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Perceptions of Novice Elementary Teachers Working in Mainstream Classrooms With English Language Learner Students

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Cristin McCue

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2026

Abstract

Perceptions of Novice Elementary Teachers Working in Mainstream Classrooms

With English Language Learner Students

by

Cristin McCue

MS, Capella University, 2019

BA, Northern Illinois University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2026

Abstract

Research indicates preservice teacher training frequently does not foster the pedagogical and linguistic expertise required to support students developing English proficiency. The problem addressed through this study was that novice teachers do not have the skills and knowledge to meet the learning needs of English language learners (ELLs) in mainstream classrooms. Guided by the integrated collaborative learning approach, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine how novice teachers perceive the challenges of supporting ELLs in mainstream classrooms and the types of support they believe are necessary for student success. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 10 novice teachers who had three or fewer years of teaching experience and at least one year working with ELLs. Thematic analysis using open coding revealed five overarching themes: (a) challenges related to teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms; (b) instructional approaches used to support ELL learning; (c) collaboration and resource use; (d) professional learning needs; and (e) the role of school and district support systems. Teachers reported feeling underprepared, frequently relying on colleagues for guidance, and lacking access to clear instructional supports. Recommendations include expanding ELL-focused preparation in teacher education programs, providing sustained professional learning and mentoring, and further examining novice teacher experiences across varied educational settings. By strengthening equitable instructional practices for ELLs, improving teacher readiness, and supporting culturally responsive learning environments, ELL students are likely to experience greater success in the classroom leading to positive social change over time.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children. Your love, laughter, and strength carried me through every stage of this journey. You were my motivation on the hardest days and my reminder of why I kept going.

To my family, thank you for standing beside me throughout this process. Your patience, encouragement, and belief in me made this possible. This achievement reflects not only my effort, but the support and foundation you have always provided.

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To my family, thank you for standing by me during this journey. Your patience, encouragement, and understanding made it possible for me to keep moving forward. To my children, you continue to inspire me every day and remind me of the importance of persistence and purpose.

This milestone reflects not only my effort but also the support and encouragement I received along the way. I am sincerely thankful to everyone who contributed to this achievement.

Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Research Questions.....	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Nature of the Study.....	7
Definitions.....	8
Assumptions.....	8
Scope and Delimitations.....	9
Limitations.....	10
Significance.....	11
Summary.....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	15
Introduction.....	15
Literature Search Strategy.....	17
Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation.....	18
Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable.....	21
Challenges With Preparation-to-Practice Gap.....	23
Challenges Facing ELLs.....	24

Support For ELLs & Novice Teachers.....	25
Support for Novice Teachers Through Education.....	27
Practice-Based Teacher Education.....	29
Supporting Teacher Learning.....	30
Competencies for Novice Teachers.....	32
Teaching as a Practice.....	33
Teaching & Supporting ELLs.....	36
ELL Advocacy.....	37
Mainstream Teacher Preparation Programs in Higher Education.....	40
Summary and Conclusions.....	44
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	46
Research Design and Rationale.....	46
Central Phenomenon.....	47
Role of the Researcher.....	49
Methodology.....	50
Participant Selection.....	52
Instrumentation.....	52
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	53
Data Analysis Plan.....	56
Trustworthiness.....	60
Credibility.....	61
Transferability.....	61

Dependability	62
Confirmability.....	62
Ethical Procedures	63
Institutional Review Board	63
Treatment of Data	63
Justification for Incentives	64
Summary	64
Chapter 4: Results	65
Setting	65
Data Collection	66
Data Analysis	68
Results	71
Theme 1: Challenges of Teaching ELLs in Mainstream Classrooms	76
Theme 2: Strategies for Supporting ELLs’ Learning Outcomes	77
Theme 3: Collaboration and Resource Use	79
Theme 4: Professional Development and Training Needs.....	80
Theme 5: The Role of School and District Support.....	82
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	84
Credibility	84
Transferability.....	85
Dependability	85
Confirmability.....	85

Summary of Findings.....	86
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	88
Interpretation of the Findings.....	89
Findings Related to Research Question 1	89
Findings Related to Research Question 2	90
Integration With the ICLA Framework.....	90
Connection to the Literature	91
Limitations of the Study.....	92
Recommendations.....	93
Recommendations for Practice	93
Recommendations for Policy.....	94
Recommendations for Future Research	94
Implications.....	95
Implications for Practice.....	95
Implications for Policy.....	96
Implications for Social Change.....	96
Conclusion	97
References.....	99
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	113
Appendix B: Codebook.....	116

List of Tables

Table 1 <i>Participant Demographics</i>	72
Table 2 <i>Interview Summary by Participant</i>	73
Table 3 <i>Alignment of Themes and Subthemes With Research Questions</i>	74
Table 4 <i>Overview of Themes</i>	75
Table 5 <i>Conceptual Map of Themes and ICLA</i>	84

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Teachers strive to support student learning outcomes; however, research continues to indicate that many enter the classroom without adequate preparation to effectively teach English language learners (ELLs). Studies have shown that preservice training does not consistently provide the pedagogical and linguistic expertise required to support students developing English proficiency (Kiramba et al., 2022; Tulomana et al., 2023; Wissink & Starks, 2019). This gap is particularly concerning given that more than 76% of schools in the United States serve ELL populations, highlighting the widespread need for teachers to be equipped to meet these instructional demands (Wynne & Hadley, 2022). As a result, novice teachers are often expected to support ELLs in mainstream classrooms without sufficient preparation, underscoring the importance and relevance of this study. ELLs represent a heterogeneous population with diverse linguistic and academic needs, and many struggle to meet grade-level expectations in mainstream classrooms (O'Hara et al., 2020). Students who are still learning English often face greater difficulty meeting academic expectations, as these standards require advanced language skills across multiple subject areas. As a result, teachers must provide targeted linguistic and instructional supports. However, novice teachers frequently report feeling insufficiently prepared to address these needs effectively or to foster academic language development within general education settings. (O'Hara et al., 2020).

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to understand novice teachers' perspectives on the challenges of supporting ELLs and the resources needed to help these students meet academic expectations in general education settings. The literature review

in Chapter 2 will reveal current research that has continued to find novice teachers entering their mainstream classrooms feeling challenged and needing extra support when working with ELLs in this setting. The existing literature highlights the importance of further examining this issue. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study, including the background and problem statement, the purpose and research questions, the conceptual framework, and key methodological considerations such as definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance. Chapter 1 will conclude with a summary.

Background

Teachers, especially those new to the profession, often work with English language learners in general education settings. Despite this, national data suggest that many have not received adequate formal training for this responsibility. Only a small percentage of educators reported receiving extensive professional development focused on ELL instruction, highlighted a mismatch between classroom demands and teacher training (National Center for Education Statistics [NECS], 2002). This lack of preparation is particularly concerning given longstanding disparities in academic outcomes between students who are learning English and their English-proficient peers. (Moss & Puma, 1995).

As they enter the profession, novice teachers may lack confidence in their ability to effectively teach English language learners in mainstream classroom environments. Prior research has consistently indicated that many new educators feel insufficiently prepared during preservice training to support the academic and linguistic development

of these students (Meadows & Gutierrez, 2022). These preparation gaps affect both individual educators and the broader educational system. Federal requirements established in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) mandate that school systems ensure English language learners have equitable access to grade-level curriculum.

Research examining elementary teachers' differentiation practices for ELLs found that educators frequently reported uncertainty related to instructional planning, assessment, inclusive classroom practices, distinguishing language needs from learning challenges, and identifying effective entry points for support (Stairs-Davenport, 2021). Another study examined the effects of an undergraduate course focused on teaching ELLs that was required within an elementary education program. Findings suggested that participants who completed the course demonstrated increased understanding of ELL students and stronger support for their inclusion in school settings (Hutchinson, 2012). However, the specific challenges novice teachers experience, along with the supports required to meet the needs of ELLs in mainstream classrooms, are not yet well understood.

Providing effective support for beginning teachers is essential for developing a strong teaching workforce. Many novice educators start their careers with limited preparation for addressing the needs of ELLs and may lack sufficient understanding of how academic language develops in classroom contexts. Although preservice programs may introduce strategies for supporting ELLs, many beginning teachers report entering the classrooms without sufficient hands-on experience applying these approaches with students or guidance from experienced mentors (O'Hara et al., 2020). These limitations

suggest that novice teachers may require increased support to effectively teach ELLs, especially when opportunities to apply their knowledge in practice have been limited.

Problem Statement

The problem that was addressed through this study is that novice teachers do not have the skills and knowledge to meet the learning needs of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Researchers such as Deng et al. (2020) and Kim and Weng (2022) have reported that novice teachers felt inadequate when confronted with cultural challenges in the classroom.

When teaching ELLs, both novice and experienced educators are expected to support students in developing English proficiency while also meeting grade-level academic expectations (Deng et al., 2020). Although these expectations often reflect standardized views of learning that may not fully account for diverse ways of knowing (Alim et al., 2020), accountability systems across states continue to emphasize these outcomes. As a result, teachers must build the knowledge, instructional approaches, and reflective practices needed to meet these demands while also valuing and incorporating students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These combined expectations can influence how prepared novice teachers feel in their roles (Deng et al., 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of novice teachers about the challenges they face and the support needed to successfully meet the learning outcomes of ELLs in the mainstream classroom. Novice teachers often report difficulties supporting ELLs in general education classrooms due to limited knowledge

and instructional experience (Kim & Weng, 2022). These challenges can affect both teaching effectiveness and student learning. Together, these issues highlight a gap between preparation and classroom practice, particularly in meeting the needs of ELLs.

This study aims to explore the challenges novice teachers identify, as well as the types of support they perceive as necessary when working with ELLs in general education classrooms. Many novice teachers may enter the profession without targeted preparation or sufficient knowledge to effectively support this population. Wynne and Hadley (2022) stated that many novice teachers find themselves working with ELLs when entering their mainstream classrooms, which further supports the need for this study. This fact makes understanding the challenges faced and how best to support these novice teachers imperative to their success in working with ELLs to support their learning outcomes within their mainstream classrooms.

Research Questions

The gap between preparation and classroom demands indicates that novice teachers may experience difficulty meeting the learning needs of ELLs in general education settings. This study explores this issue through the perspectives and experiences of novice teachers currently working with ELLs. The following research questions are used to examine this problem:

- RQ 1: What challenges do novice teachers describe in helping mainstream ELLs meet their learning outcomes?
- RQ 2: What support do novice teachers describe as needed to assist them to help mainstream ELLs meet their learning outcomes?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the Integrated Collaborative Learning Approach (ICLA), which combines principles from two complementary perspectives on teaching and learning. One component derives from Britton's (1970) Collaborative Learning Approach, which emphasizes active participation and interaction among learners as a means of constructing knowledge. The second component reflects Eggen's and Kauchak (2012) Integrative Teaching Approach, which focuses on connecting instructional strategies across content areas to support deeper understanding (Zaib, 2020). Zaib (2020) synthesizes these perspectives into the ICLA framework, proposing that collaborative engagement and integrated instructional practices can support language development alongside academic learning.

This framework was selected for the study because ELLs in general education classrooms are expected to develop both academic understanding and English proficiency, which often requires coordinated instruction and opportunities for interaction. The ICLA framework informed the examination of novice teachers' experiences in supporting these students. It also shaped the development of the interview protocol by informing questions related to the challenges teachers encounter and the support they believe is necessary. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences addressing both the academic and language needs of ELLs, while the framework guided how these perspectives were interpreted. In this way, the ICLA supported a deeper understanding of how novice teachers view the challenges they face and the supports needed to effectively teach ELLs in general education settings.

Nature of the Study

This research used a qualitative approach. It is best to use this methodology when seeking to understand thoughts or experiences (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This type of research is typically used to answer questions regarding an experience, one's perceptions, or a viewpoint on a particular issue (Hammerberg et al., 2016). A qualitative methodology is appropriate for this study, as it examines novice teachers' perspectives on the challenges of working with ELLs and the support they need in general education classrooms.

A basic qualitative research design was selected to examine how participants understand and assign meaning to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). This approach is well suited for developing an in-depth understanding of complex issues. It was selected to examine novice teachers' perspectives on the challenges they encounter and the support they identify as necessary. The study focuses on a sample of novice teachers as the population of interest. The study was qualitative. Therefore, interviews with novice teachers explored their perceptions about facilitating learning outcomes for ELL students within mainstream classrooms.

This study gathered data through individual semistructured interviews with novice teachers employed in a Midwestern school district. Interviews were selected as the primary method to allow for an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives (Gill et al., 2008). The semistructured format supported consistency across interviews while also allowing participants to share their experiences in their own words (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). With participants' consent, all interviews were audio recorded and later

transcribed. The transcripts were then imported into NVivo 12 for analysis and used to identify patterns and themes.

Definitions

According to their use in this study, unfamiliar terms are defined in this section. These defined terms informed this research study. They are standardized terms used in the educational profession.

English language learners (ELLs): Students who speak a primary language other than English and are developing proficiency in English, which may affect their ability to fully engage in academic instruction without additional language support (Lee et al., 2022).

Novice teachers: Teachers with fewer than three years of professional teaching experience (Shohani et al., 2015).

Mainstream classroom: A general education setting where students with varied learning needs, including English language learners, are taught together using the standard curriculum rather than separate or specialized programs (Todorov et al., 2021).

Assumptions

Assumptions are stipulated propositions that must be accepted as accurate for research to be meaningful, but they cannot be verified by demonstration (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study is based on the assumption that participants will provide truthful and accurate responses throughout the interview process. The novice teachers would not omit any information regarding challenges they faced working with ELLs, even if they believed what they were currently doing was ineffective. The novice teachers

would also not omit any support they believed was needed, even if this support was not currently being offered or they believed it would not be offered in the near future. This assumption was necessary because the research questions required exploring participants' perceptions, and self-report was the only available source of information about those perceptions. It was also the assumption that I would hold personal biases in check and not influence the findings.

This study is further based on the assumption that thorough descriptions of the setting, participants, and data will enable readers to assess the extent to which the findings may be transferable to other contexts.. This will be done in Chapters 3 and 4. This assumption was necessary because the researcher cannot predict the contexts in which the findings may be applied and, therefore, cannot pre-determine their transferability.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the boundaries of a study that are intentionally defined by the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the setting is limited to a single school district in the Midwestern United States. Focusing on one district may limit the extent to which the findings can be applied to other educational contexts. This setting was selected due to accessibility and its alignment with the purpose of examining novice teachers' perspectives within a district environment.

The scope of the study centers specifically on the challenges novice teachers experience and the support they identify as necessary when working with ELLs. As a result, the findings are not intended to address other areas of teacher development. This

focus is supported by prior research indicating that novice teachers often encounter difficulties when working with English language learners due to limited preparation and experience (Kim & Weng, 2022).

The population for this study includes novice teachers within the selected district, defined as those with three or fewer years of teaching experience. Teachers in specialized English language learner roles were not included, even if they met the experience criteria. This decision may limit the transferability of the findings to other contexts, including different school districts, instructional programs, and stakeholder groups such as preservice teachers or administrators. However, novice teachers in general education settings were expected to provide relevant insights based on their direct classroom experiences. These perspectives align with existing research highlighting the challenges novice teachers face and the support needed to effectively teach English language learners in mainstream classrooms (Wynne & Hadley, 2022).

Limitations

Limitations refer to elements of a study's design or methodology that may influence how the findings are interpreted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The qualitative methodological approach is unable to yield objective findings that are valid independently of the perspectives in which they are grounded, that can be confidently generalized from a sample to a population, or that ensure transferability to other populations and settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Generalizability and objectivity were not objectives in this study because the findings' potential value depends on their grounding in specific perspectives within a specific context.

Researcher bias may have arisen due to my background as an elementary teacher. Although my current classroom setting may not always involve ELLs, my past experiences include working with them, and there is a possibility that I may do so again in the future. This potential connection to ELLs could have introduced bias into my research perspective. To mitigate potential researcher bias stemming from my role as an elementary teacher, I sought to engage in reflective journaling.

This practice provided a structured means for me to regularly assess and acknowledge my perspectives, helping to ensure a more objective and nuanced approach to my research. The qualitative methodological approach entails researcher bias' potential to influence the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researcher bias can influence confirmability, defined as the degree to ensure that the findings are grounded in participants' perspectives rather than shaped by the researcher's interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). As a strategy to support this, participants were invited to review their transcripts to confirm accuracy.

Significance

Existing research has not fully examined the specific challenges novice teachers face or the types of support they need when working with ELLs in general education classrooms (Kim & Weng, 2022). This study contributes to that area by providing insights that may inform educators and decision-makers in both K-12 and higher education settings.. According to Gleeson (2022), this gap has been present for decades, and little has changed. Limited progress in this area highlights the need to better understand how novice teachers support ELLs in general education classrooms. This

study aims to contribute to that understanding by examining the strategies teachers use, the challenges they encounter, and the support they identify as necessary. By focusing on these experiences, the study provides insight into the disconnect between classroom demands and teacher preparation. The findings are intended to offer practical and research-based perspectives that may inform future work in this area. Understanding these challenges can inform administrators of interventions that may be put into place to improve outcomes.

The results of this study can assist faculty at the K–12 level in planning, adopting new teaching strategies, activities, and means of assessments. Both students and teachers can benefit from a well-planned, student-centered curriculum with learning activities designed to benefit all students at their level and ability (O’Hara et al., 2020). The study can also benefit teacher educators in higher education by having them evaluate their current knowledge and practice. They can reflect on whether their knowledge is up-to-date and following current educational trends to educate teachers.

This study's findings may have positive social change implications, as evidenced in more ELLs meeting their learning outcomes while enrolled in a mainstream classroom. This could be achieved by providing those responsible for teacher preparation with a clearer understanding of the challenges novice teachers face when working with ELLs in general education classrooms. Stakeholders and administration at both the higher education and K–12 levels can be informed of any support needed by novice teachers to increase the learning outcomes for ELLs within mainstream classrooms.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the topic, purpose, and nature of the proposed study.

Although increasing numbers of ELLs are educated in mainstream classrooms, research indicates that novice teachers often face significant challenges in meeting these students' academic and linguistic needs. Existing literature identifies gaps in understanding both the specific difficulties novice teachers encounter and the types of support required to address them effectively (Kim & Weng, 2022; Meadows & Gutierrez, 2022; O'Hara et al., 2020; Wynne & Hadley, 2022). Addressing this practice gap is essential given the growing population of ELLs served in general education settings (Wynne & Hadley, 2022).

The research problem addressed the practice gap by exploring novice teachers' perceptions of the challenges and support needed to meet the learning needs to ELLs within mainstream classrooms. Findings from this study may inform teacher education programs by highlighting practices that support curriculum development, instructional decision-making, and preparation for working with ELLs. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to examine novice teachers' perspectives on the challenges they experience and the support they identify as necessary when working with English language learners in general education classrooms in the Midwestern United States.

Potential implications for positive social change include more ELLs meeting their learning outcomes while enrolled in a mainstream classroom. At the school level, improved outcomes for ELLs may contribute to more inclusive learning environments where students from diverse backgrounds learn together and develop greater cultural

awareness and understanding. Also at the school level, ELL success improves the overall academic performance of schools, which can enhance the overall reputation of the institution. On a community level, social change can be seen by inclusive schools serving as community hubs that reflect values of inclusion, leading to stronger, more harmonious communities. Additionally, at this level, ELLs succeeding academically can contribute to a more educated workforce and, in turn, attract businesses and investments to the community. On a societal level, a better educated workforce contributes to a more competitive and innovative society. Addressing this issue may involve increasing awareness within teacher preparation programs of the challenges novice teachers face when working with ELLs. In addition, stakeholders and administrators in both K–12 and higher education settings may benefit from a clearer understanding of the types of support novice teachers need to effectively support ELLs. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical and empirical literature related to the study's focus, including the research problem and the preparation-to-practice gap. It also examines prior studies to support the selection of the study's methodology, design, and procedures.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter reviews existing literature related to the challenges novice teachers come across when supporting ELLs in mainstream classrooms. With a growing population of English language learners in U.S. schools, general education teachers are more frequently responsible for supporting students whose success depends on both academic content and language development. Prior research suggests that many novice teachers feel underprepared for these responsibilities and may lack the specialized knowledge needed to effectively support ELLs (Wissink & Starks, 2019; Wynne and Hadley, 2022). The scope of the issue is reflected in national data showing that more than 76% of U.S. school enroll ELLs (Wynne & Hadley, 2022).

Earlier survey data point to a disconnect between classroom responsibilities and teacher preparation. Although many teachers report working with ELLs, relatively few have received meaningful professional development in this area. For example, national data suggest that just over one in ten teachers engaged in more than eight hours of professional development focused on supporting ELLs (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2002). Together, these findings suggest an ongoing gap between expectations placed on novice teachers and the preparation they receive.

A review of the literature highlights ongoing concerns regarding how well novice teachers are prepared to support ELLs in general education classrooms. Multiple studies indicate that new teachers often feel underprepared to address the academic and language needs of this population (O'Hara et al., 2020). This concern has persisted over time, with

research continuing to show that preservice preparation does not always equip teachers with the skills needed to effectively support ELLs (Meadows & Gutierrez, 2022).

For example, one study examining elementary teachers' approaches to differentiation found that educators frequently reported uncertainty related to instructional planning, assessment, classroom community building, distinguishing language differences from potential learning difficulties, and identifying appropriate starting points for supporting ELLs (Stairs-Davenport, 2021). In contrast, research examining targeted coursework in teacher preparation programs suggests that structured learning experiences can improve teacher readiness. Preservice teachers who completed coursework focused on ELL instruction demonstrated increased knowledge, greater awareness of linguistic diversity, and stronger support for these students in school settings (Hutchinson, 2012).

Although such findings point to the value of targeted preparation, more recent research indicates that a gap between preparation and classroom practice remains. Many novice teachers continue to report feeling insufficiently prepared to meet the academic and linguistic demands of ELLs as they enter the profession (Meadows & Gutierrez, 2022).

The following sections examine the preparation-to-practice gap, with a focus on the challenges novice teachers face in meeting the needs of ELLs in general education classrooms. The chapter also introduces the conceptual framework that guides the study and explains its relevance to the research problem and purpose. In addition, I will attempt to establish the relevance of the study's goal to help solve the educational issues. I will

define the concept and present evidence showing how other researchers have studied it. There will be discussions on relevant seminal research related to the concept and synthesis of research studies relating to the research questions.

Literature Search Strategy

The databases and search engines used for collecting relevant literature for this research included Google Scholar, EBSCO Host, ERIC, SAGE, ProQuest, and Science Direct. The key terms used alone and the search included: ELLs, English Language Learners, ESL, English as a second language, novice teachers, new teachers, beginning teachers, mainstream classroom. Some other terms used were: ESL teaching strategies, ESL teaching methods, ELL teaching strategies, teacher preservice programs, teaching methods, No Child Left Behind, teaching theories. The key search terms used included ELLs, English Language Learners, novice teachers, teacher preservice programs, teaching methods. The initial ProQuest search for “ELL, novice teachers, mainstream classrooms” returned more than 1000 peer-reviewed journals for the past five years.

Peer-reviewed journals and relevant articles specific to the topic of "Teacher Self-Efficacy" and “Culturally Responsive Teaching” were more widely available from the past five years. The literature on novice teacher preparation and ELL outcomes required additional database searches using more targeted Boolean keywords to locate relevant peer-reviewed studies. The most effective interval for the inclusion of peer-reviewed journals for this literature review was across the past five years (2019-2023) to provide detailed information regarding the study topic.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

This study aims to better understand novice teachers' perspectives on the challenges they encounter and the support they identify as necessary when working with ELLs in general education classrooms. The study is grounded in Britton's (1970) Collaborative Learning Approach (CLA) and Kauchak and Eggen's (2012) Integrative Teaching Approach (ITA), which together provide the theoretical foundation.

The Collaborative Learning Approach views learning as an active and socially constructed process in which interaction and dialogue play a central role. Within this framework, students engage with one another to exchange ideas, solve problems, and build shared understanding. Instructional practices aligned with this approach encourage participation, collaboration, and the co-construction of knowledge. Through these interactions, learners are able to deepen their understanding and work toward shared academic goals.

This research will also implore Eggen and Kauchak's (2012) ITA as a theoretical foundation, which is a pedagogical strategy that combines various teaching methods to enhance student learning. The approach involves integrating different learning styles, teaching techniques, and instructional materials to create a comprehensive and inclusive learning experience, which is beneficial to ELL students (Eggen & Kauchak, 2012). This approach focuses on linking new information to students' prior knowledge and applying learning to authentic situations to support comprehension of challenging material. This approach fosters meaningful student engagement and helps learners develop a deeper

grasp of content as well as the skills required for academic success (Eggen & Kauchak 2012).

The Collaborative Learning Approach and the Integrative Teaching Approach are combined within the Integrated Collaborative Learning Approach (ICLA), which serves as the conceptual framework for this study (Zaib, 2020). This framework emphasizes collaborative learning and shared engagement, where students interact with both peers and teachers to support their understanding. Within ICLA, learning is designed to engage students as active contributors, encouraging them to take ownership of their learning process. They are expected to participate in group discussions and activities, engage in critical thinking, and reflect on their learning experience. The approach also incorporates social and emotional dimensions of learning by supporting students' interpersonal awareness and ability to interact effectively with others. In addition, it emphasizes the creation of supportive classroom communities that encourage participation, collaborations, and meaningful learning experiences (Zaib, 2020).

However, students who are learning academic content in a new language encounter multiple academic, linguistic, and social demands as they navigate school environments. The Integrated Collaborative Learning Approach (ICLA) draws on two complimentary theoretical perspectives in linguistics and education to address these challenges, particularly for ELLs (Zaib, 2020). ICLA is a teaching strategy that focuses on collaboration and integration of subject areas to enhance learning outcomes for ELLs. This model emphasizes a learner-centered approach that encourages ongoing student engagement throughout instruction. The ICLA incorporates a range of instructional

strategies, including cooperative learning, project-based activities, and problem-solving tasks, to support both language development and content learning for ELLs. Research suggests that the use of ICLA can contribute meaningfully to learning in classrooms that include ELLs (Zaib, 2020).

When implementing ICLA with ELLs, teachers focus on creating inclusive classroom environments that acknowledge students' varied linguistic and cultural experiences (Nouman, 2020). Instruction typically incorporates scaffolding to support both content understanding and language development, while also providing opportunities for students to apply English in authentic contexts. Overall, the ICLA is an effective teaching strategy for ELLs. It helps them develop their language skills while also learning content, promotes collaboration and active participation, and fosters a supportive and inclusive classroom environment to help ELLs meet their learning outcomes (Zaib, 2020).

The ICLA framework supports the examination of novice teachers' perspectives on the challenges of working with ELLs in mainstream classrooms. This framework also supports an examination of how novice teachers perceive challenges related to the preparation-to-practice gap and how teacher education programs can better support them when working with ELLs in mainstream classrooms. The ICLA aligns with this focus by offering a structure for understanding the types of support novice teachers may need as they navigate these challenges and work to support ELLs.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

The literature search found a practice gap in the teaching discipline. Kiramba et al. (2022) stated that there is evidence that preservice training does not always prepare teachers for various areas of practice, including working with ELLs to reach their learning outcomes within mainstream classrooms. Existing research suggests that relatively little attention has been given to how prepared mainstream preservice teachers feel when working with ELLs (Fu & Wang, 2021). At the same time, the number of ELLs in U.S. schools remains substantial, with approximately 4.9 million students identified in 2016, and the majority of schools serving this population (Hu et al., 2021; Wynne & Hadley, 2022). Despite this widespread presence, many teachers report limited preparation for working with ELLs. National survey data indicate that while a significant portion of teachers have ELLs in their classrooms, only a small percentage have participated in extended professional development focused on this area, with just 12.5% reporting more than eight hours of training (NCES, 2002). Research also emphasizes that effectively supporting ELLs requires specialized knowledge (Wissink & Starks, 2019). However, many teachers, particularly those new to the profession, enter classrooms without sufficient preparation or experience, even though they are expected to work with this student population (Wynne & Hadley, 2022).

Learning for ELLs involves acquiring English proficiency alongside academic knowledge, a dual process that can be particularly demanding. However, the current state of instructional affairs for ELLs within the prevailing teacher preparation context is unsustainable. It is unreasonable to expect teachers to implement strategies they have not

been trained in. Scholars have identified a preparation-to-practice gap, highlighting the disparity between evidence-based practices and actual instructional methods employed in schools. Despite the presence of ELLs in many regular classrooms, a mere 29% of teachers with ELLs have received targeted professional development to enhance their instruction for this student population (Babinski et al., 2018).

Research points to a disconnect between how preservice programs prepare teachers to work with ELLs and the realities novice teachers encounter in general education classrooms. Many new teachers report feeling unprepared to effectively support ELLs as they begin their careers. This concern has been documented consistently over time, with studies indicating that preservice training does not always provide the knowledge and skills needed to meet the needs of this student population (Meadows & Gutierrez, 2022). These gaps in preparation can affect not only teachers but also the students they serve, as well as the broader school system. In the United States, school districts are required to ensure that ELLs have meaningful access to grade-level curriculum, a responsibility established in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974).

The literature highlights both the challenges novice teachers encounter and the types of support they need when working with ELLs in general education classrooms. In one study, Stairs-Davenport (2021) examined how elementary teachers approached instructional differentiation for multilingual learners and found that many educators reported uncertainty across several areas, including lesson planning, assessment practices, classroom environment, distinguishing language needs from learning difficulties, and identifying appropriate starting points for instruction. Similarly, Kiramba et al. (2022)

noted that novice teachers often struggle to effectively scaffold instruction for ELLs, suggesting a continued need for targeted support and preparation in this area.

Challenges With Preparation-to-Practice Gap

The preparation-to-practice gap has not been adequately addressed over the years. Hutchinson (2012) stated that the preparation-to-practice gap is not a new phenomenon and was discussed, debated, and pushed aside in some ways. Concerns about teacher preparedness for working with ELLs are consistently reflected in the literature. Hutchinson (2012) noted ongoing questions about whether teachers are adequately equipped to support ELLs in meeting academic expectations. Using quantitative methods, Garver et al. (2018) examined mainstream teachers' readiness and found that many lacked the specialized preparation needed to effectively teach this population. In response to these gaps, Wissink and Stark (2019) emphasized the importance of strengthening teacher education programs by incorporating targeted coursework focused on instructional strategies for ELLs, second-language development, and content-specific approaches that support multilingual learners in general education settings.

Deng et al. (2021) highlighted persistent challenges in preparing teachers to support multilingual learners effectively. Their findings suggested that teachers reported greater confidence when they had engaged in coursework focused on multilingual education, received structured support during their initial year of teaching, and gained direct experience working with multilingual students. These findings reinforce the importance of both preparation and early-career support in shaping teachers' readiness. Despite these efforts, the literature consistently indicates that many novice teachers

continue to feel insufficiently prepared to meet the academic and linguistic needs of ELLs in general education classrooms (Hutchinson, 2012; Garver et al., 2018; Wissink & Starks, 2019; Deng et al., 2021; Kiramba et al., 2022).

Challenges Facing ELLs

ELLs comprise a diverse student population with varied linguistic backgrounds, prior educational experiences, and academic needs. Many face challenges in meeting grade-level expectations, particularly as academic standards increasingly demand complex language use across content areas (Coady, 2020; O'Hara et al., 2020). At the same time, federal accountability policies, including the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), have intensified expectations for student performance on standardized assessments. These policy demands can constrain instructional flexibility and create additional challenges for teachers working to support ELLs in general education classrooms (Fu & Weng, 2023).

Federal education policies, including the NCLB and the ESSA, have played a significant role in shaping the educational experiences of ELLs in the United States. These policies have often been critiqued for prioritizing standardized assessment outcomes without fully accounting for the linguistic and academic needs of multilingual students. Under NCLB, schools were required to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a measure based on student performance on standardized tests, which placed additional accountability pressures on educators working with diverse learners. This led to a narrow focus on test preparation and a neglect of other important aspects of education, such as language development and cultural understanding (Coady, 2020; Kim

& Weng, 2022). ELLs, who often struggle with standardized tests due to language barriers, were particularly disadvantaged under this policy. ESSA, enacted in 2015 as a replacement for NCLB, introduced changes intended to better support ELLs, including requirements for states to implement English language proficiency standards and provide appropriate testing accommodations. Despite these adjustments, concerns remain that the policy continues to prioritize standardized assessment outcomes over more comprehensive supports for multilingual students. In particular, areas such as access to high-quality bilingual instruction and culturally responsive teaching practices are not fully addressed, leaving ongoing challenges for educators working with ELLs in general education settings (Coady, 2020; O'Hara et al., 2020).

Academic standards increasingly require students to use sophisticated language in subject-specific ways, which places additional demands on learners who are still developing English proficiency. As a result, teachers must provide targeted linguistic support. However, many novice educators report feeling insufficiently prepared to address ELLs' academic needs or to promote advanced language development within general education classrooms (O'Hara et al., 2020). These findings highlight the need for additional support to help novice teachers effectively meet the learning needs of ELLs.

Support For ELLs & Novice Teachers

One study by Hutchinson (2012) examined how participation in a required undergraduate course focused on ELL instruction affected preservice teachers in an elementary education program. Findings from this study suggested that novice teachers who completed additional coursework demonstrated increased knowledge of ELLs,

greater acceptance of linguistic diversity, and stronger support for these students within school settings. These outcomes point to the potential value of strengthening preservice preparation programs to better equip novice teachers for working with ELLs in general education classrooms. However, important questions remain regarding the specific challenges novice teachers encounter and the types of support needed to effectively address the learning needs of ELLs. Further investigation may help clarify these areas and inform more targeted approaches to teacher preparation.

Support for novice teacher learning is imperative to establishing quality professionals. Hayden and Gratteau-Zinnel (2019) conducted a study based on the construct of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), a gold standard for teaching practice since the 1980s. Early-career teachers often require structured guidance and mentorship, as many of the practical demands of teaching can only be fully understood through classroom experience. The study found mentoring support to be beneficial as a means of aiding novice teachers in being successful and helping to fill the practice gap.

Horn and Kane (2019) explored how workplace conversations among teachers can contribute to professional learning. Using sociolinguistic and interaction analysis, they examined how teachers make sense of instructional challenges through their interactions with colleagues. Their findings suggest the value of a shared “professional language” that supports educators in collaboratively identifying and addressing pedagogical problems.

Findings from another study suggest that co-teaching can be an effective approach for supporting the full participation of ELLs in general education elementary classrooms

(Bauler & Kang, 2020). In this study a mainstream teacher and an ESL teacher worked together to both instruct and create lesson plans for the elementary students. This study showed potential as a way forward to help novice teachers and mainstream teachers alike feel confident in supporting ELLs in reaching their learning outcomes.

Additionally, research by Turner et al. (2021) has indicated that teachers often view the linguistic diversity of students as a hurdle that needs to be overcome for them to attain their educational objectives. While some teachers express positive views toward linguistic diversity, they do not always view students' home languages as assets that can support learning. This study lends itself to the need for additional education of educators when working with ELLs.

Support for Novice Teachers Through Education

Kidwell (2019) investigated how novice teachers in a teacher education program developed an understanding of cultural factors and applied this knowledge when working with ELLs. The findings indicated that participants had limited opportunities to examine the role of culture in teaching and reported infrequently incorporating cultural considerations into their instructional practices. These results point to gaps in how preservice programs prepare teachers to meet the needs of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Consequently, novice teachers may begin their careers without the necessary knowledge, skills, or cultural awareness to fully support English language learners in meeting academic expectations.

Heineke et al. (2018) examined a university-based teacher preparation program designed to equip candidates to work with the expanding population of ELLs in U.S.

schools. The study drew on multiple data sources, including program artifacts, surveys, and interviews with participants representing different licensure areas. Findings were used to evaluate how features of the field-based program influenced candidates' development during preparation and their transition into their first year of teaching. The findings have implications for universities in terms of utilizing field-based teacher education to effectively equip prospective teachers for the challenges of teaching in diverse classrooms (Heineke et al., 2018). The study's results emphasize the need for specialized education in preservice programs to support learning outcomes when working with ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

Lindahl (2018) examined novice teachers' understanding of Teacher Language Awareness, which refers to a teacher's ability to use language effectively in instruction and support students' language development. As the population of ELLs in K–12 settings continues to grow, this competency has become increasingly important for classroom teachers. Analysis of preservice teachers' reflections revealed concerns about preparedness, including limited confidence in supporting language development, misconceptions about language proficiency, and uncertainty about working with linguistically diverse students. These findings indicate that teacher education programs may not sufficiently develop the linguistic knowledge and instructional skills needed to effectively support ELLs. Similarly, prior research has emphasized the importance of specialized preparation within preservice programs to help novice teachers address both the academic and language-related needs of ELL students in general education classrooms (Babinski et al., 2018; Dubetz & Collett, 2019; Garver et al., 2018; Karas &

Faez, 2020; Pavlak & Cavender, 2019; Villegas et al., 2018). Taken together, this body of literature points to an ongoing disconnect between teacher preparation and classroom practice that continues to influence teachers' ability to support linguistically diverse learners.

Practice-Based Teacher Education

Practice-based reforms can take multiple forms, including changes to program structure, curriculum design, and instructional practices (Hauser & Kavanagh, 2019). Structural reforms involve relocating methods courses to K-12 schools and facilitating fieldwork for novice teachers under the guidance of teacher educators. Teacher preparation programs have implemented a range of strategies to better prepare novice teachers for the classroom. In some cases, this includes expanding clinical experiences through extended field placements or year-long residency models, where candidates collaborate closely with a mentor teacher in a single classroom setting (Hauser & Kavanagh, 2019). Others have implemented practice-based reforms that emphasize core teaching practices and align coursework around those competencies (Grossman et al., 2019).

Pedagogical reforms within practice-based teacher education are often the most prevalent, primarily due to their flexibility in implementation by individual teacher educators without necessitating program-wide changes. Practice-based teacher education pedagogy involves an instructional approach that centers on connecting the learning experiences of preservice teachers to teaching episodes or commonly utilized teaching artifacts, such as lesson plans or student work samples (Hauser & Kavanagh, 2019). This

was referred to as pedagogies of enactment. Pedagogies of enactment refer to pedagogical strategies employed in teacher preparation, focusing on the cultivation of clinical skills and craftsmanship among novice teachers. These approaches involve deliberate practice wherein teachers engage in progressive teaching simulations that guide their skill development and refinement. In contrast, pedagogies of investigation extend beyond enactment-focused approaches by emphasizing the development of novices' content knowledge and engaging them in discussions centered on research related to teaching and learning (Kavanagh & Danielson, 2019). For teachers to collaborate effectively in enhancing their instruction, the presence of a shared language becomes indispensable, enabling them to analyze and reflect upon their classroom practices (Zenkov et al., 2023).

Practice-based teacher education emphasizes the need for novice teachers to enter the classroom with the knowledge and skills required to support student learning.. As the studies above point out, such specialized education may require additional fieldwork or residencies during teacher education programs. The additional hands-on education during the teacher's higher education would allow the novice teacher to enter their mainstream classroom with additional experience and expertise of a more seasoned educator. This additional experience could help the novice teacher aid the students, specifically the ELLs, in meeting their learning outcomes.

Supporting Teacher Learning

Ambitious teaching involves substantial social and cognitive demands, requiring teachers to manage complex classroom interactions while supporting students in

engaging with rigorous content and disciplinary practices. The teacher is confronted with multiple, sometimes conflicting, and often uncertain demands that necessitate careful management. To cultivate the capacity to effectively respond to students' thinking in real-time, teachers require learning experiences that integrate declarative knowledge with contextual judgment and reasoning. Together, these elements help teachers develop the skills needed to apply a range of instructional strategies with clear instructional goals (Gibbons et al., 2021).

Research suggests that practice-embedded professional learning designs, implemented in both preservice and in-service contexts, offer teachers meaningful opportunities to refine and strengthen these skills. Gibbons et al. (2021) used practice-embedded settings in their research and found they distinguish themselves from other forms of professional learning that typically occur outside the presence of students and rely on classroom materials. In practice-embedded settings, teachers participate in authentic interactions with individual learners while collaboratively reflecting on and testing targeted instructional strategies. Through this process, they examine instructional outcomes, pose new questions, and support students in developing a deeper understanding of disciplinary concepts. The practice-embedded approaches examined in this study incorporated a structured learning cycle designed to guide teachers in exploring and applying ambitious teaching practices (Gibbons et al., 2021).

Research has examined the learning outcomes of teachers participating in practice-embedded contexts. Boz and Ari (2020) discovered that pre-service teachers enhanced their ability to clearly express instructional goals, intentionally facilitate

discussions to achieve those goals, and take ownership of their progress in pursuing those goals. Similarly, Kavanagh et al. (2020) found that novice teachers benefited from structured support that helped them identify instructional challenges, consider alternative teaching approaches, and make informed decisions, particularly in facilitating classroom discussions. These findings suggest that teacher educators play an important role in preparing preservice teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to support ELLs effectively in general education classrooms.

Competencies for Novice Teachers

Novice teachers often begin their careers without adequate preparation to support ELLs. Although they may have some exposure to academic language development and instructional accommodations, this knowledge is often limited and not reinforced through practice. Opportunities to apply these skills in real classroom settings, especially with mentorship, are frequently insufficient (O'Hara et al., 2020). Novice teachers, thus, may require expanded support working with ELLs to help them reach their learning outcomes in the mainstream classroom based on their limited knowledge and application opportunities.

ELLs are often considered to be the most vulnerable student population in our classrooms today. Yet there continues to be a disconnect between the growing number of students in mainstream classrooms and how prepared their novice teachers feel to support their instruction (LaCroix et al., 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2010). Andrews et al. (2021) highlighted recommendations from scholars in teacher education that emphasize integrating antiracist pedagogy, increasing the recruitment and support of diverse faculty,

and promoting equity-focused research to address systemic inequities. This approach seeks to improve educational experiences for underserved learners while also supporting the broader networks that influence their academic success.

Recent research by Brown et al. (2020) emphasizes that teacher preparation programs do not always fully reflect the practical demands candidates encounter once they begin working in PreK-12 classrooms. Research suggests that job-embedded professional development, implemented within teachers' classrooms, can promote a shared sense of responsibility among educators for effectively supporting ELLs (Von Esch, 2021). Teacher preparation programs that emphasize hands-on instructional practice can better equip candidates for the demands of their initial teaching positions. Russell (2022) found that providing practice-based preparation opportunities can positively influence novice teachers' instructional outcomes during their first year of teaching.

Teaching as a Practice

In educational research, the term "practice" is sometimes contrasted with theory and used to describe observable skills or routines without considering the broader purposes and contexts that shape them. However, some scholars define practice more expansively. Drawing in sociocultural perspectives, teaching practice can be understood as a shared activity that integrates knowledge and action and develops through participation within professional communities (Kavanagh et al., 2020). Learning a profession such as teaching involves adopting ways of working that have evolved over time rather than creating entirely individual approaches (Grossman et al., 2019). From this perspective, effective professional practice requires more than performing prescribed

tasks; it involves making informed decisions within complex instructional situations that vary according to context (Kavanagh et al., 2020).

Inagaki and Hatano (1987) Describe skilled performance as “adaptive expertise”, distinguishing it from “routine expertise”, which involves the consistent execution of familiar tasks without modification. Adaptive expertise, by contrast, required flexible thinking and the ability to make informed decisions in response to changing situations. In instructional contexts, expert teachers must continually adjust their approaches as students’ understanding evolves during lessons. Achieving this level of responsiveness depends on sustained learning, reflection, and opportunities to apply knowledge in varied contexts. Although research has examined differences between adaptive and routine expertise, comparatively little attention has been given to how teacher preparation programs can cultivate adaptability rather than reliance on fixed instructional routines (Kavanagh et al., 2020).

Additionally, Philip (2019) argued that teacher education should place greater emphasis on the improvisational aspects of teaching, which are often overlooked in more rigid, practice-based approaches that narrowly define readiness as being “learner ready on day one.” Scholars examining practice-oriented teacher education have also highlighted the relational dimensions of teaching, emphasizing that effective instruction involves more than the application of discrete skills. From this perspective, teaching is shaped by factors such as identity, race, and language, which influence interactions between teachers, students, and families. Accordingly, novice teachers may begin by developing foundational instructional practices and then refine these approaches over time as they

gain experience working with diverse learners and adapt their communication in culturally responsive ways (Philip, 2019). Taken together, these perspectives underscore the importance of preservice preparation that equips teachers with both instructional and relational competencies needed to support ELLs in general education classrooms.

Conceptualizations of the relational dimensions of teaching risk oversimplifying the complexity of classroom interactions when reduced to generalized assumptions about student groups. Instead, relational teaching requires ongoing critical reflection on teachers' positionality, the beliefs that shape perceptions of difference, and the broader social and historical contexts that influence classroom dynamics. Effective teaching involves recognizing how identity, language, and power shape interactions, while valuing students' experiences and fostering inclusive learning environments. Practice-based approaches that incorporate elements of improvisation may support teachers in developing these relational competencies (Philip, 2019).

Reisman et al. (2019) contributed to this area of research by examining how novice teachers enact discussion-based instructional practices following practice-based preparation in their methods courses. Although prior scholarship has explored the use of methods instruction to analyze teaching practice, there is limited empirical evidence on how candidates implement these approaches in real classroom settings. Their study investigated how an instructional focus on facilitating discussion was integrated into field placements and how novice teachers applied these strategies with students. The findings indicated that, with appropriate preparation and support, novice teachers were able to

facilitate text-based discussions effectively, despite the complexity of this instructional practice (Reisman et al., 2019).

Another study by Kavanagh et al. (2020) spoke to this practice-based approach and were optimistic about the shift towards practice-based teacher education as it offers potential for preparing teachers capable of designing and facilitating student-centered instruction. However, without detailed examples of practice-based teacher education that prioritize responsiveness, there is a risk of repeating past mistakes by viewing teachers solely as technicians rather than adaptive experts entrusted with intricate and swift decision-making within complex educational environments. Teaching is a multifaceted and interdependent profession that demands quick decision-making when teachers encounter pedagogical challenges in real-time. Ultimately, teacher educators aim to cultivate adaptive expertise in candidates, enabling them to make informed decisions and engage in meaningful interactions during daily instructional practices (Schutz et al., 2019).

Teaching & Supporting ELLs

Kibler et al., (2018) examined instructional practices and peer interactions in mainstream classrooms that included both ELLs and non-ELL students. Their findings suggest that teachers in classrooms with higher levels of integration emphasized inclusive practices, such as recognizing students as individuals, promoting collaboration, and encouraging active participation. These approaches were associated with classroom environments that supported social interaction, academic engagement, and language development. In contrast, classrooms with lower levels of integration demonstrated fewer

opportunities for meaningful peer interaction. The study emphasizes the role of teachers in shaping classroom communities that support learning for all students, including those from linguistically diverse backgrounds. These findings point to the importance of preparing novice teachers with strategies to create inclusive and supportive learning environments for ELLs.

Another study by Miller et al. (2023) uncovered that many of the strategies used to help ELLs in the classroom do not always have to be ELL specific. These instructional approaches are likely to be embraced not only by general education students but also by students with diverse learning needs and varying learning styles. While it is important to recognize that these strategies may not be applicable in every lesson, the overarching objective is to optimize learning outcomes for every individual student within the classroom setting. Thus, learning these strategies in higher education programs seems to be a win-win for all involved on numerous levels (Miller et al., 2023).

Despite research indicating that many teachers feel inadequately prepared to work with ELLs, this issue has significant implications for equity and access in ELL education. Insufficient preparation in ELL instruction can lead to low expectations for ELLs' participation and achievement, as well as misconceptions about their prior knowledge and language use (Hopkins et al., 2019). These low expectations and misconceptions often influence teachers' practices, resulting in negative effects on ELLs' progress.

ELL Advocacy

One of the roles of teachers working with ELLs, tasked with facilitating the academic achievement of emergent bilingual students, extends beyond the mere

implementation of effective language instruction strategies. In addition to addressing linguistic development, these teachers must also advocate for the equitable educational opportunities of emergent bilinguals who often face barriers in public schools (Reynolds et al., 2024). This entails actively monitoring and addressing disparities, recognizing, and valuing students' linguistic and cultural assets, tailoring instruction to meet diverse learner needs, ensuring the fair allocation of resources, critically examining curriculum and assessment practices, and developing a comprehensive understanding of language policy (Reynolds et al., 2024). By taking on advocacy roles, these teachers help create classroom environments that support and include emergent bilingual students.

Supporting teacher advocacy for emergent bilingual students requires teacher education programs to provide educators with the knowledge and skills needed to do so effectively. Examining how beginning teachers approach advocacy is important, because the demands of early career adjustment may leave little capacity for engagement in broader professional or social initiatives (Reynolds et al., 2024). Research has not yet thoroughly examined how teachers are prepared to advocate for emergent bilingual students or how early-career educators enact advocacy in their professional practice (Reynolds et al., 2024).

Research by Linville (2020) revealed that teachers of ELLs may possess inherent predisposition towards the advocacy role. It also emphasizes the role of both individual and contextual factors in shaping teachers' engagement in advocacy. The findings suggest that intercultural experiences, such as multiculturalism or time spent abroad, do not have a significant correlation with advocacy involvement. This lack of correlation is likely

attributed to the extensive exposure to diversity that teachers have already experienced. Instead, teachers' knowledge of the Standards and their perception of themselves as advocates are strongly associated with their advocacy actions (Linville, 2020).

Therefore, findings indicate teacher education programs should raise awareness of the standards and provide instruction on advocacy steps and skills. Findings from this study highlight the importance of preparing teachers with political advocacy skills to support long-term policy changes for ELLs (Linville, 2020). Although preservice teachers may be less likely to engage in advocacy efforts, their participation tends to increase as they gain classroom experience. Linville (2020) also found that teachers' sense of responsibility and perceived competence may have a greater influence on their advocacy actions than their awareness of social justice issues, though the relationship between these factors remains unclear.

These findings suggest that teacher education programs should address social justice while remaining attentive to the risk of reinforcing deficit perspectives. Additionally, fostering supportive school environments may strengthen both instructional and advocacy-related practices. Emphasizing relationship building and collaboration within teacher preparation programs can help educators develop networks that support their work with English language learners. Finally, helping future teachers recognize their sphere of influence may further support their engagement in advocacy efforts (Linville, 2020).

Mainstream Teacher Preparation Programs in Higher Education

Increasing attention has been given to strengthening mainstream teachers' readiness to support English language learners effectively. Research has identified key knowledge, skills, and dispositions that should be developed through teacher preparation programs (Wernicke et al., 2021). For example, Lucas and Villegas (2013) expanded the concept of culturally responsive teaching to include a linguistic dimension, emphasizing the importance of understanding language variation and second language development. Within this framework, linguistically responsive teachers recognize and value linguistic diversity, identify the language demands of different content areas, and implement instructional strategies that support both content learning and language development. In addition, creating learning environments that build on students' linguistic and cultural assets is essential for supporting the academic success of bilingual learners (Wernicke et al., 2021).

Teacher preparation programs for mainstream educators encounter particular challenges in addressing linguistic responsiveness. Many teacher candidates and educators come from dominant language and cultural backgrounds, which can shape how instruction is approached. As a result, preparation programs may emphasize English-centered practices, including the use of nonverbal supports such as visual aids and graphic organizers, as well as adjustments to oral and written language to support comprehension (Wernicke et al., 2021).

Research suggests that preservice and novice teachers who demonstrate openness toward students' home languages are better positioned to develop the knowledge and

skills needed to support bilingual learners academically. Bunch (2013) describes this as “pedagogical language knowledge,” which includes an understanding of the languages, literacies, and cultural practices that shape students’ learning experiences. This knowledge enables teachers to build on students’ existing linguistic and cultural resources and connect them to new academic content. Similarly, Wernicke et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of this type of knowledge in supporting instruction that is both linguistically and culturally responsive for bilingual learners.

Several factors have been identified as contributing to teachers’ effectiveness when working with linguistically diverse students, including experience with a second language, prior engagement in multilingual environments, and early exposure to language diversity. Practicum experiences have also been shown to play a critical role in shaping teachers’ attitudes and readiness to support multilingual learners (Barros et al., 2020). Despite these influences, a persistent monolingual orientation among mainstream teachers in the United States continues to present challenges. Many teachers do not view language instruction as part of their professional responsibilities, creating a disconnect between their roles and the realities of multilingual classrooms. This misalignment poses an ongoing challenge for teacher preparation programs seeking to prepare educators who can effectively meet the needs of diverse student populations (Barros et al., 2020).

Ponzio and Deroo (2021) found that incorporating multimodal learning tasks into teacher education courses can support both preservice and in-service teachers in deepening their understanding of ELLs and expanding their instructional approaches. Their findings also emphasize the value of using multimodal resources to help educators

conceptualize ELLs within a theoretical framework while strengthening their ability to apply these strategies as part of equity-focused instructional practices.

Schneider and Winthrop University (2019) examined a field-based course designed for sophomore preservice teachers aimed at strengthening their ability to support ELLs. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study evaluated how the course influenced participants' understanding of ELLs, including their academic needs and the legal considerations associated with serving this population in southeastern U.S. schools. The findings indicated that participants demonstrated measurable growth in their knowledge across these areas following course completion (Schneider & Winthrop University, 2019). These results suggest that field-based coursework may play an important role in preparing teachers to work effectively with ELLs and increasing their confidence in doing so. However, further research is needed to better understand the specific challenges novice teachers encounter and the types of support required to help ELLs meet academic expectations in general education classrooms, which is the focus of the present study.

Okhremtchouk and Sellu (2019) found that teachers with more extensive preparation and direct experience working with ELLs during training reported greater confidence in their ability to support these students in the classroom. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening teacher education programs to better prepare educators for working with multilingual populations. At the same time, the results point to ongoing gaps in preparation, as many teachers continue to feel insufficiently prepared to support ELLs in general education settings.

Teacher preparedness remains a central concern in supporting ELLs in general education classrooms, highlighting an ongoing preparation-to-practice gap. Heineke and Giatsou (2019) examined the role of field-based experiences in initial teacher preparation and found that opportunities to engage with linguistically diverse students, combined with intentionally designed coursework, can support teachers' readiness to work with ELLs. Their findings emphasize the value of structured interactions that allow preservice teachers to connect theory with practice. Similarly, Unsworth and Mills (2020) conducted a comprehensive review of teacher preparation research and argued that efforts to improve readiness should extend beyond isolated field experiences or individual courses. Instead, they suggest examining teacher preparation at the program level to better understand how teachers develop the knowledge and skills needed to support ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

Teachers' perceptions of their preparedness are closely related to the level of specialized training they receive for supporting multilingual learners. Research indicates that teachers with targeted knowledge in this area are more effective in supporting students' academic outcomes (Deng et al., 2021). Despite this, many teachers report feeling insufficiently prepared due to limited training in areas such as language development, culturally responsive practices, and instructional strategies for second-language acquisition (Kiramba et al., 2022).

Although preparing teachers to work effectively with ELLs is a nationwide concern, educators in regions with smaller ELL populations or rapidly changing demographics may hold less favorable perceptions of multilingual students (Hopkins et

al., 2019). This highlights the need for continued research examining how novice teachers experience and navigate the challenges of supporting ELLs in general education classrooms. Overall, the literature points to a clear need for further investigation into the specific challenges novice teachers face and the types of support required to help ELLs meet academic expectations.

Summary and Conclusions

Key themes in the literature highlight the growing presence of ELLs in U.S. schools and the resulting implications for general education classrooms. Policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act have contributed to increased integration of ELLs into these settings, leading to more mainstream teachers working directly with linguistically diverse students. Despite this shift, many general education teachers do not identify as responsible for language instruction. This disconnect is particularly evident among novice teachers, who often report difficulty meeting the academic and linguistic needs of ELLs (Babinski et al., 2018; Garver et al., 2018; Villegas et al., 2018; Pavlak & Cavendar, 2019; Dubetz & Collett, 2019; Karas & Faez, 2020).

Research findings from this preliminary search indicated that the preparation-to-practice gap has prevailed for decades, and little has changed. While it is known that more ELLs are entering mainstream classrooms, little is changing regarding the preparation of teachers for the classroom in higher education. Several studies have explored approaches to preparing preservice teachers to work with ELLs (Kibler et al., 2018; Okhremtchouk & Sellu, 2019; Schneider & Winthrop University, 2019; Heineke & Giatsou, 2019; Ponzio & Deroo, 2021; Miller et al., 2023). Despite these efforts, such

approaches have not been widely implemented at a broad or sustained level. As a result, there remains a limited understanding of the specific challenges novice teachers encounter when supporting ELLs in general education classrooms, as well as the types of support they identify as necessary to meet students' academic needs.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the challenges novice teachers encounter when supporting ELLs in general education classrooms. It also hopes to uncover support described by novice teachers to assist them to help mainstream ELLs meet their learning goals. The results of this research could inform key stakeholders of the challenges and support novice teachers need when facilitating a mainstream class of ELLs. This could also inform administrators of interventions that may be put into place to improve learning outcomes. Higher education programs may also be informed as to best practices for programs to best prepare teacher candidates. Positive social change may be evidenced in more ELLs meeting their learning outcomes while enrolled in a mainstream class. The researcher will discuss in the following chapter the intent to achieve these goals. Chapter 3 presents the methodological approach for this study, including the research design, the role of the researcher, data collection and analysis procedures, considerations of trustworthiness, and ethical safeguards.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This study employs a basic qualitative research design to examine novice teachers' perceptions of the challenges they encounter and the support they need when working with English language learners in general education classrooms. Qualitative research focuses on understanding participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of a particular phenomenon. It is commonly used to explore how individuals make meaning of their experiences and to address questions related to perceptions and viewpoints. This approach allows for flexible data collection methods, such as interviews, which are used to generate in-depth insights aligned with the research questions (Hammerberg et al., 2016). This chapter details the study's methodological framework by outlining the research design, explaining how data were collected and analyzed, describing strategies used to ensure rigor, and addressing the ethical considerations that informed the study.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions for this research study will explore the challenges and support that novice teachers identify in facilitating ELLs in a mainstream classroom to meet their learning outcomes. The research questions are:

- RQ 1: What challenges do novice teachers describe in helping mainstream ELLs meet their learning outcomes?
- RQ 2: What support do novice teachers describe as needed to assist them to help mainstream ELLs meet their learning outcomes?

Central Phenomenon

The central focus of this study is to understand how novice teachers perceive the challenges they encounter and the support they need as they support ELLs in general education classrooms. The literature review indicates a sustained need for more targeted preparation in this area, particularly as the population of ELL students in U.S. schools continues to grow. Although many general education teachers do not identify as responsible for language instruction, novice teachers in particular report difficulty meeting the academic and linguistic needs of these students (Babinski et al., 2018; Garver et al., 2018; Villegas et al., 2018; Pavlak & Cavendar, 2019; Dubetz & Collett, 2019; Karas & Faez, 2020).

Prior research has explored strategies for preparing preservice teachers to work with ELLs (Kibler et al., 2018; Okhremtchouk & Sellu, 2019; Schneider & Winthrop University, 2019; Heineke & Giatsou, 2019; Ponzio & Deroo, 2021; Miller et al., 2023). However, these approaches have not been widely implemented at a systemic level, and gaps in preparation persist. As a result, there remains a need to better understand how teachers can be supported in effectively working with ELLs (Miller et al., 2023).

A qualitative methodology was chosen to better understand how participants describe and interpret their experiences. Qualitative research is well suited for examining how individuals interpret and make meaning of a particular phenomenon, particularly in educational contexts where understanding perceptions can inform practice (Hammerberg et al., 2016; Merriam, 2009). Additionally, this approach is valuable when the research

focus centers on participants' lived experiences and viewpoints, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the issue under investigation (Bradshaw et al., 2017)

Hammerberg et al., (2016) describe basic qualitative design as one of the most frequently used approaches in educational research. Percy et al. (2015) stated that researchers trying to understand people's subjective opinions regarding real experience should consider using a basic qualitative approach. In basic qualitative research, the goal is to understand how participants make sense of their experiences and the meanings they assign to them (Merriam, 2009). This design is well suited to interviewing novice teachers to gain insight into their perceptions and experiences while examining the problem within its real-world context.

The phenomenology or case study approaches would not be appropriate for this study because they seek to study other dimensions (Hammerberg et al., 2016), The phenomenological study aims to answer questions about meanings and understand the participants' lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). According to Hammerberg et al. (2016), a phenomenological study is suitable for addressing emotion, affect, and life experiences. This research is not trying to find out the essence and underlying structure of the phenomenon, the interaction of individuals, building a theory or telling people's stories. A case study is used when the focus of the study is bounded by a shared experience or situation answering 'how' or 'why' research questions (Merriam, 2009). A basic qualitative research design is appropriate for addressing the research questions guiding this study.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, data collection and analysis are carried out through the researcher, who functions as the primary instrument in the research process (Geddis-Regan et al., 2020). In this study, the researcher will conduct semistructured interviews in alignment with the research design and guiding research questions. Data will be collected using the interview protocol provided in Appendix A. The researcher will transcribe and analyze the data to develop codes, categories, and themes, and will present the findings based on participants' perspectives. Throughout the research process, the researcher will remain attentive to potential biases and assumptions that could influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation. According to Asselin (2003), the researcher should gather data with open eyes and assume that they do not know about the phenomenon in question. In this situation, my role is to bracket assumptions and be aware of biases. I would exercise introspection by analyzing feelings and attitudes to avoid prejudices and preconceptions that will influence my understanding.

I am an elementary teacher and would be the sole researcher collecting and interpreting the data. According to Gill (2020), there is a potential for researcher bias when the researcher is working with participants that are in the same professional field as themselves. Another way that bias can occur is if the researcher leads the participants to answer questions in a certain way. Geddis-Regan et al. (2020) stated that reflexivity is essential in research to manage ethical issues surrounding the position, identity, trust, and disclosure process.

Bracketing is another method that researchers use to prevent biases. Dörfler and Stierand (2020) defined bracketing as "the researchers' attempt to hold in abeyance their pre-understandings and assumptions to attain experiences before making sense of them" (p. 1). I will utilize bracketing by setting aside any presupposition surrounding critical thinking and focusing on its essence to understand it from the participant's perspective. Bracketing will help with the internal suppositions regarding my knowledge of teaching ELLs and assist in interviewing the faculty with an open mind. Bracketing the previous understandings, attitudes, inclinations, and convictions will help obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the participant account. Bracketing will also be helpful when transcribing the notes. Reflecting on the interview process is intended to increase awareness of any instances where bracketing, the practice of setting aside preconceived notions during the interview, may not have been effectively implemented. This self-awareness aims to identify and address moments where the researcher's biases or assumptions could have influenced the interpretations of the participants' experiences, ensuring a more objective analysis aligned with the participants' perspectives. Bracketing is beneficial because it will help make sense of the data (Dorfler & Stierand, 2020).

Methodology

The population for this study will consist of novice teachers from one school district in a Midwestern state who teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms. If a sufficient number of participants cannot be recruited from this district, additional participants may be identified through social media platforms or a qualified participant recruitment

service. The selected participants are expected to represent diverse backgrounds, ages, and experiences, which may contribute to rich and meaningful data.

A purposeful sampling strategy will be used for this study. Purposeful sampling involves selecting participants who possess specific knowledge relevant to the phenomenon of interest and can provide information aligned with the research questions (Campbell et al., 2020). In this case, participants will be selected based on their experience as novice teachers working with ELLs in mainstream classroom settings.

The reason for choosing purposeful sampling rests upon Patton's (2013) criteria that a purposeful sample allows the researcher to gain a significant amount of knowledge about the issues central to the research study's purpose. The goal of selecting the purposeful sample is to identify the individuals with the experience that will shed light, yield the most relevant information to answer the research question. Snowball sampling may also be used as a sampling technique, if needed, to obtain the required sample size. I chose novice teachers as a group because they are the ones who can shed light on the challenges faced and support needed to help ELLs in the mainstream classroom meet their learning outcomes. I also selected the novice teachers because the literature calls for further research focusing on developing strategies to support novice teachers in working with ELLs (Hutchinson, 2012; Garver et al., 2018; Wissink & Starks, 2019; Deng et al., 2021; Kiramba et al., 2022). The novice teachers can provide rich descriptive perceptions of the challenges they face and support needed to help ELLs meet their learning goals within mainstream classrooms.

Participant Selection

The novice teachers will meet the participant criteria if they have been in professional practice for three years or less, have facilitated a mainstream class with ELLs for one year or more, are full-time teachers who have worked with ELLs within their mainstream classrooms. I will draw my sample from the novice teachers who meet my criteria. The goal is to obtain eight to ten of the novice teachers to participate in the research study. Patton (2015) explained that determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research involves considering the study's purpose, the characteristics of the inquiry, how the findings will be applied, available resources, and the need to ensure credibility. Similarly, Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted that purposeful sampling in qualitative research is not intended to produce generalizable results but rather to support a rigorous and ethical exploration of the research question. The rationale for a smaller sample size comes from the aim to prioritize the depth of analysis of breadth, allowing for meticulous exploration of individual experiences within the specific focus of study. This approach is integral to capturing nuanced insights and ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument will be a researcher-developed interview guide. Numerous authors have documented the value of interviews in qualitative studies. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) stated that interviews are a way to collect knowledge about human behavior, belief, and feeling. Ravitch and Carl (2016) believed that interviews allow researchers to obtain rich, meaningful, and relevant data.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), interviewing participants allow researchers to understand their perceptions. This study aims to explore novice teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face and the support needed to help ELLs meet their learning outcomes in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, semistructured interviews are an appropriate data collection method, as they allow for an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives

I will use an in-depth semistructured interview approach to address the research questions. This type of interview and questioning technique is more flexible and will give more autonomy to ask pertinent questions. The interview questions will be developed to support the research questions and the purpose of the study. The literature and conceptual framework will also inform the interview questions. I will establish content validity by ensuring that the semistructured interview questions ask about the participants' perspectives and align with the research question. Therefore, all the interview questions will elicit the challenges and support that novice teachers identify in facilitating ELLs in a mainstream classroom to meet their learning outcomes.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Once Walden University IRB has given approval to conduct the study, I will also obtain permission from the research site to carry out the study. I will contact the school district and discuss the purpose of the research study. I will ask for permission to communicate with the participants. I will ask the school district to provide me with the e-mail addresses of the full-time novice teachers. I will email an invitation to the full-time novice teachers who currently work with or have worked with ELLs in their mainstream

classrooms inviting them to participate in the interview for the research study. As a backup, I may use social media to gain access to participants. In this case, I will message the administrators of a couple of spaces who may have participants in them who meet the participant criteria. Then, I will ask their permission to post within the space to potentially gain access to participants for the study. As another back up, I may use a qualified participant company to gain participants. In this case, I would create a profile on the company's platform indicating the parameters of my study and the qualifications for the participants needed. I will then use this platform to solicit and gain access to qualified participants for this study. I will email an informed consent to those who are interested and who meet the participation criteria explaining that the research is for educational purposes and ask all participants to sign the informed consent. I will also explain that participating would be voluntary. I will inform the participants that their identity will be confidential. The data will remain confidential. A coding system will prevent anyone from tracing back the information to them, and they can opt out of or withdraw from the study without any reprisals and any of their data will not be used in the data analysis. I will inform the participants that I will not reveal their identity in the study's aggregated findings.

The location for the interviews will be a high school in a Midwestern state or via a video conferencing program. The interview meetings will be in a private conference room. To prevent undue stress on the participants, I chose this location because the participants come to the high school weekly to work or online they can do from anywhere they choose. Confidentiality will be ensured by using a private location for the interviews

and using coded identifiers instead of personal information in any documentation. If any of the educators are uncomfortable with this location, I will find another private, convenient location that suits the participants' time and schedule. The interviews will be face-to-face or online using a video conferencing program such as Zoom.

Interviews will be scheduled for approximately 45 to 60 minutes. With permission from participants, conversations will be recorded to allow for accurate documentation and comprehensive analysis of the data. Audio recording allows the researcher to remain engaged in the conversation, respond appropriately to participants, and avoid reliance on extensive note-taking during the interview. Recordings will facilitate a complete and accurate record of the discussion for subsequent transcription and analysis.

No historical or legal documents will be used as data sources for this study. Follow-up questions may be asked as needed to clarify or expand upon participants' responses. Participants will be informed in advance that interviews will be recorded and will have the option to decline recording if they are not comfortable. Upon completion of the study, participants will be provided access to the final published research.

When the participants are about to exit the study, I will refer to the interview protocol for the wrap-up questions. Hammarberg et al (2016) recommended thanking the interviewee for taking the time to talk with you, emphasizing an appreciation for their time, and make it known how valuable the information they gave will contribute to understanding the issue. Yin (2016) recommended that the researcher should let the participants have the last word. I would ask if they wanted to add any information or if they have any questions. I will give the respondent a telephone number to call if they

have something that they want to add or ask about the interview. I will tell the participants that the transcript will be sent to them within 1–2 weeks for them to review. This process, known as member checking, is essential for verifying the accuracy of participants' responses. I will offer the participants a \$20 gift card for their participation and tell them that I will contact them if I need any additional information.

Data Analysis Plan

The researcher must analyze the data to find themes. Thematic analysis is one method used to discover meaningful information in qualitative data. I will use Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase framework as a guide to conduct a thematic analysis of the data that will generate themes connecting the data to specific research questions. These themes will develop from an inductive study of the interview transcripts and the notes.

The type of coding I will use is open coding. Open coding is the initial process for labeling concepts, defining, and developing categories (William & Moser, 2019). Open coding for this study will begin with a preliminary reading and rereading of the data. Next, I will impose a structure by looking for similarities and differences of the code and group them into categories and subcategories after several revisions. I will then proceed to the next level of conducting a thematic analysis.

Data analysis will follow Braun and Clarke's (2006) structured approach to thematic analysis. This process involves familiarization with the data, systematic coding of meaningful segments, organizing codes into broader themes, reviewing and refining those themes, defining and naming each theme, and presenting the findings in a coherent narrative form.

Familiarize Oneself With the Data

Step one of the thematic analyses is becoming familiar with the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), researchers need to immerse themselves in the data better to understand the complexity and breadth of the information to obtain the best result. The first step I will take in the data analysis process is to examine all the interview notes. When all the transcripts are available, I will begin to scrutinize them. During this phase, the researcher will follow Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations by reading and rereading the interview transcripts to become familiar with the data. Initial notes will be recorded, including the identification of significant statements, recurring words or phrases, and preliminary patterns and meanings within the data. These transcripts will require extensive and repeated examination of the data and multiple readings. I will begin to examine the participants' answers to a specific research question, recognize and interpret patterns, keywords, hoping to understand the data after multiple reading attempts.

Generating Codes

The second phase involves generating initial codes. During this stage, the data will be organized in a meaningful and systematic manner, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher will identify key ideas, concepts, and patterns within the data and apply broad, initial codes to relevant segments. Coding enables the researcher to systematically examine large amounts of data and reduce them into smaller, meaningful units for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I will use open coding to initiate and modify codes as I examine different data segments. The coding method will also depend on

selecting data that addresses and is relevant to the research questions. I will also be looking at the notes and comparing them to the transcripts for accuracy as I analyze the data. This process will start showing the connection of the data to specific research questions. I will use different labels, abbreviations, color identifiers such as highlighters and pens to differentiate the codes.

Constructing Themes

The third phase of data analysis involves identifying potential themes within the coded data. A theme represents a meaningful pattern that captures information relevant to the research questions (Maguire et al., 2017). Because thematic analysis does not prescribe strict criteria for what constitutes a theme, codes will be grouped and reorganized into categories based on conceptual similarity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this process, related codes will be examined to determine how they can be combined into broader themes or subthemes. Adjustments will be made as needed to ensure that the themes accurately represent participants' responses. Themes may reflect differing perspectives on the same issue or interconnected ideas that collectively address the research problem (Maguire et al., 2017). A reflective journal will also be maintained to support analytic decision-making and to monitor potential bias throughout the analysis.

Reviewing Potential Themes

The fourth phase of the data analysis is to review the themes. I will review, modify, and refine the preliminary themes. I will merge the data by cutting and pasting the data relevant to each theme on an Excel spreadsheet. I will make a second analysis to ensure the data correctly supports the themes. At this time, I will decide whether I want to

keep, combine, refine, simplify, separate, or discard initial themes. I will follow Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggestions to check if the themes make sense, the data support them, themes overlap, themes within themes, the prevalence of themes, or other hidden themes. I will also utilize a qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 to ask more complex questions, conduct a more in-depth analysis, and provide a more robust research result. At this stage, the themes should cohere, be distinct, and a unified story should emerge from them.

Defining and Naming Themes

The fifth phase involves defining and naming the themes. During this stage, the researcher identifies the essence of each theme and determines how it relates to the overall research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, I will explain what each theme is about and show how they relate to each other. I will also show how the subthemes interact with each other and how they relate to the themes. I will accomplish this by returning to the collected data extracts for each theme, integrating them into a cohesive and consistent representation of the participants' responses.

Braun and Clarke (2006) also made a distinction between semantic and latent analysis. A semantic approach to thematic analysis focuses on the explicit, surface-level meanings of the data as expressed by participants. In contrast, a latent approach examines underlying assumptions, ideas, and conceptualizations that shape the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis typically adopts one of these approaches. This research study will focus on semantic thematic analysis, where the findings will depend solely on what the participants reported. I will not look

beyond what participants said or introduce new ideas or assumptions that could bias the analysis. The latent thematic analysis would not be appropriate because it would not allow a description of the participants' perspective but would include theorizing, which does not apply to this research study.

Producing and Reporting

The final stage will be writing up the findings from the data analysis. I will provide enough evidence and document a logical process of how the findings emerged. The aim is to use direct quotes from the participants, examples, excerpts, and sufficient evidence of themes and subthemes. This process will provide compelling evidence that the research study results bear a clear connection to the themes discovered within the data. The accurate study results will be available whether the findings endorse the phenomenon under review. The audit trail will follow, providing convincing proof showing the steps researchers take during a research study and how they arrive at conclusions. An audit trail makes transparent the research inquiry, strategy, data collection, data processing, and findings. The findings of this study will also be compared with existing literature to determine whether they support, contradict, or extend the current body of knowledge.

Trustworthiness

To ensure rigor in qualitative research, scholars often apply four standards of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the accuracy and authenticity of the findings and reflects the extent to which the study represents participants' perspectives. Transferability addresses the applicability of

the findings to other contexts through the provision of rich, detailed descriptions.

Dependability emphasizes the consistency and transparency of the research process, allowing others to follow the procedures used in the study. Confirmability focuses on the objectivity of the findings, ensuring that the results are grounded in the data rather than researcher bias. Together, these criteria provide a framework for ensuring the quality and integrity of qualitative research.

Credibility

According to Shenton (2004), credibility occurs when the research study findings accurately reflect the participants' perceptions. Member checks will be the process I will use to establish credibility for this research study. I will carry out member checks by asking the participants to examine and verify that the transcripts are accurate. The research study will be credible if there is a fit between the respondents' views, representation, and description of their perceptions (Nowell et al., 2017). Obtaining feedback from participants will help identify any discrepancies between the researcher's interpretations and participants' intended meanings. Additionally, the dissertation committee will review the data analysis process to ensure that the identified themes are grounded in the study's data.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the study's findings may be applicable to other contexts or settings. Qualitative research emphasizes understanding the depth and complexity of a phenomenon within a specific context (Nowell et al., 2017). To enhance transferability, this study will provide rich, detailed

descriptions of the research context, participants, and methodological procedures.

Additionally, by offering comprehensive descriptions of the findings, readers can make informed judgments about the relevance of the results in different settings.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent to which the research process is transparent and consistent (Shenton, 2004). To support this, I will maintain a clear audit trail documenting data collection procedures, methodological decisions, and the development of findings. In addition, an inquiry audit may be used to further evaluate the consistency and reliability of the research process (Nowell et al., 2017). An inquiry audit, as described by Nowell et al. (2017), is a strategy used to establish dependability in qualitative research. It involves a systematic examination of the research process and findings to ensure consistency and transparency. This process allows for the identification and documentation of decisions made throughout data collection and analysis, thereby enhancing the overall dependability and trustworthiness of the study

Confirmability

Confirmability seeks to confirm that the study results are derived and grounded from the data (Nowell et al., 2017). I will have to show that the methodology, analytic techniques, findings, and conclusions agree with the data rather than the researcher's personal views. Nowell et al. (2017) suggested using an audit trail to determine how I will conduct the study. It will also include the reasons for using the conceptual framework, methodology, and data analysis. Confirmability will show a step-by-step research study process where other researchers can confirm the study's findings.

Ethical Procedures

Adherence to ethical principles and guidelines for protecting human participants in research is essential. As the researcher, I will avoid causing distress, anxiety, pain, harm, or any negative feelings to the participants. As mentioned previously, I will inform the participants of their rights to privacy, confidentiality, and that they may withdrawal from the study at any time they wish. I will provide them with the opportunity to make changes to their transcript.

Institutional Review Board

Before conducting research, I will apply to the IRB at Walden University and the school district in the Midwestern state to approve the research study. The institutions will determine if the research study poses a potential risk or harm to participants and the institution. I will include the assigned IRB numbers from the Midwestern school district and Walden University in the final research study.

Treatment of Data

I will save the informed consents, transcripts of the recording, and all other typewritten notes on a personal computer with a backup system that is password-protected and in a file that is also password protected. The audio recording of the interviews and any handwritten notes will be locked away at home in a filing cabinet that no one else has access. The data's original hard copies will be secure and then shredded after five years.

Justification for Incentives

Getting answers to the research questions is related to exploring the challenges and support that novice teachers identify in facilitating ELLs in a mainstream classroom to meet their learning outcomes. This is the sole intent of this study. At the conclusion of the interview, participants will receive a \$20 gift card as compensation for their time and participation in the study.

Summary

This chapter describes the research method, design, rationale, and the role of the researcher. It outlines the methodological approach, including data collection instruments, recruitment procedures, participant involvement, and data collection processes that guide the study. A plan for data analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic framework is presented, detailing how codes, categories, and themes will be developed to address the research questions. The chapter further details the procedures used to support trustworthiness, specifically through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ethical procedures for protecting participants, such as informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, and the right to withdraw, are addressed. Additional considerations include data management and storage, participant compensation, and ethical considerations associated with conducting research in a professional setting. Upon approval of this proposal, the study will proceed to Chapter 4, which will present the research setting, data collection and analysis procedures, findings, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of novice teachers about the challenges they face, and the support needed to successfully meet the learning outcomes of ELLs in the mainstream classroom. This inquiry was guided by two research questions: (a) What challenges do novice teachers describe in helping mainstream ELLs meet their learning outcomes? and (b) What support do novice teachers describe as needed to assist them in helping mainstream ELLs meet their learning outcomes?

This chapter presents the study's findings. It begins with a description of the research setting, followed by an overview of the data collection procedures and data analysis approach. The results are then presented according to the identified themes and subthemes, supported by illustrative participant quotations. Evidence supporting the trustworthiness of the study is also provided. The chapter concludes with a summary and a transition to Chapter 5, which presents an interpretation of the findings.

Setting

Data for this study were collected through semistructured interviews with novice teachers who met the inclusion criteria of having less than three years of experience teaching in mainstream classrooms with ELLs. After receiving approval from Walden University's IRB, I used the online platform User Interviews to recruit participants. This platform allowed me to screen for eligible participants while ensuring alignment with the approved inclusion criteria.

All participants received and signed an informed consent form outlining the study's purpose, their rights as participants, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were also informed that they would receive a \$20 electronic gift card as compensation for their time. This process ensured that participants understood the study before the interviews and that ethical guidelines were followed.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted via a secure online video conferencing platform (Google Meet) through User Interviews' integrated system. All sessions were audio recorded with participant permission to ensure accuracy and to allow the researcher to remain fully engaged in the discussion. Following each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and participants were provided the opportunity to review their transcripts through member checking. This process allowed participants to confirm the accuracy of their responses and clarify statements as needed.

Through this process, I collected rich, detailed accounts from participants that directly address the research questions. Ten participants were ultimately included in the study. They represent a diverse set of perspectives across grade levels and teaching contexts while still maintaining the focused scope appropriate for qualitative inquiry.

Data Collection

Following IRB approval from Walden University, data collection began with the recruitment of novice teachers who met the study criteria. Although my original plan was to recruit participants directly through a school district, I employed an approved alternate strategy by using the User Interviews platform to access qualified participants. This

approach allowed me to maintain all inclusion criteria while offering a \$20 gift card incentive for participants.

Once identified, eligible participants received an invitation outlining the purpose of the study and were provided with an informed consent form. Participation was entirely voluntary, and individuals were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Signed informed consent forms were obtained prior to scheduling interviews, ensuring that participants were aware of the confidentiality measures in place. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to participants and used in all reported findings.

Interviews took place virtually using Google Meet and typically lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. This timeframe allowed adequate opportunity to address all interview questions while giving participants space to elaborate on topics they considered important. With participant's consent, the sessions were audio recorded to preserve accuracy and reduce the need for extensive note taking during the interviews.

At the conclusion of each interview, participants engaged in a brief debriefing to address any remaining questions and to ensure they felt comfortable with their participation. The member checking process was explained, and participants were informed that they would receive a transcript of their interview within one to two weeks. This process allowed participants to confirm the accuracy of their responses and to clarify statements if necessary. A \$20 gift card was provided as compensation for their time and contribution. This systematic approach to data collection ensured consistency across participants while maintaining ethical standards. The use of semistructured interviews

allowed participants to speak freely about their experiences while maintaining alignment with the research questions guiding the study. Such methodological alignment supports qualitative rigor and ensures that data collection procedures were both systematic and flexible.

Data Analysis

The data were examined using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, which supports a structured process for identifying patterns while allowing flexibility in interpretation. This framework offered a clear process for moving from raw qualitative data to meaningful themes while maintaining transparency and rigor. The process began with immersion in the 10 interview transcripts through repeated readings, allowing the researcher to develop a deep familiarity with participant accounts while noting initial impressions and potential areas of significance.

In Phase 1, familiarization with the data, I read and reread the 10 interview transcripts to develop a deep understanding of participants' experiences. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were returned to participants for member checking. During this process, participants reviewed their transcripts for accuracy and clarity, providing minor corrections or clarifications as needed. Their feedback was incorporated prior to formal coding to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the data. As I read the verified transcripts, I recorded analytic notes and initial observations in a reflexive journal and used NVivo 12 to store memos and reflections. This process allowed for immersion in the data and the identification of preliminary ideas related to the research questions.

In Phase 2, generating initial codes, I systematically coded meaningful data segments across all transcripts. Using NVivo 12 software, I conducted line-by-line, inductive coding to capture recurring patterns and key concepts that related to novice teachers' experiences with ELLs. Codes were intentionally kept close to participant language to preserve the authenticity of their voices. I applied the same coding frame across transcripts, using NVivo's coding stripes to monitor consistency, and documented definitions of each code in analytic memos. Reflective journaling helped ensure the reliability and transparency of the coding process. The complete list of final codes, operational definitions, and illustrative examples is included in Appendix B.

Phase 3, searching for themes, involved organizing the initial codes into broader categories that captured shared meanings across participants. I reviewed coded data extracts and grouped related codes together to form potential themes. Within NVivo, I created thematic "nodes" and collated supporting excerpts under each one. Early versions of thematic maps were developed to visualize relationships among codes, categories, and emerging themes.

During Phase 4, reviewing themes, I refined and tested the coherence of each preliminary theme. I examined whether the data within each theme were internally consistent and distinct from other themes. This process required revisiting coded excerpts and, at times, the original transcripts to ensure accuracy and representation. Redundant or overlapping themes were merged, while distinct themes were clarified and redefined. The thematic map was revised repeatedly until the structure accurately reflected the data.

In Phase 5, defining and naming themes, I developed clear definitions and concise names for each final theme and subtheme. I write analytic summaries describing what each theme represented, its boundaries, and its relevance to the research questions. Subthemes were identified when they added clarity or depth to the broader pattern, such as subcategories related to instructional strategies or institutional supports. Theme names were finalized to capture the essence of each concept while maintaining alignment with the study's purpose.

Finally, Phase 6, producing the report, I selected compelling participant quotations to illustrate each theme subtheme. These quotations were used to anchor the findings in participants' voices and demonstrate transparency in interpretation. Thematic results were then integrated into a coherent narrative aligned with the conceptual framework, the ICLA, and the study's research questions. Analysis of the tenth transcript did not produce new thematic insights, signaling that sufficient depth had been reached in the data.

The systematic data analysis process produced a clear and coherent set of findings that reflect novice teachers' shared and individual experiences working with ELLs in mainstream classrooms. The coding and thematic review led to the identification of five overarching themes and several related subthemes that align closely with the study's research questions. The following section presents these results in detail, supported by participant quotations and examples that illustrate the depth and complexity of their experiences.

Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of novice teachers about the challenges they face, and the support needed to successfully meet the learning outcomes of ELLs in the mainstream classroom. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with novice teachers recruited via the User Interviews platform. Participants represented multiple school districts across diverse contexts, which provided a broad range of perspectives on the challenges and supports related to teaching ELLs. This diversity in teaching environments and participant backgrounds strengthened the transferability of the findings and ensured that the results reflected multiple instructional contexts rather than a single, localized experience.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the study participants. To protect confidentiality, each teacher was assigned a pseudonym (P1-P10). The sample reflected variation in grade levels, subject areas, school contexts, and types of ELL experience, offering a diverse picture of novice teacher perspectives. This diversity provided a foundation for identifying both common patterns and unique experiences across participants, enriching the thematic analysis presented later in this chapter.

Table 1***Participant Demographics***

Participant ID	Years of teaching experience	Grade level(s) taught	Subject area(s)	District/school context	ELL experience description
P1	2	K–12	English	Private, urban	Worked with recent Ukrainian arrivals
P2	1	3–5	General Ed	Suburban public	Multiple ELLs at varying proficiency
P3	3	3–6	Science	Rural public	Sole mainstream teacher with ELLs
P4	2	K–2	General Ed	Suburban public	Early literacy and vocabulary challenges
P5	1	3–9	Math	Charter school, urban	Differentiation for multilingual learners
P6	2	4–8	Social Studies	Public, Midwestern	Mixed-level ELL supports in class
P7	3	1–5	English	Public, diverse district	High newcomer population
P8	1	K–5	General Ed	Public, suburban	Pull-out ESL coordination
P9	2	3–6	STEM	Public, suburban	Coteaching with ESL specialist
P10	1	4–6	ELD	Public, urban	Works with multilingual learners; funding/resource challenges noted

Note. Participant IDs are pseudonyms used for confidentiality.

Each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes and was audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis. Table 2 presents a summary of each interview’s duration and transcript length, illustrating the depth and consistency of the data collected across participants. The findings were organized into themes and subthemes through multiple rounds of coding, which progressively refined the initial set of codes into final thematic categories. To keep participants’ voices central, representative quotations are included throughout each theme. Together, these methodological elements enhance transparency in the analytic

process and establish a clear foundation for the presentation of findings in the following sections.

Table 2

Interview Summary by Participant

Participant ID	Interview length (min)	Transcript length (pages)	Notes
P1	55	11	Elementary, urban
P2	48	10	Suburban, grades 3–5
P3	60	12	Middle school science
P4	47	9	Early literacy focus
P5	58	11	Charter school math
P6	52	10	Social studies, Midwest
P7	61	12	Public, diverse district
P8	49	9	Elementary, suburban
P9	53	10	STEM, suburban
P10	56	11	Mixed proficiency levels
Total	539 (≈ 9 hr)	105	—

Note. Participant IDs are pseudonyms. Duration and transcripts lengths are approximate but reflect the typical range of 45–60 minutes and 9–12 pages per interview.

The analysis of the 10 interview transcripts revealed recurring patterns that were organized into themes representing both the challenges novice teachers faced and the supports they identified as most beneficial. These themes, developed through iterative coding and verification, offer insight into the instructional, emotional, and institutional factors that shaped novice teachers' experiences with ELLs. The following section introduces these themes in detail and explains how they align with the study's research questions.

To illustrate how the findings were organized and connected to the study's research questions, Table 3 presents the alignment of each theme and its related subthemes with the corresponding research question. This visual representation clarifies which aspects of the teachers' experiences addressed the challenges (RQ1) and which

reflected the supports and strategies (RQ2). Together, these relationships provide a structural overview of the results before each theme is explored in detail.

Table 3

Alignment of Themes and Subthemes With Research Questions

Research question	Themes addressing the question	Related subthemes/focus areas
RQ1: What challenges do novice teachers describe in helping mainstream ELLs meet their learning outcomes?	Theme 1: Challenges of teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms; Theme 5: Role of school and district support	Language proficiency differences; Limited resources; Lack of training; Administrative constraints
RQ2: What support do novice teachers describe as needed to assist them in helping ELLs meet their learning outcomes?	Theme 2: Strategies for supporting ELLs' learning outcomes; Theme 3: Collaboration and resource use; Theme 4: Professional development and training needs; Theme 5: The role of school and district support	Instructional scaffolds; Peer collaboration; Targeted PD; Institutional supports and resources

Note. Themes and subthemes are derived from thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke (2006).

As shown in Table 3, the five overarching themes and their related subthemes align directly with the study's two research questions. This alignment demonstrates how participants' reflections addressed both the challenges novice teachers faced (RQ1) and the supports they identified as necessary (RQ2). Together, these themes provide a cohesive framework for understanding novice teachers' experiences and set the stage for the detailed discussion that follows, where each theme is examined through illustrative participant quotations and contextual examples.

To provide an at-a-glance summary of the thematic findings, Table 4 presents an overview of each theme with brief descriptions and exemplar participant quotations. This summary helps readers visualize the scope and focus of each theme before the detailed discussion that follows. Presenting the themes together also clarifies how the findings

progress from the challenges novice teachers face to the supports and institutional factors that enable effective practice.

Table 4

Overview of Themes

Theme	Description	Exemplar quote
Theme 1: Challenges of teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms	Novice teachers face varied English proficiency levels, classroom management issues, and limited preparation.	"I had students who could barely speak a word of English sitting next to those who were almost fluent." (P1)
Theme 2: Strategies for supporting ELLs' learning outcomes	Teachers used vocabulary instruction, visuals, structured pacing, and cultural relevance to aid comprehension.	"Repetition and visuals made a huge difference—students needed to see it, hear it, and practice it." (P4)
Theme 3: Collaboration and resource use	Support came from colleagues, bilingual staff, and technology tools like translation apps.	"Talking with my colleagues gave me practical strategies I wouldn't have thought of alone." (P6)
Theme 4: Professional development and training needs	Participants felt unprepared and wanted PD on language development, trauma-informed practice, and ELL pedagogy.	"We didn't learn enough in preservice about working with ELLs; PD would help us a lot." (P7)
Theme 5: Role of school & district support	Administrative guidance, policies, and resources shaped teachers' ability to meet ELL needs.	"Support from the district is uneven—sometimes you're on your own to figure it out." (P8)

Table 4 provides a concise summary of the five overarching themes that emerged from the data. Together, these themes reflect how novice teachers experience both the challenges and supports involved in teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Examining the themes in sequence provides a clearer understanding of how individual teacher experiences connect to broader patterns of preparation, collaboration, and institutional support.

Theme 1: Challenges of Teaching ELLs in Mainstream Classrooms

Across participants, one of the most consistent findings was the range of challenges novice teachers experienced when working with ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Teachers frequently described difficulties balancing the needs of ELLs with those of native English-speaking peers, while also managing classroom expectations and curriculum demands. These challenges often stemmed from differences in language proficiency, cultural background, and limited preservice preparation.

Several participants described the wide variance in English proficiency levels within their classrooms. One teacher noted, “In a single class I had students who were nearly fluent sitting next to others who couldn’t yet form basic sentences. Finding that middle ground where everyone could engage was incredibly difficult” (P1). Another echoed this tension reflecting, “I had to constantly check myself – was I going too fast, using too many colloquialisms, or leaving some students behind without realizing it?” (P3). Similarly, one participant explained, “Some of my students are conversationally fluent, but others are just starting out, so I’m planning two or three lessons at once” (P10).

Participants also raised concerns about the emotional and behavioral dimensions of teaching ELLs. For example, some students withdrew or acted out when they could not fully understand the content or felt embarrassed to participate. As one participant explained, “Sometimes it wasn’t just about language – it was about frustration. When students didn’t understand, they would shut down or distract others” (P8).

Finally, teachers highlighted a lack of adequate preparation and resources as a significant challenge. Several participants emphasized that their preservice programs offered minimal practical tools for supporting ELLs in mainstream classrooms. One shared, “We might have covered accommodations in theory, but I never had the chance to practice them before I had to use them in a real classroom” (P5).

Taken together, these accounts underscore how novice teachers grappled with linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical challenges as they sought to support ELLs. Viewed through the lens of the ICLA, the findings reveal tension between teachers’ desire to integrate ELLs into mainstream instruction and their limited preparation to do so. The ICLA emphasizes collaboration and integrative strategies, yet the teachers’ reflections highlight how structural and experiential gaps complicate their ability to fully enact these principles.

Theme 2: Strategies for Supporting ELLs’ Learning Outcomes

In addition to describing challenges, participants shared a variety of strategies they used to help ELLs succeed in mainstream classrooms. These strategies reflected both intentional instructional choices and adaptive practices learning through trial and error. Many participants emphasized that success required combining multiple approaches tailored to student needs rather than relying on a single method.

One common approach was vocabulary-focused instruction. Several teachers described using word walls, frequent quizzes, and explicit instruction to ensure students could access core academic content. As one participant shared, “I relied heavily on vocabulary practice, because if they couldn’t understand the terms, they couldn’t grasp

the bigger concepts” (P1). Another added, “Even with my more advanced students, I found vocabulary was the bridge – it gave them confidence to engage in class discussions” (P3).

Visual supports also emerged as a frequently used tool. Participants incorporated whiteboards, graphic organizers, and digital resources to reinforce language and content simultaneously. One participant noted, “putting visuals on the board or handing out diagrams made such a difference – it anchored the language in something concrete” (P7).

Classroom structure and pacing were also highlighted as important. Teachers described breaking lessons into smaller chunks, rotating activities, and providing repeated opportunities to engage with the material. For example, a teacher explained, “I would set up the board at the beginning of class: 20 minutes for reading, 20 minutes for group work, 20 minutes for discussion. That kind of structure helped my ELLs know what to expect and reduced anxiety” (P5).

Finally, participants described the importance of making learning culturally and socially relevant. This included incorporating current events, drawing on students’ prior knowledge, and encouraging peer collaboration. As one participant put it, “I tried to connect assignments to things happening in the world or their lives – it made the English practice feel meaningful rather than just another task” (P8). Another described pairing students intentionally so peers could support one another, explaining, “I paired students strategically, so someone with stronger English could help a newcomer” (P10).

Through the lens of the ICLA, these strategies reflect the integration of multiple approaches and the collaborative, student-centered ethos that underpin the framework.

Teachers worked to scaffold learning, provide multiple entry points, and foster engagement through interaction and relevance. In doing so, they began to align their instructional practices with the ICLA principles, even when they did not name them explicitly.

Theme 3: Collaboration and Resource Use

Another strong theme that emerged from participant interviews was the importance of collaboration and leveraging available resources. Novice teachers frequently described reaching out to colleagues, drawing on school or district level tools, and learning from more experienced peers as essential for navigating the challenges of working with ELLs.

Participants noted that informal collaboration with colleagues was often the most accessible and beneficial form of support. As one teacher explained; “I learned a lot just by popping into a colleague’s classroom or chatting in the hallway about what worked for them with ELL students” (P2). Another shared, “Some of my best strategies came from conversations with other teachers who had already worked with these students” (P6). These accounts highlight how peer support and knowledge sharing became a substitute for more formal preparation.

Teachers also pointed to resources within their schools, such as bilingual staff members, cultural liaisons, or specialized support for teachers. For example, one participant reflected, “I relied heavily on the Spanish teacher next door. He knew what strategies worked, and he reassured me when I felt stuck” (P4). This sense of collegial

reliance was particularly important in smaller schools where formal ELL programming was limited.

Technology and instructional materials also played a role. Several participants described using translation apps, online visual aids, and culturally relevant media to supplement instruction. As one participant stated, “We didn’t have a big ELL program, so I leaned on digital tools. Even something like Google Translate or visuals on the smartboard made a big difference” (P8).

Through the ICLA lens, collaboration and resource use demonstrate the framework’s emphasis on collective learning and integrative practice. Teacher’s reliance on colleagues, school-level resources, and technology illustrates how collaboration enhances instructional effectiveness and provides scaffolding when formal training is insufficient. In this way, novice teachers’ experiences exemplify the ICLA principles of shared responsibility and cooperative problem solving in supporting ELLs’ success.

Theme 4: Professional Development and Training Needs

Many participants highlighted the importance of expanded professional development and training to strengthen novice teachers’ readiness to support ELLs. While many participants expressed enthusiasm for supporting multilingual learners, they consistently noted that their preservice programs and early professional experiences left them underprepared for the realities of mainstream classrooms.

Several teachers described only minimal exposure to ELL-focused coursework during their preparation. One participant shared, “We had maybe a week in one of my classes where ELLs were mentioned, but nothing in depth that I could take and apply

right away in my classroom” (P6). Another reflected, “I came in knowing the basics of accommodations, but not how to actually implement them when I had 25 kids staring at me” (P2).

Professional development opportunities within schools or districts were also perceived as insufficient. A participant explained, “Most of the PD sessions we get are focused on general topics – classroom management, new tech tools – but nothing really specific to language learners” (P4). Others noted that while some training was offered, it was not tailored to the unique needs of novice teachers. “By the time I get into the classroom, I needed practical examples, not theory. I wanted to see how strategies looked in action” (P8).

Despite these gaps, participants expressed a strong interest in receiving training that addressed both instructional strategies and the socioemotional needs of ELLs. One teacher summarized this well: “I think if we had more PD on both the academic and cultural side, it would make a huge difference – not just for the students, but for our confidence as teachers” (P7).

Viewed through the ICLA framework, the emphasis on professional development underscores the importance of equipping teachers with integrative and collaborative approaches before and during their classroom practice. Without sufficient training, novice teachers struggle to enact the principles of collaboration and integration central to ICLA. Ongoing, context-specific professional learning opportunities would strengthen their ability to meet the diverse needs of ELLs and align their practices more closely with this framework.

Theme 5: The Role of School and District Support

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of support from school administration and district leadership in shaping their ability to serve ELLs effectively. While some teachers reported feeling supported, others described gaps in guidance, resources, and policies that left them to navigate ELL instruction largely on their own. This variation in administration and district level support influenced how confident teachers felt in implementing strategies, accessing resources, and meeting the diverse needs of their multilingual learners.

Several teachers noted that administrative expectations often felt disconnected from the realities of teaching ELLs. One participant explained, “Our principal was very hands-on with events, but when it came to academics, especially with language learners, I didn’t feel like there was much direction” (P3). Another echoed, “I think the district had policies on paper, but we weren’t given clear training or materials to actually follow them” (P5).

Resource allocation was also a recurring issue. Participants described limited access to bilingual aides, culturally relevant materials, and extracurricular opportunities. One teacher reflected, “We had almost no extracurriculars for our ELL students, and I could see how much more confident they became when they had the chance to participate in something like drama club or sports” (P7). Another added, “I wish the district would dedicate more resources to building program that don’t just meet compliance but actually support language growth” (P2). Similarly, one participant emphasized the role of funding,

explaining, “We don’t have enough funding for bilingual aides, and it makes it harder for kids to keep up” (P10).

At the same time, some teachers shared positive experiences with administrators who encouraged flexibility and provided room for adaptation. One participant said, “The best support I got was just permission to try new things without worrying about being ‘off script’ – the freedom made a big difference” (P8).

Through the ICLA framework, school and district support can be understood as the enabling conditions for collaborative and integrative teaching. Without alignment between teachers’ efforts and institutional structures, the collaborative learning approach is limited in scope. When administrators provide resources, policies, and encouragement that prioritize inclusion, teachers are better positioned to enact ICLA principles and ensure ELLs’ success in mainstream classrooms.

Taken together, these five themes illustrate both the challenges and the supports that shape novice teachers’ work with ELLs in mainstream classrooms. While each theme highlights a distinct dimension of their experience, they collectively point to broader patterns of need, adaptation, and institutional influence. These findings reinforce the importance of collaboration, integration, and shared responsibility, as emphasized by the ICLA framework. Table 5 provides a visual representation of how the five themes align with the framework’s components, illustrating the interconnected nature of teacher experiences, collaboration, and institutional support. This conceptual map bridges the presentation of results and the discussion of trustworthiness that follows.

Table 5***Conceptual Map of Themes and ICLA***

Framework	Connected themes
Integrated Collaborative Learning Approach (ICLA)	Theme 1: Challenges of teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms Theme 2: Strategies for supporting ELLs' learning outcomes Theme 3: Collaboration and resource use Theme 4: Professional development and training needs Theme 5: Role of school and district support

Note. Table 5 illustrates how the five major themes align with and reinforce the key components of the ICLA framework, emphasizing collaboration, integration, and learner-centered practice.

As shown in Table 5, the five major themes align closely with the principles of the ICLA. This model emphasizes collaboration, integration, and learner-centered practice, which are reflected throughout participants' experiences. Together, the visual and thematic findings illustrate how novice teachers' perspectives connect theory to practice, providing a strong foundation for evaluating the rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness of the results discussed in the following section.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Measures were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study's findings. In qualitative research, trustworthiness enables readers to assess the credibility, consistency, and neutrality of the results. This section explains how Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, were addressed throughout the research process to strengthen the rigor of the study.

Credibility

Prolonged engagement during 45–60-minute interviews supported credibility by allowing for in-depth exploration of participant experiences. Member checking also

enhanced accuracy; each participant reviewed their transcript to verify and clarify meaning when needed, and all 10 participants confirmed the accuracy of their accounts.

Transferability

Transferability was addressed through rich descriptions of context, demographics, and teaching environments. Because participants represented multiple districts across different regions, the findings capture diverse perspectives rather than a single setting. This range allows readers to determine whether results may apply to their own contexts.

Dependability

Dependability was strengthened through the use of a clear audit trail. Documentation was maintained across all stages of the research process, including recruitment, data collection, transcription, and thematic analysis. Research decisions were systematically recorded to ensure transparency.

Confirmability

Confirmability was supported through reflexive journaling, which allowed the researcher to monitor potential biases. Direct quotations further grounded interpretations in participants' voices rather than researcher assumptions.

The combined use of these strategies enhanced the study's rigor and supported the trustworthiness of the findings. The combined application of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability reinforced the accuracy, transparency, and trustworthiness of the findings.

By maintaining careful documentation, reflective practice, and participant validation throughout the process, the study yielded results that are both credible and

dependable within the context of novice teachers' experiences supporting ELLs. These verified findings are summarized in the following section, which integrates the themes and their practical implications.

Summary of Findings

Across the five themes, the experiences of novice teachers reveal both the complexity and the promise of supporting ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Participants described the significant challenges they faced, including varying levels of English proficiency, classroom management concerns, and a lack of adequate preparation. Despite these barriers, teachers employed a range of strategies, such as vocabulary instruction, visual aids, structured pacing, and cultural relevance, that helped ELLs engage more meaningfully in learning.

Collaboration also emerges as a key factor. Teachers leaned on colleagues, bilingual staff, and digital tools to supplement their own limited training, demonstrating the value of shared resources and cooperative problem solving. Participants consistently emphasized the need for more targeted professional development focused on ELL instruction. The gap between preservice preparation and classroom realities left many novice teachers relying on informal trial and error rather than structured guidance.

Finally, participants highlighted the critical role of school and district support, both in terms of resource allocation and administrative guidance. When institutional support was limited, teachers struggled to meet students' needs; when support was present, teachers felt empowered to innovate and adapt.

Taken together, these themes suggest that while novice teachers bring creativity, commitment, and resilience to their work with ELLs, their efforts are often hindered by systematic gaps in preparation, training, and support. Viewed through the ICLA, the findings reinforce the importance of collaboration, integration, and collective responsibility in building inclusive and effective classrooms. These insights provide the foundation for Chapter 5, where I discuss implications for practice, policy, and future research, and they directly address the research questions by identifying both the challenges novice teachers face and the supports they perceive as necessary.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter interprets the findings of the study and connects them to the conceptual framework, existing literature, and implications for educational practice. It begins with an interpretation of the findings in relation to the Integrated Collaborative Learning Approach (ICLA) and prior research, followed by a discussion of the study's limitations. Recommendations for practice, policy, and future research are then presented to support improvements in teacher preparation and the instruction of ELLs. The chapter concludes with an examination of implications for social change and a summary of the study's overall contributions to promoting equity and inclusivity in diverse educational contexts. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of novice teachers about the challenges they face, and the support needed to successfully meet the learning outcomes of ELLs in the mainstream classroom.

This chapter provides an interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 4, connecting them to the study's conceptual framework, the ICLA, and the existing literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The discussion highlights how the findings align with, extend, or contrast with prior research on teacher preparation and support for ELLs. The chapter concludes with sections addressing the study's limitations, recommendations for practice and future research, and implications for positive social change.

The discussion highlights how the themes derived from participants' experiences both align with and extend prior research on teacher preparation, instructional strategies, and institutional support for ELLs. By examining these connections, the interpretation

provides insight into how novice teachers navigate the complexities of multilingual classrooms while striving to promote equitable learning outcomes.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings from this study address two research questions: (a) What challenges do novice teachers describe in helping mainstream ELLs meet their learning outcomes? and (b) What support do novice teachers describe as needed to assist them to help mainstream ELLs meet their learning outcomes? Analysis of the interview data revealed five overarching themes: Challenges of teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms, Strategies for supporting ELLs' learning outcomes, Collaboration and resource use, Professional development and training needs, and The role of school and district support. Collectively, these themes provide a comprehensive understanding of how novice teachers perceive both the barriers and supports that influence their ability to meet the needs of ELLs.

Findings Related to Research Question 1

Novice teachers described several challenges in teaching ELLs, including wide variations in English proficiency, cultural differences, and limited preparation for language-focused instruction. These challenges reflect existing research indicating that many beginning teachers enter the classroom without sufficient training in ELL pedagogy (Wernicke et al., 2021; Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Within the ICLA framework, these findings highlight gaps in teachers' ability to integrate collaborative and learner-centered strategies. Participants also noted that inconsistent administrative support and limited

access to instructional resources restricted their ability to fully implement approaches that promote both language and content mastery.

Findings Related to Research Question 2

Participants identified several supports that improved their instruction for ELLs, including the use of visual aids, structured pacing, vocabulary instruction, and culturally relevant materials. Collaboration with colleagues and bilingual staff was viewed as essential support, reinforcing the ICLA principle that shared learning and professional dialogue strengthen instructional practice. Teachers also emphasized the need for targeted professional development on language acquisition and culturally responsive teaching, consistent with prior research advocating for ELL-specific preservice and in-service training (Baecher & Chung, 2019). District-level support and administrative encouragement further enhanced teacher confidence and instructional effectiveness, aligning with previous studies that show how leadership guidance and equitable resource distribution improve outcomes for both teachers and students (Samson & Collins, 2012).

Integration With the ICLA Framework

The ICLA framework emphasizes collaboration, integration, and reflective learning as essential elements of effective instruction. Across all themes, participants demonstrated partial alignment with these principles by using multiple strategies, engaging in peer collaboration, and adapting instruction to meet diverse student needs. However, the findings also revealed systemic barriers, including insufficient preparation and inconsistent institutional support, that limited teachers' ability to apply the framework fully. These results extend the ICLA framework by illustrating that novice

teachers require both relational support among colleagues and organizational support from school leadership to implement collaborative and integrative practices effectively.

Connection to the Literature

The findings of this study contribute to the ongoing conversation about novice teachers' preparedness to work with multilingual learners in mainstream classrooms. Prior research has documented persistent gaps in preservice preparation, variability in teacher confidence, and limited institutional structures to support language development. For example, Villegas et al. (2018) found that many teacher preparation programs offer minimal opportunities for preservice teachers to apply ELL pedagogy in authentic classroom settings. The results of this study support their conclusion, as participants frequently described learning primarily through trial and error or informal peer collaboration rather than structured preparation.

The findings also reveal patterns that align closely with prior scholarly work on novice teachers and ELL instruction. Earlier research has shown that novice teachers often feel uncertain or overwhelmed when teaching multilingual learners without sufficient training (Coady et al., 2020). Similarly, Gándara (2021) emphasized the importance of mentoring and school-based support systems in promoting effective instruction. This study extends their work by demonstrating that novice teachers relied heavily on self-initiated collaboration and resourcefulness when formal support structures were inconsistent or unavailable.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the need for teacher preparation programs and school systems to provide sustained, practice-based training and consistent

institutional support. By situating these results within the context of the ICLA framework and existing literature, this study highlights both areas of alignment with prior research and the ongoing challenges faced by novice teachers. The following section discusses the limitations of the study and the contextual factors that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations influenced the scope and interpretation of this study. First, the sample size was limited to ten novice teachers. Although this aligns with qualitative research standards, it restricts the ability to generalize findings to broader populations. The study prioritized depth of understanding over statistical representation; however, the small sample may not reflect all possible variations in novice teacher experiences.

Second, participants were recruited through the User Interviews platform rather than specific school districts, which may have affected participant demographics and teaching contexts. While this approach allowed for a range of perspectives across settings, it limited access to detailed information about district-specific practices or policies that may influence teacher preparation and support.

Third, the data were based on self-reported experiences through semistructured interviews. This reliance on personal accounts introduces the potential for response bias, as participants may have emphasized certain experiences or underreported others. Member checking and reflexive journaling were used to mitigate these risks and enhance credibility.

Finally, the researcher's professional experience in education may have contributed to how the findings were understood and analyzed. To minimize potential bias, reflexive notes were maintained throughout the research process, and the researcher adhered closely to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis. This ongoing process of reflection ensured that interpretations were grounded in participant data rather than personal assumptions, thereby strengthening the objectivity and credibility of the findings.

Despite these limitations, the study maintained methodological rigor through consistent data collection procedures, transparent coding, and participant validation. These safeguards supported the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings while acknowledging the contextual boundaries inherent in qualitative inquiry. As a result, the conclusions drawn from this research remain trustworthy and grounded in participants' authentic experiences.

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest several recommendations for practice, policy, and future research. These recommendations are grounded in the voices of novice teachers who shared both the challenges they encountered and the supports that facilitated their success. Together, these insights highlight actionable steps for educators, administrators, and policy makers to enhance teacher preparation and support for ELLs.

Recommendations for Practice

Novice teachers would benefit from structured professional development focused specifically on instructional strategies for ELLs. Training should include opportunities to

observe model lessons, practice scaffolding techniques, and receive feedback from experienced mentors. School leaders can also strengthen support by fostering collaboration between general education and ESL teachers, ensuring access to bilingual resources, cultural liaisons, and peer-learning networks. These strategies would promote both instructional effectiveness and teacher confidence in linguistically diverse classrooms.

Recommendations for Policy

Districts and teacher preparation programs should align policies to ensure that all new teachers receive foundational coursework and applied practice in language development and culturally responsive instruction. Educational policymakers might also consider increasing funding for multilingual programs and providing incentives for schools that demonstrate effective ELL integration. Strengthening administrative guidance and ensuring equitable access to resources across districts would improve instructional consistency and reduce disparities in teacher preparation and support.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies could build upon this research by including teachers from multiple states or a wider range of grade levels to capture more diverse perspectives. Quantitative or mixed-methods approaches could further validate the findings and examine relationships between teacher preparation, support structures, and ELL achievement outcomes. Longitudinal research could also explore how novice teachers' skills and perceptions evolve over time as they gain experience and participate in sustained professional learning.

Collectively, these recommendations emphasize the importance of sustained investment in teacher preparation, collaboration, and institutional support. Implementing these actions can strengthen instructional equity for multilingual learners and enhance teacher effectiveness in diverse classrooms. The broader implications of these findings for educational equity and inclusivity are explored in the following section on social change.

Implications

Implications describe how research findings inform practice, policy, or future inquiry by highlighting the broader consequences or applications of a study's results. In qualitative research, implications help connect emerging themes and real-world contexts where those insights can be applied (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The findings of this study have several implications for teacher preparation, sustained professional support, and institutional alignment to help novice teachers meet the needs of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. When schools, districts, and policymakers address these areas collectively, they strengthen teacher confidence and improve learning outcomes for multilingual students.

Implications for Practice

The study highlights the need to equip novice teachers with practical, research-based strategies for supporting ELLs. Integrating ELL pedagogy into preservice coursework and early professional development can strengthen teachers' instructional effectiveness and reduce anxiety during their initial years in the classroom. Providing mentoring, co-teaching experiences, and targeted workshops that model effective

instruction can further ensure that teachers are prepared to meet the linguistic and academic needs of all learners.

Implications for Policy

At the policy level, the findings indicate a need for systemic investment in equitable support for multilingual learners. School districts and state agencies should ensure that teacher preparation programs include coursework on language acquisition and culturally responsive instruction. Policies should also fund sustained professional learning rather than short-term, incentives, ensuring teachers have the resources and time to apply new skills effectively. Aligning these policy measures with classroom realities will help close the gap between institutional expectations and the daily challenges novice teachers face in supporting ELLs.

Implications for Social Change

This study contributes to positive social change by promoting inclusivity, equity, and the professional growth of educators who serve linguistically diverse populations. When novice teachers are adequately prepared and supported, they are empowered to reduce language barriers and create classrooms where all students can access meaningful learning opportunities. Strengthening ELL-focused teacher education not only benefits K-12 learners but also supports higher education and adult learning programs that prepare future educators for diverse classrooms. By advancing practices that view linguistic and cultural diversity as assets, this study supports broader efforts to foster more equitable and socially responsive educational systems.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of novice teachers about the challenges they face, and the support needed to successfully meet the learning outcomes of ELLs in the mainstream classroom. Ten participants shared detailed accounts of their experiences, providing insight into the instructional, emotional, and institutional factors that shape their work with multilingual learners. These narratives offered a comprehensive understanding of the realities novice teachers encounter when balancing content instruction with language development.

Through thematic analysis, five major themes emerged: (1) Challenges of Teaching ELLs in Mainstream Classrooms, (2) Strategies for Supporting ELLs' Learning Outcomes, (3) Collaboration and Resource Use, (4) Professional Development and Training Needs, and (5) The Role of School and District Support. Together, these themes revealed both barriers and the enabling factors that influence teachers' effectiveness in supporting ELLs. The interconnected nature of these themes reflects the complexity of ELL instruction, where preparation, collaboration, and policy alignment all play essential roles in student success.

The findings indicate that novice teachers benefit most from consistent mentorship, professional learning opportunities tailored to ELL instruction, and school-level policies that support inclusive and collaborative practices. When schools and districts provide these supports, teachers develop greater confidence and instructional adaptability, which in turn enhances learning opportunities for linguistically diverse

students. These results highlight the importance of structured systems that prioritize ongoing teacher learning rather than one-time interventions.

Overall, this study enhances understanding of how early-career educators manage the combined demands of teaching academic content while supporting students' language development. By highlighting specific areas for growth in teacher preparation, ongoing professional learning, and educational policy, the findings point to practical ways to support more equitable and culturally responsive classroom environments. Continued research that connects teacher education, in-service learning, and broader systemic efforts may further strengthen educators' ability to meet the needs of diverse learners.

This chapter interpreted the study's findings, examined their implications for practice, policy, and social change, and concluded with recommendations for future research. The results highlight the importance of structured support systems that enable novice teachers to effectively support ELLs through collaboration, focused professional learning, and equitable school-level practices. By linking teachers' lived experiences to practical approaches for improvement, this study adds to ongoing efforts to strengthen inclusive education and promote meaningful, sustainable change in diverse learning environments.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Before each interview I will:

- I will remind each participant 48 hours before the interview of their interview time, date, and location.
- I will remind each participant that their participation is voluntary.
- I will ensure that I have a signed informed consent form from the participant.
- I will test all equipment to ensure it is in working order.
- I will take steps to ensure the participant debriefed after the interview and questions are answered.

Interview Questions:

1. Could you discuss the challenges you've encountered while teaching ELL students in your mainstream classroom? What inspired you to work with this particular group of students?

2. How have you, as a novice teacher, specifically navigated the challenges of assisting mainstream ELLs in achieving their learning outcomes?

3. Please provide examples of strategies or approaches you've used to help mainstream ELLs in reaching their learning outcomes? Have you found any of these strategies to be particularly effective or challenging?

4. What common challenges have you, as a novice teacher, identified that impact the progress of mainstream ELLs in meeting their learning outcomes, and how have you attempted to overcome these obstacles?

5. How do you engage with your colleagues or utilize available resources to improve your effectiveness in assisting mainstream ELLs to achieve their learning outcomes? What particular strategies or tools have you found beneficial to this aim?

6. In your experience as a novice teacher working with mainstream ELLs, what kinds of support have you found most helpful in helping these students achieve their learning outcomes?

7. What support do novice teachers need to assist them to help mainstream ELLs in meeting their learning outcomes?

8. Are there any professional development opportunities or training programs that you believe would be beneficial for you as a novice teacher to better support mainstream ELLs in meeting their learning outcomes? If so, why do you, as a novice teacher, feel this is needed?

9. How could the support provided to you as a novice teacher be enhanced to better assist mainstream ELLs in achieving their learning outcomes?

10. What forms of support from school administration and the district do you, as a novice teacher, find necessary to effectively assist mainstream ELLs in achieving their learning outcomes? Could you suggest any policy adjustments or additional resources that would aid in this endeavor?

Appendix B: Codebook

The following codebook presents the final set of codes developed through Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. Each code was derived inductively from the interview transcripts and refined through multiple rounds of review to ensure alignment with the study's research questions and conceptual framework, the Integrated Collaborative Learning Approach (ICLA). The table lists the primary codes, their operational definitions, and representative participant excerpts that illustrate their meaning. These codes were later organized into five overarching themes discussed in Chapter 4.

Final Codebook

Code	Definition/Description	Illustrative Example
Language Proficiency Differences	References to varied English-language skill levels among students and the instructional difficulty of addressing them simultaneously.	“In a single class I had students who were nearly fluent sitting next to others who couldn’t yet form basic sentences.” (P1)
Cultural and Behavioral Challenges	Mentions of cultural misunderstanding, disengagement, or behavioral issues stemming from language barriers.	“Sometimes it wasn’t just about language — it was about frustration. When students didn’t understand, they would shut down or distract others.” (P8)
Limited Preparation and Resources	Comments highlighting lack of preservice training, materials, or institutional support for ELL instruction.	“We might have covered accommodations in theory, but I never had the chance to practice them.” (P5)
Vocabulary and Scaffolding Strategies	Descriptions of instructional methods (e.g., visuals, repetition, structured pacing) used to build language comprehension.	“Repetition and visuals made a huge difference — students needed to see it, hear it, and practice it.” (P4)
Cultural Relevance and Engagement	Instances where teachers connect lessons to students’ backgrounds or real-life contexts to increase participation.	“I tried to connect assignments to things happening in the world or their lives ... it made the English practice feel meaningful.” (P8)
Collaboration with Colleagues	Accounts of seeking guidance or sharing ideas with peers to address ELL needs.	“Talking with my colleagues gave me practical strategies I wouldn’t have thought of alone.” (P6)
Use of Technology and Instructional Tools	Mentions of translation apps, visuals, or other digital aids supporting ELL learning.	“Even something like Google Translate or visuals on the smartboard made a big difference.” (P8)

Need for Targeted Professional Development	Statements emphasizing inadequate ELL-specific PD or the desire for practical, hands-on training.	“Most of the PD sessions we get are focused on general topics — nothing really specific to language learners.” (P4)
Administrative and District Support	Observations about leadership influence, policy clarity, and availability of district-level guidance.	“I think the district had policies on paper, but we weren’t given clear training or materials to actually follow them.” (P5)
Resource and Funding Constraints	Mentions of limited access to aides, materials, or extracurriculars for ELLs.	“We don’t have enough funding for bilingual aides, and it makes it harder for kids to keep up.” (P10)
Empowerment and Autonomy	Descriptions of positive experiences when administrators allowed flexibility or innovation.	“The best support I got was just permission to try new things without worrying about being ‘off script.’” (P8)

Note. Codes were organized inductively from interview data and refined through iterative analysis to form the five major themes reported in Chapter 4:

1. Challenges of Teaching ELLs in Mainstream Classrooms
2. Strategies for Supporting ELLs’ Learning Outcomes
3. Collaboration and Resource Use
4. Professional Development and Training Needs
5. The Role of School District Support