you can see visually that monetary word looks like money.”

The findings in Theme 1 show that teachers have a variety of strategies that they use in the classroom to help students improve their reading and writing. All teachers were able to articulate scaffolds that they have used to improve students in their reading and writing. All teachers were able to articulate ways in which they support students in improving their reading and writing as measured by the WIDA access exam. Teachers articulated more strategies that they use to improve students reading and less on writing.

After reviewing the data in Theme 1 there is no universal strategy employed by teachers in this district and teachers have varying perceptions of what they feel are best practices to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing.

Theme 1 is connected to the study's framework in various ways. An example of this is when T9 references using Spanish alongside English. This strategy can help an ELL student in their BICs language. In addition, the various scaffolding strategies mentioned by participants show a focus on CALP. By using multiple scaffolds such as T6 using writing prompts and T2 using differentiated text strategies are used to help bridge the gap between students' current linguistic skills and those needed to improve.

Theme 2: Teachers Articulated Specific Factors Needed to Promote ELL Academic Readiness

Theme 2 emerged from questions aligned with to RQ 1. Theme 2 contains three categories that were created from 16 second cycle codes. Theme 2 was created after I analyzed the data and multiple categories emerged where teachers explained the specific factors they employ to promote ELL academic readiness.

All teachers mentioned that to promote ELL academic readiness teachers need to rely on different forms of collaboration. All 10 participants explained how they collaborate with various stakeholders to support student growth. Participants mentioned many different stakeholders that supported ELL academic readiness. Examples were ESOL trained coaches, literacy coaches, social media groups, school-based administration, peer based collaborative planning, parents, and student-based collaboration. A majority of participants (N=7) explained that they rely on collaborative

planning with school-based personnel to understand how to take theories on teaching and apply it to their ELLs. Three participants (T1, T4, and T9) mentioned that to promote academic readiness they have their students work collaboratively. This collaboration takes the form of peer feedback, student assigned leaders, and group activities.

In addition to having students collaborate half of participants explained that they incorporate social emotional learning (SEL). T7 explained that “having a restorative classroom where a teacher builds relationships with students will lead to higher student achievement”. By building relationships through SEL activities students will see that their teachers are empathetic and that their lessons are more culturally relevant. The combination of culturally relevant lessons and connections with their teachers N=3 participants said that students in their class were more likely to take academic risks.

Theme 2 includes numerous factors teachers need to consider with supporting ELLs in their academic readiness. All teachers explained how they need the support of various stakeholders to support their students. Half of the participants mentioned that ELLs need to have SEL factors considered when considering how to support ELLs. My findings from the data were that there is no singular factor teachers perceive to support ELL readiness with academics. Instead, the data indicated that teachers rely on collaboration to support each other.

Theme 2 connects to the study’s framework in various ways. Cummins explained that it is important to utilize collaboration to support ELLs in developing their BICS and CALP. In addition, Cummins explains that students need a supportive learning environment where SEL learning is taken into account. T7 explained the importance of

relationship building and by creating a supportive environment students are more likely to progress in their reading and writing.

Theme 3: Teachers Rely Heavily on the Prior Training and Experiences to meet the needs of ELLs

Theme 3 was created from data related to research question 2. Theme three addresses teachers' perceptions about their training and readiness to teach ELLs with improving their reading and writing. After analyzing the second round of codes three categories were used to create this theme.

Many teachers (N=8) explained how previous trainings prepared them to meet the needs of their ELLs while not being specifically trained to be an ELL teacher. Two participants explained that they used course work from their special education classes to scaffold for ELLs. Other participants explained that they relied on trainings from previous jobs such as working in a museum or junior college. Two participants in the study explained that they were trained in California and that in California their certification required for them to receive extensive training on helping ELLs improve in their reading and writing. All participants explained various trainings that they have received and there was no unifying theme with their trainings.

With teachers having various backgrounds, participants (N=6) explained how they rely on their peers to support them by leveraging each other's previous experiences or trainings to improve in their own readiness to meet the needs of ELLs. An example of a previous experience was when T2 explained that teachers who spoke Spanish were better at connecting with Spanish speaking students and for this reason while not professionally

trained in how to speak Spanish this participant has collaborated with colleagues to improve their ability to translate and support students in their native language. T8 explained that they “rely on the support of their colleagues to improve in their scaffolds to meet the needs of their students.” Their experiences with their colleagues have altered their teaching practices and plans for professional development. After reviewing the data most teachers provided various ways, they perceive how their previous trainings have supported them.

All teachers (N=10) reported throughout the interviews that they had a positive perception of their training and readiness to support ELLs. T5, T6, T7, and T9 explained that their programs had high expectations for them, and this has caused them to have high expectations for their ELLs. High expectations were shown in T5’s confidence to scaffold AP US history and AP world history so that their students would be “be getting fours and fives, especially in AP US history or AP world history class”. T8 explained that “I had a really good training and that I was prepared” to meet the needs of my ELLs while another participant explained that they were proud of how their previous trainings prepared them. During interviews, each participant mentioned they had some positive training that helped them meet the needs of their ELLs. While all participants explained positive experiences there was no singular experience and N=7 participants explained that they had more to learn.

Theme 3 was created from three categories where teachers explained some of their prior training, their generic perceptions, and their positive perceptions of their trainings. All teachers explained how they have received some training to meet the needs

of their ELLs. All teachers explained how they had a generic perception on how their training has impacted their ability to meet the needs of their ELLs. All teachers also had something positive to say about their trainings or experiences to meet the needs of ELLs. There was no unified training or experience among the teachers.

Theme 3 connects to Cummins theory in multiple ways. The first is that Cummins emphasized that teachers need to be trained on how to support ELL students in improving their reading and writing. My findings found that many teachers have received this prior training and have a foundation for supporting ELL students. In addition, participants mentioned the need for continued professional development. This connects to Cummins because he stresses ongoing professional development to adapt and refine strategies to support ELL students.

Theme 4: Teachers Articulated Specific Training and Support Needed to teach ELLs in Heterogenous Classrooms

Theme 4 was created after analyzing the data and finding that teachers understand what problems and what supports they need to solve these problems. Theme 4 was created because while all participants explained that they have received training on supporting ELLs all participants expressed specific supports and needs that they feel they need to support ELLs.

All teachers explained how they perceived that they had a deficit when it comes to supporting ELLs in improving their reading and writing. Participants explained that they struggle to implement the theoretical ways of scaffolding for newcomer students, with one participant explaining that they have low expectations from their newcomers. After a

review of the data, no participant mentioned receiving specific training that was received to support newcomers in a heterogeneous classroom. Two participants explained that they did not know where to start with supporting newcomers in the classroom. To alleviate these deficits T4 stated that they would like “some form of training” to support newcomers. T5 echoed the sentiment of needing more newcomer training but explained when training does take place the timing of the training needs to be considered. T5 stated “I hate school meetings that are an hour after school” and “We have had two-hour staff meetings on a Friday. At the end of the week our brains are dead.” The teachers explained that they understand that they have a deficit in meeting the needs of all ELLs and articulated that they would like specific training with the timing of the training being considered.

Almost every participant (N=9) asked for specific professional development on how to support students with reading and writing to get them to grade level. Participants explained that they felt their ELLs were not performing at grade level and would like more professional developments to support getting students on grade level. A suggestion by one participant was a professional development on how to create graphic organizers to support ELLs in multiple disciplines. These graphic organizers could be used to help teachers scaffold writing in classes where writing is not traditionally done such as in elective classes. T3 expressed frustration that they have been asked to give random writing assignments and as an elective teacher felt they have not been trained to teach reading and writing in their discipline. Not feeling trained to meet the needs of ELLs led participants (N=7) to state that they have a lack of confidence in teaching ELLs, but this

lack of confidence could be overcome with all participants explaining that they need more training on how to better meet the needs of their linguistically diverse students.

In addition to specific professional development that teachers articulated they wanted N=4 teachers mentioned district wide changes that they would like to see addressed. Teachers requested smaller class sizes, longer class periods, books at various reading levels, and more ESOL coaches to help teachers plan their lessons. A majority of participants (N=7) explained that many of the problems were created by the district. Two participants cited the district pacing guidelines as the reason their ELLs are being left behind with administrators pressuring teachers to teach all tested material even if students have not mastered the lessons. A second district created problem is that many ELLs are placed in classes where the curriculum is not within their zone of proximal development. Many students according to T6 struggled in elementary math and are now expected to master algebra and geometry. A second participant explained that they have students in 10th grade English who are unable to read or write and instead should be in an ESOL class. The third district created problem was that participants felt that they were working in silos without having access to support or the ability to collaborate.

Participants also mentioned their perceptions of ELLs. The most common code that emerged in this category was that teachers have low expectations (N=21) for their ELLs. This low expectation for ELLs was shown with participants saying they do not give ELLs much work in the classroom, a feeling that ELLs will not read or write, or a feeling that they will learn the material at a later date. This mentality of being passed along led T6 to explain how they were “teaching fifth grade material to an 11th grade

English class. T9 cited that they have students in high school English classes that do not know their ABC's. They struggled with providing material to these students that did not make the students feel babied. Participants explained that the population of ELLs in their school is increasing and that the problem of not knowing how to meet this demographics need is increasing.

The data that I used to create Theme 4 showed that many teachers need additional support. Theme 4 is centered around teachers' perceptions of the problems that they face and how this has led to a negative view of their ELLs. No single problem was identified by participants as being the root cause of all the concerns. While there is no single solution all participants agreed that more trainings and district changes need to be made to support teachers in meeting the needs of ELLs.

Theme 4 is connected to Cummins theories in multiple ways. Teachers acknowledge, their deficit perspective and a need for specialized training. Cummins explained that it is important for teachers to be properly trained on how to support students. With teachers acknowledging that they are not fully trained to meet their students' needs there is a problem that needs to be addressed. Cummins emphasizes meeting students within their zone of proximal development. With participants mention curriculum concerns more support is needed to help teachers with scaffolding.

Summary

In Section 2 of this project study I presented information about the design and methodology of my qualitative study. Section 2 described my participants, data collection, and data analysis. After analyzing my data from 10 interviews about teachers'

perceptions of best practices for teaching ELLs and their training and readiness to meet the needs of ELLs, four themes emerged. The four themes allowed me to create a project study to begin solving the study's problem. The project is a White paper with an explanation of my findings and recommendations to present to the district leadership. I chose a White paper because after reviewing the data I felt that a white paper was the best way to address the study's problem and purpose.

In Section 3 I introduce and justify the need for my project. My project was created because the themes from this study included data from all teachers. All teachers could articulate various strategies they use in the classroom, and my project study was created to leverage the skills that multiple teachers bring to the school. The district where this study took place is large and diverse, and the project study that I present leverages the different training and experiences teachers bring to the classroom.

Section 3: The Project

I explored teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase ELLs achievement in reading and writing in a Mid Atlantic School district. According to the study, teachers were able to describe a myriad of strategies to support ELLs, teachers articulated specific factors needed to promote ELL academic readiness, teachers rely on their prior training and experiences to meet the needs of ELLs, and teachers articulated specific training and support needed to teach ELLs in heterogenous classrooms.

Description of Project

In response to the findings of this study, I created a white paper (Appendix A). A white paper presents a problem and provides research-based solutions or recommendations. My white paper provides specific recommendations that the Mid Atlantic school district should implement to improve teachers' preparedness to meet the needs of ELLs: (a) for a school created needs assessment, (b) teacher led professional development from the needs assessment, and (c) for schools to develop school based professional learning communities. The findings from the study and literature review provide the basis for the recommendation to address the problem of understanding teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase ELL achievement in reading and writing. The data from my qualitative interviews indicated that teachers in the district have various training and experiences that they rely on to meet the needs of ELLs. I found by analyzing the data that teachers all employ various best practices and that teachers in the district know what they need to improve student achievement. However, teachers need the support of their colleagues and the district to increase student

achievement.

The project is designed to inform stakeholders in the district that was studied a summary of teacher's perceptions on ELL best practices and provide recommendations to improve teacher preparedness to meet the needs of linguistically diverse learners. The white paper contains recommendations for improved practices to address the needs of ELLs based on the analyzed data. In the white paper I present a summary of my data and recommendations for the district to decide if they want to implement. Limitations in the white paper will also be addressed to explain the study's narrow scope as there were 10 participants from a district of 20,000. The white paper consists of an introduction, background of the existing problem, summary of analysis and findings, evidence from literature and recommendations that are connected to the evidence.

Goal of the Project

The goal for the white paper is to inform district leadership about the perceptions of teachers while providing recommendations to build on teacher's capacity to improve on their best practices to increase ELL achievement in reading and writing. The white paper will provide district leadership teachers perceptions about their training and readiness to support ELLs with the purpose of improving on this capacity. The data in the white paper will help district leadership justify solutions to problems in the district. I present three goals in the white paper and connect those goals to evidence based decisions from the data collected.

Rationale

A white paper provides specific solutions or recommendations for a problem

researched by an expert. The white paper I provide has specific recommendations the district can implement based on my qualitative research (see Appendix A). The white paper that I am submitting to the district addresses the local problem of understanding teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase ELL achievement in reading and writing.

Based on findings from my interviews, I believe that teachers in the district would benefit from a school-created needs assessment. After coding, categorizing, and creating themes with the data that I gathered my fourth theme was teachers articulated specific training and support needed to teach ELLs in heterogenous classrooms. All teachers in the study explained that they had received various training on how to support ELLs and this training was not unified. No specific training was given by all participants, but 90% of participants expressed specific professional development that they felt they needed to support ELLs. In addition to teachers articulating specific supports that they needed 40% of participants articulated district-wide changes that they would like to see addressed and 80% of participants explained that many of the problems they have with teaching ELLs were created by the district. By having school-based needs assessments schools could provide specific professional developments to support their teachers and district leadership could see what district changes need to be made and address problems coming from the district.

The second recommendation included in my white paper comes from Theme 1, Theme 2, and Theme 3 on creating teacher-led professional development from the school-based needs assessment. Teachers who participated in the study were all able to

explain generic and specific strategies that they use in the classroom to support ELLs with reading and writing. All teachers who participated in the study were able to explain WIDA assessed best practices to support their students, which the district uses to measure ELL achievement. This knowledge at the school level and Theme 2 has data teachers understand the specific supports they need to promote ELL academic readiness. Theme 2 included data that teachers rely on collaboration and need more of it at the school level. This collaboration that 100% of participants explained they needed comes from various school-based stakeholders. Depending on what supports are identified by the needs-based assessment, leaders of the professional development could be administrators, ESOL-trained coaches, ESOL teachers, special education teachers, or classroom teachers. Theme 3 had data where teachers articulated their prior training and experiences and the training and experiences in the district were very diverse. With 80% of teachers explaining how their previous training has helped them and 100% of participants having a positive perception of their training, the district can leverage these diverse perspectives to better prepare their teachers.

The final recommendation in my white paper will be for schools to develop school-based professional learning communities. Theme 2 had data where teachers articulated specific factors needed to promote ELL academic readiness. All teachers explained how collaboration has supported them. Seventy-percent of participants explained that they rely on collaborative planning with school-based personnel on how to better take theories about teaching ELLs and put them into practice. By strengthening and implementing PLCs schools can address specific needs and provide teachers with various

perspectives on better supporting ELLs.

Review of the Literature

Databases fundamental to this research were ERIC, Google Scholar, Education Research Complete, and SAGE Journals. The keywords used to find relevant articles were *white paper*, *needs assessment*, *benefits of needs assessment*, *scaffolding for WIDA standards*, *ELL strategies to improve reading*, *ELL strategies to improve writing*, *collaboration through school-based professional learning communities*, and *professional development for ELL teachers*.

White Paper

In a white paper, the author will explain their research on an issue and will then provide recommendations for a specific group of stakeholders. A white paper can help empower the intended audience with the knowledge and skills to respond to an issue (Renbarger, 2023). White papers present a recommended call to action on the issue (Franzo et al., 2023; Rodler & Renbarger, 2023). To solve the issue of increasing ELL achievement in reading and writing will require stakeholders to understand the problem and work together to address the issue and adapt to meet the needs of diverse learners. This has been done in a previous white paper by Karsgaard and Davidson (2023) to provide specific recommendations to circumvent systemic lags. While not all white papers are successful at fixing systemic issues, by having a white paper that is data driven on specific recommendations, a white paper is likely to be successful at accomplishing its stated goals (Picker, 2020). By having data driven solutions that clearly communicate a recommendation I am confident that my white paper will support teachers with being

better prepared to meet the needs of linguistically diverse learners.

The goal of this white paper is to inform stakeholders about an issue to make informed decisions. A white paper needs to present data driven findings to a nonacademic audience (Campbell et al., 2020). By ensuring that a position paper is written in a way that can be understood by multiple stakeholders, more stakeholders are willing to accept the recommendations and can make informed decisions (Bala et al., 2018). By ensuring that my white paper is written in a way that is used to inform stakeholders I can be assured that my recommendations are more likely to be adapted.

Needs Assessment

Teachers, when given needs assessments, can articulate their needs to better inform stakeholders of what supports are needed to help students. For example, Kartini and Aprilia (2022) found through qualitative interviews that teachers could articulate their deficits and what training they felt they needed to be successful. Yi and Erickson (2024) also found that after surveying 344 speech-language pathologists all respondents were able to articulate their deficits and where they needed to be trained via qualitative surveys. After conducting a needs assessment Yi and Erickson concluded that school-based and non-school-based personnel should focus their training on specific reading and writing support. Taneja-Johansson et al. (2023) found that when teachers' perceptions were considered the data collected through semi-structured interviews in six primary schools, teachers approached diversity with a deficit mindset. By listening to what teachers articulated, local school systems were able to successfully create professional developments and implement other supports to help improve the quality of the kid's

education. Once a teacher's perceptions are gathered in a needs assessment, plans can be made to better support teachers.

After a needs assessment occurs stakeholders are better able to allocate resources and personnel to better address specific needs. For example, Jamin et al. (2024) found after surveying nine teachers that additional services at the schools were needed, including the hiring of specialized staff such as occupational therapists and special education teachers. In addition to hiring new staff, the data collected showed a need to increase training for teachers along with a targeted intervention program. The Healthy Schools Campaign (2018) found after their needs assessments that more resources need to be diverted to support student nutrition, physical activity, and support of school nurses. Both studies highlight how specific needs assessments in a specific area resulted in differing resources and personnel that were needed to address problems with student learning.

Since the 2020 COVID pandemic, the needs of teachers and students have changed rapidly. Watson et al. (2022) found after conducting a national needs assessment of 1,275 school-based personnel that student engagement was significantly lower than pre-pandemic levels. This needs assessment found that several policies and practices needed to be addressed to support various stakeholders in helping to re-engage students. Watson et al. acknowledged that school staff had a strong work ethic but needed additional support and resources as the educational landscape evolved. Raub and Heymann (2023) found that with 1.6 billion learners being out of school in April of 2020 more literature supported the detrimental impact of school closures on children and

school-based personnel. New policies, procedures, and training were needed to support schools and childcare centers since the pandemic (Raub & Watson et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic affected each community differently. To address the rapid changes from the pandemic and the needs of teacher's assessments need to be conducted.

ELL Best Practices

For teachers to meet the needs of ELLs, teachers need to be equipped with the pedagogical knowledge to meet student needs. Gupta's (2019) conceptual paper explained that teachers need many diverse approaches to meet the needs of linguistically diverse learners. As schools become more diverse Gupta (2019) explained that there is no singular best practice for supporting ELLs but instead, multiple approaches need to be taken. For linguistically diverse learners to succeed in the classroom, Gupta states teachers must employ the seven principles of second language learning. Gupta's paper explained that teachers need to be trained in motivating students to learn a new language, creating a welcoming classroom, building on previous knowledge, building vocabulary, providing opportunities for interaction or discussion, using multiple modalities, and continuing to provide reviews and assessments. Gupta's paper was supported by Knoll (2021), who found that when instruction is modified to expand a student's background knowledge students are more likely to overcome their disadvantages in a multigrade classroom. Knoll (2021) further explained that by modifying their instruction and scaffolds based on a student's background knowledge students are more likely to achieve the desired learning results. Roseberry-Mckibbin (2021) found after collaborating with multiple schools in California that teachers need support in understanding a student's

background knowledge and how to use data from previous assessments to modify instruction. Teachers cannot be assumed to understand the data that they are presented with unless specifically trained in using that data. To successfully meet the needs of linguistically diverse learners, multiple studies explain that teachers need to be equipped with various pedagogical knowledge to meet the unique needs of ELLs.

With various pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of linguistically diverse learners, teachers need to know strategies on how to put theories into practice. Vintan and Gallagher (2019) conducted a qualitative study on collaboration between ESL teachers and found that ESL teachers had a desire to work together and believed that collaboration was important to student learning. The results of the study though found that many ESL teachers encountered barriers due to a lack of training and only implemented surface-level collaboration. Rance-Roney (2019) found that veteran ELL teachers expressed confusion about implementing ELL best practices such as collaboration due to a lack of training. Zaidi et al. (2021) that ESL teachers also struggle to support families with parent-teacher collaboration. Teachers in the focus group explained that they needed more training in collaborating with parents. One of the recommendations from the two-year study was to provide more training for teachers of refugee and immigrant students to understand collaborative best practices. Understanding the theories behind collaboration and implementation is a best practice that multiple studies have explained teachers need to have further training on.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, new best practices and new platforms have emerged. Teachers need explicit training on how to meet the needs of students on these

new platforms and new best practices. An example of this was Chung's (2022) study that found online learning platforms can be advantageous for ELLs. When teachers are training on how to support students with virtual collaboration and on ways to implement experiential learning on online platform students are more likely to become lifelong learners in regard to learning a second language. In addition to needing to be taught about online collaboration and new platforms, teachers need training on how to provide students feedback in an online environment (Chung, 2022). Carjuzza and Williams (2021), conducted a qualitative study in which they found that since the coronavirus pandemic, teachers are facing new obstacles and need support in modifying new pedagogical best practices. Some themes that emerged from Carjuzza and Williams is that teachers are overwhelmed and struggle to make learning and teaching in a virtual context less isolating. The world has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic and with this change, teachers need support in understanding and implementing new or modified best practices.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have the potential to provide ongoing, collective, and result-oriented professional development in schools. Dufour (2014) explained that PLCs can support adult learning continually. Instead of quick professional development, PLCs have the potential to provide ongoing support for teachers. PLCs were found in Chicago to help build staff capacity with local problems. When educators embrace a framework for PLCs Dufour (2007), explained that schools will improve. The author further explained that PLCs would not provide a quick fix for a solution but would

help solve local issues in a “step-by-step, action-by-action, decision-by-decision” approach. PLCs when embraced by a school have the potential to create long-term positive change.

After the COVID 19 pandemic many teachers expressed a strong feeling of isolation and stagnation in their professional development. Andreienko et al. (2023) explained that during and in the aftermath of the COVID 19 pandemic teachers struggled with unexpected technology issues and social isolation. After conducting a qualitative study on PLCs from 2021-2022 88% of participants said that PLCs helped them self-reflect and participants explained that they learned a new concept that they could use in their classroom. In addition, 88% of participants explained that they grew professionally and learned new ways to improve or incorporate technology into their lessons.

Andreienko et al. (2023) concluded that 88% of participants helped to expand their professional network and that it helped their emotional engagement. While PLCs did not solve all of the problems that emerged as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic Musor et al (2021) explained through a quantitative study that teachers who engaged in PLCs in STEM education felt that they did not need to lower the standards for their students. Of the 7 teachers and 45 students that participated in this study 64% of students were at the developing level in STEM and the other 24% were at the exemplary level. The study concluded that STEM PLC’s helped teachers prepare lessons that improved students’ competence in STEM education. Shiona and McLaren (2024) further supported the benefits of PLCs after the covid pandemic by conducting a qualitative study where individual interviews found that most participants felt that PLCs helped foster a sense of

belonging. This sense of belonging helped teachers find supportive ways to raise the standards for their students and recover learning loss after the COVID 19 pandemic. PLCs after COVID pandemic can help combat the feeling of isolation and professional stagnation by providing a network of support.

Professional learning communities can provide specific support for teachers as they address local problems. Dang et al. (2023) reviewed 115 articles and found that most educators feel unprepared or unsupported. Formal and informal PLCs were found to help teachers feel more prepared and more supported to address problems that they may encounter in the classroom. Vicici (2024) also found that PLCs can support teachers with being lifelong learners and teachers who participate in PLCs explained that PLCs had a positive impact on their work. 1065 educators participated in this study from 75 schools and these educators explained how PLCs allowed them to solve local problems in their school through a collaborative culture. Educators in the study explained that when properly implemented PLCs allowed teachers to learn from each other and created a more positive culture in the school. Nichols (2024) further explained that PLCs can be used across grade levels to help students in STEM education throughout the school year. This collaboration can also be used to help teachers build on previous school years knowledge. The use of PLCs has been shown that teachers are able to support each other as they try to solve local problems.

PLCs will help a school build its own capacity. Fair (2023) explained that by encouraging school-based stakeholders to collaborate in PLCs teachers can engage in collective action. Fair (2023) explained after interviewing 36 participants via zoom that

by encouraging multiple stakeholders to collaborate a holistic approach to education can be achieved. This holistic approach can be achieved when you have general educators, coaches, and special educators engaging in PLCs who support students with an inclusive education. Mariani-Peroze (2023) found that any school regardless of size can have PLCs that can engage in high quality professional development. Mariani-Peroze found that by having participants from various grade levels in PLC teachers were able to support each other and this had a positive impact on student standardized tests from the winter to the spring. Mariani-Peroze came to this conclusion after surveying ten teachers who took part in PLC professional development at a small rural school. By trusting teachers to collaborate and support each other schools can build on their own capacity and help students improve on standardized assessments.

Teacher Led Professional Development

Teachers come into the classroom with various trainings and experiences. Teacher-led professional development can positively impact student performance when given the chance. Towes (2024) found through a case study that teachers can lead targeted professional development to support each other with scaffolding to target a specific reading skill. The three teachers who participated in a shared reading intervention all reported that the experience was positive and that after delivering the taught intervention, all teachers could implement a modified reading to students in multiple classrooms. Being teacher-led perceptions of teachers were taken into account and this allowed teachers to collaborate both in person and via email as teachers had limited time during the school day. By embracing a constructivist approach where

teachers co-design curriculum and professional development Huang et al. (2024) found that participants gained confidence and skills through the support of their colleagues.

Teacher-led professional developments are found to not only be effective but can also be a cost-effective way to address 21st-century issues. Huang et al. (2024) conducted a study that included 202 teachers. Those teachers who participated in staff-led professional development had a positive impact on their student's literacy. The study concluded that the professional development was positively received by participants. This was determined when compared to a control group that did not participate in the professional development. By relying on teachers to lead the professional development the district did not have to pay for outsiders to come in and support these 202 teachers in addressing the local needs. Rafique (2024) found that since the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers have the skills to teach in a post-pandemic society while other teachers need more support. Rafique found that districts must design cost-effective professional development. Rafique, after conducting a qualitative study on 25 English teachers, found that a major hindrance to teachers' professional development was inadequate collegial support and insufficient logistics facilities. By allowing teachers within schools to support each other through professional development both the issues of collegial support, logistics facilities, and budget restraints can be overcome. By leveraging the skills of existing staff teach-led professional development sessions can cost-effectively overcome many modern issues.

By empowering schools to create their professional development the overall school environment will be positively affected. Tran (2022) found after reviewing

multiple case studies that when principals create workplace conditions where teachers are empowered and a culture of collaboration is encouraged student achievement increases along with a better school environment. Tran (2022) came to these conclusions after analyzing case studies at four high schools. Tran's work was supported by Eradze (2023), who found after analyzing qualitative data from 15 representatives that by fostering teacher-led professional development teachers can increase their teaching and learning activities by relying on their peer networks and collaboration. This supportive and collaborative environment will have a positive impact on the school's climate and culture while better-empowering teachers to meet the needs of 21st-century learners.

Project Description

Needed Resources

The district in this white paper has most of the materials needed, resources, and support to implement. Some funding must be allocated to allow the white paper to be printed and disseminated. A digital copy can be shared if the district chooses not to print the white paper for dissemination. In addition to providing paper, the most significant investment that the district will need to invest in is time. Administrators will need time to craft and administer the needs assessment to school-based stakeholders. Teachers must also have time to meet in PLCs during the scheduled workday.

Existing Supports

The research district has many existing supports to allow the implementation of the white paper. The first existing support is that the district's leadership has buy-in, wanting to see research-based improvement in ELLs' reading and writing skills within

the next 2-4 years. The buy-in is shown in the ESOL strategic plan. The district's website also highlights 29 central office staff members hired to support school-based staff addressing school-based issues. In the past, the district has also mandated that schools address school-based problems during the pre-service week before school starts for school-led professional development. In addition to allocating time in the past to address school-based issues, the district has allocated one day per academic quarter for school-led professional development. The district has four quarters each between three and four months.

Potential Barriers

The most significant barrier to this white paper is that the district leadership must allocate time for a needs assessment and time for teachers to meet in PLCs and for professional development. Another potential barrier is that not all administrators and teachers will have buy-in and want to collaborate with their peers (DuFour, 2014). If teachers are unwilling to collaborate and work together, PLCs will not be effective (Fair, 2023). Another possible barrier is that not all schools have staff members confident in supporting ELLs in improving their reading and writing.

Potential Solutions to Barriers

The first solution regarding allocating time is the flexibility of the school calendar. It currently includes dedicated time for schools to address school-based problems. This occurs the week before students return and once a quarter, during which no students are allowed in the building. Principals are given the discretion to allow teachers to do what is needed to address school-based issues. This flexibility ensures that

schools can effectively manage their time to address specific issues.

The second solution regarding buy-in can be addressed in several ways. Currently, the district's leadership has prioritized ELL education, and district leadership wants to see research-based improvement in ELLs' reading and writing skills within the next 2-4 years. During my research, all teachers commented that they had positive views on their previous training, and all teachers could articulate what support they needed. Schools must tailor their PLCs and professional development to their school's needs. By tailoring PLCs and professional development to schools, teachers will have more of a say in what training and support they need. PLCs are also independent to address issues that concern them. This bottom-up approach to solving the issue will result in more buy-in from more stakeholders, empowering educators and making them feel influential in the process.

If school-based staff do not want or feel they can support their colleagues, the final solution can be addressed in a number of ways. The first is the district employees: 29 central office staff members trained and hired to help schools create action plans to solve ESOL-related issues. These staff members have been sent to schools in the past to support the implementation of school-based support.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

I propose that district leaders request principals create a generic needs assessment survey over the summer. Principals are 12-month employees and are supposed to coordinate with district leadership to ensure that schools are open and have staff ready to teach. I propose implementing the needs assessment during the first week of staff

onboarding. Once data has been collected, principals can create PLCs for teachers and a professional development plan. I propose that PLC meet once a quarter during the professional development day. Professional developments arising from the needs assessment should be implemented during the after-school staff meetings held once a month. If data is collected and analyzed during the pre-service week, a PLC meeting calendar and a professional development plan can be created. If a school needs the support of a district leader, by doing this at the start of the school year, principals can coordinate with the central office to have district support come to the after-school meetings.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and any Others Involved

My primary role and responsibility was the researcher, gathering data about teachers' perceptions of best practices to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing. I will present my findings to district leadership and, if necessary, elaborate or answer questions about my findings through the white paper. As a consultant, I will also be responsible for explaining the recommendations included in the white paper. Implementation of the white paper and next steps will be at the discretion of the district's leadership

Project Evaluation Plan

The type of evaluation for this project will be outcomes-based. Outcome-based evaluation is a measurement of results. Results are observations that show a positive change in a desired outcome (Institute of Museum and Library Services, n.d.). In the case of this project, the evaluation can be a survey conducted at the end of the school year that

shows how teachers' perceptions of how to support ELLs better have grown. This growth can be measured against the start of the school year and needs assessment. In addition to the survey, meeting notes from the PLCs can be included to see what supports have been implemented to see if there is a measurable impact on student learning. The white paper aims to inform and allow district leadership to choose to implement the recommendations. District leadership may decide to evaluate the success of this project through a summative and formative evaluation. Data from a summative assessment could be from the yearly WIDA assessment to see if students are improving their reading and writing. Formative assessments could be seen if there is growth in the quarterly benchmark assessments that ESOL teachers are required to administer.

The goal of this project aligns not only with the study's problem and purpose but also with the district's needs. The problem that was addressed through this study is the need to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase ELL achievement in reading and writing. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teacher perceptions of best practices to support English language learners in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district. The end-of-the-year survey will show district leadership if teachers are better able to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students. The goal of this project is to improve teacher capacity to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students. By conducting a survey at the end of the year district leadership and school administration can see if teachers are better equipped to meet the needs of these students.

Project Implications

Social Change Implications

Social change is about empowering or inspiring others to improve the world (Walden University, 2024). The district where this white paper will be given has, as of December 2022, 32,098 students, or 20% of students from 102 countries where English is not their first language (Board of Education Academic Achievement Committee, 2023). Twenty thousand teachers teach these students in 198 academic centers ([District], 2023). The white paper can potentially effect these teachers as they can share the knowledge they have accrued from years of experience or previous teaching experience. Teachers in this district explained that they all have foundational knowledge about some strategies to support ELLs. Teachers and students can increase their capacity by allowing teachers and other stakeholders to collaborate and support each other. During this study, teachers expressed a desire for and need for more resources. This white paper provides solutions to what the teachers wanted. By providing more support for teachers, this study can potentially create positive change with both the students and teachers in the district by increasing student literacy skills and teachers' pedagogical knowledge about ELL education.

Project Importance to Local Stakeholders in a Larger Context

The district where this study was conducted has an ELL population of about 20%, higher than the national average of over 10%. Each year, the number of ELLs in the US and the district has been increasing while ELL achievement in reading and writing has not. This study could be used in other districts to learn what teachers know about ELL

best practices and create localized solutions. With no unified teacher standards, teachers come into the classroom with various levels of pedagogical knowledge and confidence to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students. By understanding how to support teachers in meeting the needs of their students, more students will graduate high school and college and be career-ready. More students will graduate with the skills and abilities to be literate in reading and writing.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In Section 4, I discuss the strengths and limitations of this qualitative study that addressed the problem of the need to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase ELL achievement in reading and writing. I will also include an analysis of myself as a scholar and developer of a doctoral level project study. I will also explain my experience with project development, scholarship, and leadership. I conclude Section 4 with my reflections regarding what I have learned and how I will continue to do future research to be an agent of positive social change.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Projects Strengths

The white paper I created provides the findings from the study about teachers' perceptions of best practices to support ELLs in reading and writing and their perceptions about their training and readiness to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing. I interviewed 10 teachers in the district, and the findings can be used to help the district with creating an action plan to support teachers with meeting the needs of ELLs. The data collected from these 10 teachers will be presented to local leaders along with their perception of what supports teachers feel they need. By conducting this study, I was able to determine that teachers come to the district with various skills and experiences on how to better teach ELLs. I was able to determine that all teachers know strategies on how to better support ELLs and that teachers would like support in collaboration to share these skills with each other.

The findings from the interviews allowed me to create a white paper to present to

district leadership, with three recommendations on how the district can better support teachers. The first recommendation would be for schools to do a needs assessment. When I reviewed the data, I determined that teachers come to the district with various trainings, experiences, and perceptions on how to meet the needs of ELLs. No two teachers provided the same answers to my interview questions. With diverse perceptions, school-based stakeholders can implement my second recommendation, to have school-led professional developments, to address gaps in training. In addition to school-led professional developments, schools can implement PLCs, as the data showed that teachers rely on collaboration to support student learning. By implementing these three recommendations, the white paper will support the district, leveraging existing resources to support student learning.

Project Limitations

The district where this study took place is large, containing over 20,000 teachers at 198 academic centers. This study had a small sample size of 10 teachers. In addition to the relatively small sample size only high school teachers who met the study's criteria were able to participate. Due to the small sample size and the criteria not all teachers' perceptions were considered in the district.

A second limitation of the study is the study does not provide a specific solution to supporting teachers with improving ELLs in their reading and writing. Teachers provided various solutions and had some commonalities, but no teachers were able to articulate a single solution. This lack of a single solution means that teachers need to incorporate various strategies to support ELLs. These various strategies need to be

learned by teachers so that they can implement them.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Other Approaches

This study was a basic qualitative study that relied on semistructured interviews with participants that met four criteria. Purposeful sampling was done to ensure that teachers met the criteria to participate in this study. All participants consented and volunteered for the study with no financial benefit to themselves. An alternative approach I could have taken to address the study's purpose and problem would have been to expand the study's criteria to allow middle school and elementary school teachers to explain their perceptions of best practices to meet the needs of ELLs. In addition to expanding the studies criteria to allow other grades to participate I could have met with other school-based personnel who support teachers with improving students reading and writing. Some of these school-based personnel could include but are not limited to counselors, pupil personal workers, para professionals, and community schools coordinators.

Another approach I could have taken would have been to instead of creating a white paper to inform district stakeholders about my findings would be to create a professional development plan. I considered this professional development plan approach, but I decided against it as there is no singular way to support ELLs. Instead of a district wide professional development plan the data that I collected from this study emphasized that teachers come with various skills and need the support of each other. That is why a white paper was chosen instead of a professional development plan.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

I have learned much through the process of earning this doctorate. One of the first things I learned was the importance of having data from a peer-reviewed scholarly article to support an argument. This process taught me, through weekly discussions and assignments, how to locate and use peer-reviewed articles to support my position on a subject.

Another thing that I learned during this process is the importance of detailed feedback to help me improve my writing and studies. This will affect my future teaching as I now understand how vital communicating clear feedback in a timely manner is to support a student's learning. Throughout this process, I relied on the feedback of my teachers, and I will take what I learned from their comments and apply them to my future classrooms.

I also learned how to conduct unbiased interviews to gather qualitative data to address a gap in practice. Before this process, I knew how to conduct interviews through my professional responsibilities. While I knew how to conduct an interview, I now know how to analyze the data from the interview and create themes to summarize what was gathered. Before this process, I needed to learn how to analyze data so that my bias would not be reflected in the results. This project study was my first experience gathering qualitative data. From this process, I look forward to applying what I learned about conducting and analyzing qualitative data to help create positive social change in my community. This positive social change can come from my new ability to let the data speak without being influenced by what I think.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

This doctoral process has shown me the importance of gathering qualitative data about a phenomenon and letting the collected data be used to create themes. As I contemplate my future in teaching and determine if I want to become an administrator, I must remember the lessons I learned from this process when addressing school-related issues. I will use what I learned from this process to create positive social change in my school using the voices of multiple stakeholders, not mine.

I have also learned the importance of academic writing. I have always struggled with spelling and grammar, but this process has improved my ability to write academically. I have also learned the importance of perseverance when trying to achieve a goal. I have often wanted to quit this process but realized that it is essential not to give up and ask for help. During the 4 years I have worked to earn this doctorate, no one at my university has been unwilling to help me. This positive support will be used in my future classrooms as I look to support other scholars on their educational journeys.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

In this basic qualitative study, I analyzed teachers' perceptions of best practices to support ELLs and their training and readiness to meet their needs. In my district, there are over 30,000 ELLs who are not performing at the same rate as their peers. I learned that the teachers in my district feel they do not have the skills to meet the needs of these students. While I learned that teachers think they do not have the skills to meet the needs of linguistically diverse learners, I learned that all participants understand ELL best practices. By analyzing the data of my study's participants, I created a project study that

could address some of these problems. I hope that the district in which I conducted this study will take my recommendations so that teachers can no longer work in isolated silos but instead be supported in collaborating to share best practices. While I did not find a single best practice to help ELLs in their reading and writing, I found that teachers do have a wealth of knowledge, and teachers want to collaborate to support each other. I hope this project study can help the over 20,000 teachers in this district and better meet the needs of the over 30,000 ELLs.

In the future, I hope that others will conduct similar studies throughout the district. This will allow more perspectives to be considered and more solutions to local problems to be proposed. This research could be a starting point for others who want together qualitative data about what teachers do in the classroom and how that impacts student achievement. This study surveyed 10 teachers, and I hope that more perspectives can be gathered, and more data-driven solutions can be implemented.

The study findings confirm what I found in my literature review. In my literature review multiple studies found that teachers need to employ various strategies to support ELL students. This was confirmed in my study with all teachers being able to explain various strategies they use to support ELL students. The data I collected also has multiple participants mention that they utilize technology in the classroom leveraging learning platforms such as Canvas. A major category that emerged in my data were collaboration and this was also confirmed in my literature review as being needed to have a positive impact on student learning. Another aspect of my literature review that was confirmed in my study was that teachers have various trainings on how to meet the needs of ELL

students. With no universal teacher certification program teachers come into the classroom with various perceptions of their training and readiness to meet the needs of ELL students (Grant et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Earning a doctorate has always been a dream of mine. I have spent the past 4 years researching and learning about a subject that I am passionate about. Not only did I gain more knowledge about ELL education, but I was also able to present a district with actionable solutions to address some of the issues that teachers articulated.

Teachers' perspectives are essential to improve the educational system in the United States. Through this process, I learned that the educational system does not always need radical major changes to create positive social change. By allowing teachers to control their professional development and collaborate, teachers can share their wealth of knowledge with each other. The recommendations in my white paper have the potential to create positive social change and affect the lives of many.

I have always believed that education will offer more opportunities. If my district accepts the recommendations, it will create more opportunities for linguistically diverse learners. This study can inspire others to not just complain about a problem but work to develop data-driven solutions. I believe that all students, regardless of their first language, can improve in their reading and writing if they have teachers who know how to implement best practices collaboratively.

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Appendix A: The Project



Recommendations to improve teachers' capacity to meet the needs of ELL students
By
Josh Davis

Introduction

In the district where this study took place the fastest-growing demographic is English language learners (ELLs). According to standardized tests, 5% of ELLs are proficient in reading and writing at the high school level. The district employs a diverse group of teachers with varying levels of experience and training. However, the district still needs to adopt ways for teachers to share their experiences and training. In 2022, the ESOL team created a strategic plan with four goals to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing. However, the district did not collect data regarding teachers'

perceptions of their training and readiness to help ELLs read and write.

Through my research, I explored teachers' perceptions of best practices to support ELLs and of their training and readiness to meet the needs of ELLs. The qualitative data I gathered came from 10 full-time high school teachers who teach ELLs in a heterogeneous setting. The participants in this study teach different subjects at different high schools throughout the district. The focus of this study revolved around the following research questions:

RQ1: What are high school teachers' perceptions of best practices for English language learners to learn reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?

RQ2: What are high school teachers' perceptions about their training and readiness to teach English language learners how to improve their reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?

The Local Problem

The district has prioritized increasing ELL achievement in reading and writing, as shown by the 2022 strategic plan. However, WIDA data have shown no significant improvement, with 9% of students exiting ESOL in 2018-2020, decreasing to 8% from 2021-2022. With students not exiting WIDA, more students have remained in the ESOL program. In 2018-2029, 23% of ELLs were classified as long-term ELL (LTELL), increasing to 34% during the 2021-2022 school year (Menzano-Lee & Kanney, 2023). The district also has a diverse staff of over 20,000 teachers with various training and experiences. The district currently employs 24% of teachers labeled as inexperienced, 13% are teaching with emergency credentials, and 32% of teachers teach subjects they had no formal training in ([STATE]Department of Education 2020). Of the 20,000 teachers, 1% completed ESOL professional development courses. At the time of this study, no local, qualitative data had been collected and published about teachers' perceptions of best practices for teaching ELLs reading and writing, as well as teachers' training and readiness to meet the needs of this demographic. With over 32,000 students classified as ELL and the number of LTELLs increasing, this study was designed to explore teachers' perceptions and address this gap in practice.

Summary of the Study

Methodology

The problem that was addressed through this study was the need to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase English language learner (ELL) achievement in reading and writing. The purpose of this study was to analyze teachers' perceptions of best practices for supporting ELLs in improving their reading and writing and teachers' perceptions of their training and readiness to meet the needs of ELLs. I collected qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with ten full-time teachers employed who teach heterogeneous classes of ELL and non-ELLs.

The framework that guided this study was Cummin's Theory on Language Acquisition (1981). Cummins described how language acquisition could be broken into different frameworks. Cummins explained that some language is learned in daily communication but is not necessarily assessed on standardized tests, and more technical vocabulary needs specific instruction before it is evaluated on standardized tests such as the WIDA or MCAP. In his theory, Cummins explained that teachers need to explicitly teach this technical vocabulary in high-context situations so that students can apply it to standardized assessments. The Cummins Theory on Language Acquisition is a great tool to help identify and analyze teachers' perceptions of best practices they use to support ELLs in improving their reading and writing. Cummins's theory explains why some students might be unable to demonstrate mastery of academic words on standardized tests.

To collect the data, I used purposeful sampling and posted in two private social

media groups that teachers use to communicate and offer support. After posting, ten people responded, stating they met the study's criteria and would like to participate in my research. The requirements to participate were to be employed as a classroom teacher in the district, be a full-time classroom teacher, teach heterogeneous classes including ELLs and non-ELLs, and teach at a public high school in the district. I conducted a Zoom interview where participants confirmed that they met the study's criteria and consented to participate. I transcribed and coded all the interviews from the 10 participants which yielded over 100 codes, 14 categories, which were reduced to 4 themes I conducted member checking throughout the process to ensure that my qualitative data accurately captured participants' words. I used member checking to ensure that the data collected was accurate.

Data Analysis Findings

I created four themes from teachers' interviews about best practices for supporting ELLs with their reading and writing and about their training and readiness to teach ELLs reading and writing. These four themes were used to answer the study's two research questions. The themes then allowed me to create this project study to create three recommendations to address the study's problems and purpose.

Theme 1: Teachers describe myriad strategies to support ELL students in improving their academic reading and writing.

All participants could explain generic strategies they use in the classroom to improve students' reading and writing. One generic strategy the participants stated is translating a text for students using either Google Translate or providing a text to a student in their native language. 80% of participants were able to explain specific

strategies they use to support students in improving their WIDA-assessed skills. Some strategies mentioned were chunking of readings, structured writing using claim evidence and reasoning, feedback, vocabulary posters, and differentiated text. Participants could only articulate some of the same strategies, and no two participants gave the same answer. All participants explained strategies they use to support ELLs, with most teachers understanding strategies to help students improve their WIDA-assessed skills.

Theme 2: Teachers articulated specific factors needed to promote ELL academic readiness.

All teachers in the study mentioned that collaboration is essential to promoting ELL academic readiness. The explanations varied, with some participants mentioning ESOL-trained coaches, their peers, social media groups, school-based administration, parents, and student-based collaboration. Seventy percent of participants noted that collaborative planning with school-based personnel was how they best put theories into practice with their lessons. Sixty percent of participants mentioned that teachers must consider students' social-emotional learning to promote ELL academic readiness.

Theme 3: Teachers rely heavily on prior training and experience to meet the needs of ELs.

Eighty percent of participants explained that they had yet to be trained explicitly as ELL teachers but relied on other training to support this demographic. Two participants explained that they used their special education background to scaffold their instruction. Other participants explained that their previous work experience in museums

and colleges helped them. All participants explained the different trainings they had participated in and mentioned no specific training. With various trainings, all participants said they rely on their peers to support them when they have a gap in pedagogical knowledge. All participants explained that they positively perceived their previous training, and 70% of participants explained that they still had more to learn.

Theme 4: Teachers articulated specific training and support needed to teach ELLs in heterogeneous classrooms.

Theme 4 was created after I analyzed the data. I found that teachers understand the problems affecting their classrooms and the support they need to solve them. All participants acknowledged that they perceived a deficit when it came to supporting ELLs. Ninety percent of participants explained that they would like training on how to get their ELLs on grade level, as 90% of participants stated they lacked confidence in teaching ELLs. This lack of confidence has led to many participants expressing low expectations for their ELLs. All participants mentioned having lowered expectations for ELLs.

In addition to wanting more training, 40% of participants said they wanted to see district-level classroom changes, and 80% mentioned that the district created many problems they experienced. Some district-created problems are pacing guidelines, ELL placement in English classes above their zone of proximal development, and the need for collaboration. Teachers suggested smaller class sizes, extended class periods, books on various reading levels, and more ESOL coaches to help teachers plan their lessons.

Recommendations

After reviewing my second cycle codes I was able to create categories. I then created four themes from the categories. The four themes were aligned with the study's two research questions. After reviewing the four themes I created four recommendations for the district to use to address the studies problem and purpose. These recommendations are supported by my literature review.

Recommendations:

School-created needs assessment

Teacher-led professional development

Develop school-based professional learning communities

School-created needs assessment:

After reviewing the data, it became clear that teachers understand the problems they face in the classroom and know what support they need to help ELLs. Kartini and Aprilia (2022) supported my findings by also stating that teachers can articulate their deficits and what training they need to succeed. In 2023, Yi and Erickson concluded after their qualitative needs assessment that when schools conduct needs assessments, they can focus their training on those needs. By listening to what teachers perceive they need, teachers can be supported so that they no longer approach diversity with a deficit mindset (Traneja-Johansson et al., 2023).

The district where this study took place is one of the largest districts in the US, with a budget of over 2.8 billion dollars for the 2024-2025 school year. Conducting needs assessments can more efficiently allocate resources and personnel to support better student achievement (Jamin et al., 2024). With over 20,000 teachers at over 100 learning centers, localized needs assessments are needed as each school's needs could differ.

Localized needs assessments have been needed since the COVID-19 pandemic because the learning loss from the COVID-19 pandemic affected each community differently (Watson et al., (2022) explained that because of the covid-19 Pandemic each community was affected differently from learning loss. New policies, procedures, and trainings are needed to support teachers and students with this learning loss (Raub & Heyman, 2023). Leadership can only know what policies, procedures, and trainings must be implemented after a needs assessment.

Teacher-led professional development from the needs assessment

During teacher preparatory programs teachers are taught various best practices and taught the importance of collaboration. Teachers could articulate their needs and want to improve their practices. Gupta (2019) explained that only some singular best practices for supporting ELLs exist. To ensure ELL success, teachers need to have various strategies at their disposal. With teacher-led professional development, teachers can collaborate and create cross-curricular scaffolds. All teachers could explain some WIDA-assessed best practices that they implement in the classroom, and by supporting teacher-led professional development, schools can leverage existing supports.

All teachers in the study cited a lack of training as a significant hindrance to supporting their ELLs. Teacher-led training and stakeholders working together can address the problem of a lack of a unified training program (Grant et al., 2021). Teachers can support each other by having all participants know some scaffolds for WIDA assessments. Gupta (2019) explained that no singular best practice for supporting ELL students exists. For ELLs to be successful, teachers need to employ multiple approaches.

During my study all teachers articulated that they had a negative view of ELLs. This negative view will directly impact student performance. By having target professional developments based on schools needs these negative views can be addressed and supports can be put into place.

Develop School Based Professional Learning Communities

After reviewing the data, I found that 90% of participants reported lacking confidence in their ability to meet the needs of linguistically diverse learners. Dufour (2014) explained that PLCs will support adult learning continually. All teachers in my study explained that they have lowered expectations for ELLs, and this can be contributed to a lack of support and training. By having staff members engage in PLCs teachers can begin to share best practices. Fair (2023) explained that one of the reasons that PLCs will not be successful is because of a lack of buy-in. During my interviews I found that all participants mentioned that they rely on collaboration in some form to support their educational practices. The data from my study had all participants mentioning that they rely on their peers for collaboration. This peer collaboration could be formalized with teachers having designated times to meet to collaborate. This will help to alleviate the issue of lack of time that 70% of participants mentioned being an issue. This will also allow teachers to support each other by helping them address concerns that they feel in their training. All participants mentioned that they feel as though they have a lack of training and PLCs can support teachers with ongoing training in areas that they feel they need support. With 80% of participants engaging in their own professional development PLCs are a way for teachers to collaborate and support each other with

these newly learned best practices.

Conclusion

My research study found that there is no singular best practice to support ELL students with improving in their reading and writing. While there is no singular best practice, teachers who participated in my study were all able to articulate different strategies that they employ to support students. No two teachers articulated the same best practices. This differing best practice is because of different experiences that teachers bring into the classroom. These experiences ranged from differing professional developments, differing professional experiences, and differing teacher preparatory programs. These differing experiences have led to the district having teachers who have varying differing experiences. It is my recommendation that the district should leverage teachers differing experiences and allow teacher time and support in engaging in targeted professional development and school-based PLCs.

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Appendix B Interview Protocol

Researcher introduction and problem/ purpose

My name is Joshua Davis, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. My committee comprises of Dr. White, my methodologist, and Dr. Rodriguez, my chair. If you wish to speak with them, their contact information is in the consent Google form. At any time during this interview, you can opt-out. All your identifying information will be kept confidential and shared with those directly involved in the research. Your information will never be shared with the district you work in. This interview should last 45-60 minutes and address two research questions. Are you ready to begin, and can I begin to record? This is a reminder that at any time, you can opt out of the study and all data collected will be destroyed.

[Start Recording]

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine teacher perceptions of best practices to support English language learners in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district.

The problem that will be addressed through this study is the need to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase English language learner (ELL) achievement in reading and writing.

I want to confirm that you meet the criteria of this study. Can you confirm that?

1. You are employed as classroom teacher in [DISTRICT]
2. You are a full-time classroom teacher.
3. You teach heterogeneous classes that include both ELLs and non- ELLs.
4. You teach at a public high school in [DISTRICT]?

This interview will revolve around two research questions. They are:

RQ1-Qualitative: What are high school teachers' perceptions of best practices for English language learners to learn reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?

RQ2-Qualitative: What are high school teachers' perceptions about their training and readiness to teach English language learners how to improve their reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?

My first group of questions relate to your perceptions of best practices for English language learners to learn reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom.

Research Question	Interview Question (IQ)
What are high school teachers' perceptions of best practices for English language learners to learn reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?	IQ1: Tell me your opinion of best practices teachers should use for English language learners to learn how to improve their reading.
	Prompts: You shared ____ can you tell me more about how you ____ to support your students with improving their reading.
	IQ2: Tell me about your opinion of best practices teachers

	should use for English language learners to learn how to improve their writing
	Prompts: You shared _____ can you tell me more about how you ___ to support your students with learning how to write in a heterogeneous classroom. Can you provide an example of how you ___?
	IQ3: Tell me about your opinion on scaffolds that have helped or hindered students in improving their ability to read.
	Prompt: I hear you saying _____ did I summarize that correctly? What specific aspects of the scaffolds have been particularly helpful?
	IQ 4: Tell me about your opinion on scaffolds that have helped or hindered students in improving their writing.
	Prompt: I hear you saying _____ did I summarize that correctly? What specific aspects of the scaffolds have been particularly helpful?

Now that you have shared about your perceptions of best practices for English language learners to learn reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom. I would like to ask you some questions about your perceptions about your training and readiness to teach English language learners how to improve their reading and writing in a heterogenous classroom.

Research Question	Interview Question
What are high school teachers' perceptions about their training and readiness to teach English language learners how to improve their reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?	IQ5: Describe the activities and training you engaged in to prepare you for your role of teaching ELLs on how to improve in their reading?
	Prompt: Can you describe the training you received while you were in your teacher preparatory program? Can you describe the training you received from the district? Can you describe how these trainings impacted your readiness to prepare students to be better readers?
	IQ6: Please describe the activities and training you engaged in to prepare you for your role of teaching ELLs how to improve in their writing?
	Prompt: Can you describe the training you received while you were in your teacher preparatory program? Can you describe the training you received from the district? Can you describe how these trainings impacted your readiness to prepare students to be better writing?
	IQ7: Tell me your perceptions of your readiness to teach English language learners reading after finishing your teacher preparatory program.
	Prompt: Can you elaborate on why you feel this way? What activities or trainings do you feel that you need to help improve your training and readiness to improve ELLs reading?
	IQ8: Tell me your perceptions of your readiness to teach English language learners writing after finishing your teacher preparatory program.
	Prompt: Can you elaborate on why you feel this way? What

	activities or trainings do you feel that you need to help improve your training and readiness to improve ELLs writing?
	IQ9: Tell me about what additional supports you feel you need to improve in your readiness to improve the reading abilities of your ELLs.
	Prompt: Can you elaborate on why you feel this way?
	IQ10: Tell me about what additional supports you feel you need to improve in your readiness to improve the writing abilities of your ELLs.
	Prompt: Can you elaborate on why you feel this way?

Final Interview Question: Is there anything you would like to add or tell me about in regard to your perceptions on how your perceptions of best practices to help ELLs improve in their reading and writing or is there anything you would like to add about your training and readiness to teach ELL students to improve their reading and writing?

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. You will receive a follow-up email from me, including the transcript and audio recording. This will allow you to ensure that the data collected is accurate. I will then send you a synthesized copy of the collected data so you can add or clarify it in case something is misinterpreted. This will also allow you to add something if something is missing. You will receive this within two weeks of the interview. Again, thank you for your time, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

[End Recording]

Appendix C: Coding Table

RQ1: What are high school teachers' perceptions of best practices for English language learners to learn reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?

Code Word	Example	Number of occurrences in interviews	Number of participants who mentioned this code	Common Categories	Theme
Best Practice	T4 explained that they ensure they make accommodations for all ELL students.	N=5	N=3	Specific Best Practices	Theme 1: Teachers describe myriad strategies to support ELL students in improving their academic reading and writing.
CER Strategy	T10 explained that they need to use vocabulary to support their claim.	N=4	N=1		
Chunked Reading	T8, T10, T7 explained the need to break down long texts into smaller chunks.	N=13	N=4		
Experiential learning	T2 and T4 provided experiential examples of how to relate the material to students.	N=3	N=3		
Expressive Writing	T7 Explained that they require their students to express themselves in their writing.	N=2	N=3		
Feedback	All participants explained specific feedback that they offered their students.	N=56	N=10		
Guided Questions	T2 and T10 explained how they put questions on the side to support students' reading comprehension.	N=5	N=2		
Inclusive	T7 explained how they promote inclusivity to encourage students to participate.	N=3	N=1		
Learning Platform	T2 and T8 mentioned how they use Canvas to promote learning.	N=3	N=2		
Build Background Knowledge	T5 stated, "build on what they already know."	N=14	N=3	Generic Best Practices	
Compassion	T5 stated, "learning a new language is hard".	N=2	N=2		
Cultural Competency	T7 stated, "We can learn about other people's cultures."	N=5	N=2		
ELL Strategy	T4 explained that they utilize the 6 pillars of effective ELL	N=4	N=2		

	teaching.			
Generic Scaffold	Participants explained the varying strategies they employed in the classroom.	N=144	N=10	
Knowing your students	T8 stated, "you've got to meet them where they're at."	N=9	N=3	
Patience	T7 stated, " I think it also takes patience.	N=15	N=6	
Repetition	T1 stated, "Repetition does help."	N=25	N=8	
Targeted Instruction	T4 stated, "look at your individual class to determine what's going to work the best."	N=6	N=4	
Technology Scaffold	Four teachers mentioned how they use technology to assist students.	N=7	N=2	
Translation	All teachers mentioned using some form of translation in their classrooms.	N=63	N=10	
Zone of Proximal Development	T8 stated, "meet them where they are at."	N=9	N=2	
Reading Scaffold	T2 stated, "giving their students different variations of text." All participants mentioned some form of reading scaffold that they implemented.	N=80	N=10	WIDA Assessed Best Practice
Speaking Scaffold	T7 explained how they check for understanding of what students say.	N=1	N=1	
Vocabulary Scaffold	All participants explained how they support students' vocabulary development	N=47	N=10	
Writing Scaffold	All participants explained various ways they scaffold their writing assignments.	N=160	N=10	
Classroom Example	T10 and T4 provided examples from their class on how they help students improve in writing.	N=3	N=2	Application
Content Specific	N=3 teachers explained how they teach specifically in their content.	N=8	N=3	
Cross-Disciplinary Connection	60% of participants explained how they use skills students learned in other classes to support their class.	N=13	N=6	

Daily Life	T5 stated “what we are working on today,”	N=1	N=1		
Data Driven	All teachers explained how they use WIDA scores or other forms of data to guide instruction	N=51	N=10		
Example	T8 stated, “You’ve got to provide them with the tools”.	N=6	N=2		
Instruction	T1 stated, “Warm up or procedure for starting.”	N=6	N=1		
Reflection	T10 stated, “ with me to look at my instruction	N=12	N=5		
SEL Best Practice	T9 stated,” Let them get comfortable with you.	N=17	N=5	Social Emotional Learning Supports	Theme 2: Teachers articulated specific factors needed to promote ELL academic readiness.
SEL Collaboration	T6 stated, “You need is kindness.”	N=13	N=6		
Coach Collaboration	T10 stated, “like an ESOL trained coach.”	N=2	N=1	Collaboration	
Online Collaboration	T4 stated, “I have a couple of Facebook groups that I’m involved in for AP language	N=1	N=1		
Parental Collaboration	T9 stated, “they talk about things you could do at home”.	N=7	N= 3		
Peer Collaboration	Multiple participants mentioned that they had fantastic teachers supporting them.	N=87	N=10		
Personal Professional Development	T5 stated, “I read people’s theories on everything.”	N=24	N=8		
Professional Collaboration	T9 stated, “my literacy coach walked into my second period.”	N=7	N=4		
Student and Teacher Collaboration	Two participants explained that they collaborate with students to improve their lessons.	N=2	N=2		
Student Collaboration	T9 Stated “I encourage them to speak English with each other.”	N=11	N=4		
Support	T6 stated, “At least I had a resource.”	N=10	N=5		
Student-Centered	T7 stated, “if I was a student.”	N=25	N=6	Students Perception	
Student Interest	T7 explained how they base their lessons on what is important to students.	N=9	N=4		

Student Struggle	T9 stated, "So with all that they have to go through."	N=2	N=2
Student Want	T6 stated, "Can we just talk?" to understand what their students want from them.	N=5	N=3
Student Experience	T5 stated, "you'd see them struggling to put together the sentences in their head."	N=4	N=3
Students Goal	T9 stated, "they want to make some money" and "help their family."	N=4	N=2

RQ2: What are high school teachers' perceptions about their training and readiness to teach English language learners how to improve their reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?

Code Word	Example	Number of occurrences in interviews	The number of participants who mentioned this code	Common Categories	Theme
In-service training	Teachers explained various trainings they had participated in school, for example AVID and SIOP	N=42	N=10	Teacher Training	Theme 3: Teachers rely heavily on prior training and experiences to meet the needs of ELLs
International Experience	T9 "worked a whole year in Costa Rica," and T5 "was trying to learn enough Chinese to get by in China."	N=12	N=2		
Preservice Training	T2 took part in trainings on "reading and writing in the content area, and T7 engaged in trainings in southern California.	N=130	N=10		
Previous Experience	Teachers reflected on their previous work experience and how it impacted their current classrooms.	N=25	N=6		
Prior Professional Training	T8 explained in their previous trainings that "I learned a new	N=18	N=5		

	approach”.			
Professional Experience	T10 explained, “Learning on the job was the most useful thing.”	N=18	N=4	
Special Education	T2 stated, “works for both MLS and students with 504IEPs”.	N=5	N=2	
Teacher Background	Teachers reflected on how their gender, identity, or personal background impacted their teaching.	N=39	N=9	
Theory into Practice	T7 stated “You get to see the things you’ve learned.	N=7	N=4	
Changes	T8 stated, “Teaching has changed a lot.”	N=2	N=1	Teachers Generic Perception
Expectations	T2 stated, “Some students will...”	N=2	N=2	
Teacher Assumption	T2 stated, “look at MLS as, like a struggling student who has a disability.	N=13	N=6	
Teachers Perception	T3 stated, “That would help me personally teach my students.”	N=62	N=10	
Teachers’ Perception about Strategy	T2 “stated I say it doesn’t work... you’re not helping all of the students by doing that”	N=7	N=1	
College Bound	T6 stated, “go on to an English-speaking college...”	N=3	N=1	Teachers Positive Perceptions
Confident Teacher	Multiple participants explained how they were confident in	N=27	N=7	

	certain aspects of their training and their teaching abilities.					
Goal	T5 stated “where you want them to go”.	N=7	N=4			
Growth Mindset	T9 explained “Not yet, but they”re catching on.”	N=4	N=3			
High Expectations	T9 stated “No better, no worse than native speakers.”	N=7	N=4			
Positive View	T6 said “They can speak very fluently.”	N=41	N=10			
Teacher Experience	T4 said “They try to produce work.”	N=10	N=5			
Assumption	T6 explained “they had no idea”	N=24	N=6			
Confused Teacher	T4 said “we confuse techniques and strategies.”	N=12	N=7			
Deficit Mindset	T5 stated, “he came with no English, no French, nothing but whatever language he had there.”	N=4	N=4			
Low Confidence	T6 said “ I tried not to let anybody know.”	N=4	N=2			
Negative View	T6 explained “they should not have been there.”	N=35	N=10			
Teacher Centered	T9 said “ so I explained the book”.	N=4	N=1			
Teacher Problem	T4 said “I also don’t have the resources for it.”	N=6		N=2		
Teacher Struggle	T1 said “I have so much to do.”	N=4	N=3			
				Teachers Deficit Perception	Theme 4: Teachers articulated specific training and support needed to teach ELLs in heterogeneous classrooms.	

Bad Timing	T4 said “cram a bunch of like, do this activity, do this activity.”	N=6	N=4	Teachers Perception of Needs
Teacher Confusion	T2 explained “do students really understand the benefit of reading and writing instruction?”	N=3	N=1	
Teacher Want	Teachers articulated various requests to support them in the classroom.	N=87	N=10	
Time	T4 said “I need time to it”.	N=13	N=5	
Appropriateness	T9 said, “I don’t think that you should be using the ABC song or whatever.”	N=3	N=2	Teachers Perception of ELL students
ELL Difficulties	T7 said, “it is difficult for someone that comes from a culture or is learning the language.”	N=3	N=2	
High ELL Population	T8 said “it is a huge population of our students”.	N=2	N=1	
Long Term ELL	T6 said “I had other kids who have been studying English from the time they were born.	N=2	N=1	
Low Expectations	T6 explained “I went back to fifth grade and I was teaching 11th graders.”	N=21	N=10	
District Created Problem	Participants explained the district created multiple problems that they perceived.	N=12	N=8	Teachers’ Perception of Problems
Diverse Population	T2 described some of their students by saying, “in my high	N=28	N=9	

	school, we have students that are from....”				
Lack of Background Knowledge	T6 explained, “they can’t write a decent sentence to save their lives.”	N=15	N=5		
Lack of Collaboration	T9 said, “Im not sure what people use.”	N=11	N=4		
Lack of Confidence	T2 said “My fear is....I do struggle with...”	N=37	N=9		
Lack of Resources	T4 said, “I can’t get the texts as a Google doc.”	N=6	N=3		
Lack of SEL training	One teacher said, “Because of the relationship the ELL teachers had with their immersion students, they were able to...”	N=1	N=1		
Lack of Support	T4 said, “A lot of times, they sort of just sit there”	N=1	N=1		
Lack of Time	T8 said, “I can’t necessarily get to them in a 57-minute class.”	N=13	N=7		
Lack of Training	All participants explained where they felt they needed more training to support ELL students.	N=74	N=10		
Problem	All participants mentioned various problems they have with meeting the needs of ELL students.	N=66	N=10		
Problem with Training	T1 said, “we don’t know what we don’t know.”	N=21	N=2		

Appendix D Interview Protocol Alignment

The problem that will be addressed through this study is the need to understand teachers' perceptions of best practices to increase English language learner (ELL) achievement in reading and writing.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine teacher perceptions of best practices to support English language learners in improving their reading and writing in a heterogeneous high school classroom in a Mid-Atlantic school district.

The framework for this study will be Cummins's Model on Learners Language.

RQ1-Qualitative: What are high school teachers' perceptions of best practices for English language learners to learn reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?

RQ2-Qualitative: What are high school teachers' perceptions about their training and readiness to teach English language learners how to improve their reading and writing in a heterogeneous classroom?

Interview Questions:	Problem	Purpose	Framework	RQ1	RQ2
IQ1: Tell me your opinion of best practices teachers should use for English language learners to learn how to improve their reading.	X	X	X	X	
IQ2: Tell me about your opinion of best practices teachers should use for English language learners to learn how to improve their writing	X	X	X	X	
IQ3: Tell me about your opinion on scaffolds that have helped or hindered students in improving their ability to read.	X	X	X	X	
IQ 4: Tell me about your opinion on scaffolds that have helped or hindered students in improving their writing.	X	X	X	X	
IQ5: Describe the activities and training you engaged in to prepare you for your role of teaching ELL students on how to improve in their reading?	X	X	X		X
IQ6: Describe the activities and training you engaged in to prepare you for your role of teaching ELL students how to improve in their writing?	X	X	X		X
IQ7: Tell me your perceptions of your readiness to teach English language learners reading and writing.	X	X	X		X
IQ8: Tell me your perceptions of your readiness to teach English language learners writing after finishing your teacher preparatory program.	X	X	X		X
IQ9: Tell me about what additional supports you feel you need to improve in your readiness to improve the reading abilities of your ELL students.	X	X	X	X	X

IQ10: Tell me about what additional supports you feel you need to improve in your readiness to improve the writing abilities of your ELL students.	X	X	X	X	X
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