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Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of Long-Term English Language Learners

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2017

Abstract

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MA, Dominican University, 2010

BEd, Kenyatta University, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Increasing numbers of English-language learners (ELLs) with limited literacy skills in middle schools have resulted in a high percentage of long-term English-language learners (LTELLs). The problem of LTELLs, ELLs who have attended school in the United States for more than 6 years and have not met the state ESL exit criteria, is addressed in this study. Cummins' concept of second language acquisition and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theoretical frameworks were used in this qualitative case study to explore the perceptions of 6 Title I middle school teachers. The purpose of this study was to explore middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELLs and their impact on classroom instruction. The research questions investigated how middle school teachers perceived the limited literacy skills among LTELLs and respectively how middle school teachers perceived the effect of LTELLs on their classroom instruction. Data were collected through interviews and document analysis, and analyzed with descriptive analytical techniques Findings from the data indicated that middle school teachers' misconceptions about LTELLs, a lack of knowledge of LTELL and second language acquisition, and a lack of linguistic support, contributed to the limited literacy skills among LTELLs. The resulting project, a white paper, focused on recommendations for the stakeholders on how to address the issue of limited literacy skills among LTELLs. This study's contribution to social change includes a better understanding of LTELLs and their learning needs, as well as addressing teachers' misconceptions about LTELLs and second language acquisition. The results and recommendations provide suggestions that, if implemented, may improve ELLs' academic achievement and reduce the number of LTELLs.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my late dad, Mzee Japheth I. Sipira, who inspired and encouraged me to appreciate the value of education. Although my dad did not have formal education, he understood the power of education. His vision and love for education continue to kindle my quest for knowledge. His wish was for me to get a doctorate in Education and always looked forward to the day he would call me ‘Daktari’(Swahili word for Doctor). Unfortunately, he is not here to celebrate this auspicious moment with me.

Acknowledgement

First, I am grateful to God for this achievement. I would not have made through the challenges I encountered during my doctoral journey without His grace, peace, and strength. I acknowledge my family and friends for their prayers, support, and encouragement throughout my doctoral journey.

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Next, I want to express my sincere thanks to my doctoral committee for their scholarly guidance and support. I thank Dr. Timothy Rodriguez, committee chair, for his guidance and continued encouragement throughout the writing process. I appreciate Dr. Nancy Williams, committee member, for her expertise and invaluable knowledge in methodology, and Dr. Dan Cernusca, the URR, for his constructive feedback. Thank you so much for working with me, and guiding me to conduct such a valuable study.

Finally, I want to thank my students whose determination and resilience inspired and encouraged me during tough times.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

In recent years, the number of diverse learners has increased, and among them are English-language learners (ELLs). ELLs are students who learn English as a second language (ESL) as they learn grade-level content. These students are classified as *limited English proficiency* (LEP), and they are at risk of not graduating from high school (Texas Educational Agency [TEA], 2015a). The ELL subgroup is the most diversified category among the student population. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) 2008 report described ELLs as a highly heterogeneous and complex group of students with diverse abilities, educational needs, backgrounds, and goals, and they are learning English as another language. Within the ELL group exists another category, long-term English-language learners (LTELLs). LTELLs are students who have been enrolled in school in the United States for more than 6 years and have not met the ESL exit criteria (Olsen, 2010). The LTELLs significantly affect the current education system, yet little is known about them (Menken, Kleyn, & Chae, 2012).

According to Olsen (2010), 60% of ELLs have attended schools in the United States for more than 6 years, yet they have not made the expected progress in the second language acquisition (SLA) process. Slama (2012) found that LTELLs remain at the intermediate English proficiency level in reading and writing skills and still need linguistic support. Calderon, Slavin, and Sanchez (2011) observed that LTELLs have basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and can understand basic concepts, but

they lack the cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) and deeper understanding they need to apply, synthesize, and evaluate information. Menken (2013a) noted that ELLs score 20 to 50 points below their peers on state standardized tests. The National Center for Education Statistics (2012) report showed that only 2% of ELLs scored above the 70th percentile on the vocabulary scale of the 2011 eighth-grade reading test. A recent analysis of student performance on high-stakes tests revealed that limited academic vocabulary was the main reason that ELLs failed to meet the minimum standards (Stark & Noel, 2015). This analysis confirmed the findings by Menken, Kleyn, and Chae (2012) that ELLs lack literacy competency in their native language and English language, struggle in their academic classes and do not do well on state standardized tests. In this study, I examined middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELLs' limited literacy skills and how LTELLs affect teachers' classroom instruction.

Definition of the Problem

Malaika School District (a pseudonym), a school district in Texas, is among the school districts that have experienced an increase in the number of LTELLs. The school district's website showed that during the 2014-2015 academic year, 15.5% of the district's student population was classified as ELLs. The 2014–2015 end-of-year Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) records confirmed that more than 60% of ELLs in the district had attended school in the United States for more than 6 years. An analysis of the 2014–2015 Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment Standards (TELPAS), a state-mandated assessment for ELLs, suggested that 48% of the

students did not show growth in their English proficiency in their reading and writing skills. The district English language arts (ELA) coordinator (personal communication, May 28, 2015) stated that data from the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), a reading assessment used to establish students' reading levels, revealed that 68% of ELLs read at more than two grade levels below the current grade level. In addition, the district ESL coordinator (personal communication, January 18, 2015) stated that teachers' reports indicated that most ELLs lacked basic literacy skills to perform grade-level tasks and were likely to fail their current grade level. The 2013–2014 Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) (TEA, 2015b) showed that 42% of the middle school ELLs in Malaika School District did not meet the minimum standards on state assessments, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in reading. A campus improvement specialist also noted that middle schools with high enrollment of ELLs in Malaika School District did not meet the 2014–2015 adequate yearly progress (AYP) (personal communication, August 31, 2015) because of ELLs' poor performance. The ELLs' poor performance on state standardized tests had negatively affected the schools' rating and increased the number of LTELLs in the school district.

Although most school districts have developed and implemented school-wide initiatives to improve student achievement and meet the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001) accountability requirements (Robinson, McKenna, & Conradi, 2012), the number of LTELLs with limited literacy skills continues to increase. Despite these initiatives to improve student achievement, most ELLs in Malaika School District do not perform well

on the state assessments. Because of the NCLB accountability policies, teachers who work with ELLs, especially LTELLs, work under pressure to increase student achievement (Menken, 2010; Ortiz-Marrero & Sumaryono, 2010).

The lack of academic achievement among LTELLs in Malaika School District indicates a gap in learning among the LTELLs. Most middle school LTELLs lack literacy skills and perform poorly on state standardized test despite the implementation of improvement initiatives by the school district. A study to explore the issue of limited literacy skills among LTELLs was necessary, so I conducted a qualitative case study at Pearls Middle School (pseudonym) in Malaika School District. The purpose of the study was to find out how middle school teachers perceived the limited literacy skills among LTELLs and how LTELLs affected teachers' classroom instruction. I collected data to determine factors that contributed to limited literacy skills among LTELLs from teachers' perspectives.

The issue of limited literacy skills among LTELLs is not only a local problem in Malaika School District, but it is also a nationwide problem (Robinson et al., 2012). Studies by Menken et al. (2012) and Olsen (2010) confirmed that more than 60% of ELLs are LTELLs. Slama (2012) conducted a longitudinal analysis of the academic proficiencies for ninth-grade ELLs and found that 60% of the ELLs were born in the United States to immigrant parents. The findings showed that those students had attended schools in the United States for more than 9 years, yet they had not developed sufficient academic language and literacy skills to accomplish grade-level tasks. According to

Sheng, Sheng, and Anderson (2011) and Ardasheva, Tretter, and Kinny (2012), a link exists between English proficiency and students' academic performance. Sheng et al. and Ardasheva et al. noted that ELLs with high English proficiency performed at the same level as the non-ELLs, but Menken and Kleyn (2010) found that LTELLs with emergent English proficiency tested approximately 3 years below their actual grade level. Data from the TEA (2015a) biennial report indicated that more than 60% of students classified as ESL were LTELLs; they still needed linguistic support. These findings were indicators that the issue of limited literacy skills among LTELLs was not only a local challenge but also a national problem that needs to be addressed.

The issue of limited literacy skills among LTELLs is a challenge to educators and policymakers at the local, school, and national levels (Robinson et al., 2012). Despite the district initiatives to improve student achievement, the number of LTELLs with limited literacy skills continued to increase in Malaika School District. An investigation into why LTELLs lacked appropriate grade-level literacy skills was critical. The purpose of the study was to explore and gain a deeper understanding of middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELLs and how LTELLs affect classroom instruction.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

According to the International Reading Association (IRA, 2009), literacy skills are critical for career and college readiness, yet ELLs continue to struggle with the development of these skills. A recent survey of 15-year-old students around the world

found that reading engagement was a better predictor of students' reading achievement than their parents' socioeconomic status (Cummins, 2011). Sheng et al. (2011) found a link between English proficiency and students' academic performance and grade retention. They noted that English proficiency level was a leading factor that influenced the risk of ELLs dropping out of school. According to Ardasheva et al. (2012), LTELLs have a desire to do well, yet they continue to struggle, and teachers are unaware of how to meet their learning needs. Flores, Kleyn, and Menken (2015) observed that most educators and administrators at middle and high schools did not understand the learning needs associated with LTELLs, so they were unable to help them to be successful.

The NCTE (2008) report stated that most educators consider ELLs as a homogeneous group; this assumption limits teachers' ability to meet the varied learning needs of ELLs. Calderon et al. (2011) found that ELLs at the high school level were placed in the same class irrespective of the proficiency level. Vogt (2012) observed that a one-size-fits-all instruction for ELLs with diverse backgrounds, needs, and levels of proficiencies is ineffective. Simms (2012) noted that ELLs who were born in the United States have different learning needs from those who are new to the country.

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

Middle school teachers expected LTELLs to perform grade-level tasks with minimal linguistic support (Berkeley et al., 2012). The fact that these students had limited literacy skills was frustrating to both students and teachers. According to Marchand-Martella et al. (2013), the NCLB Act (2001), the National Institute of Child Health and

Human Development (NICHD; 2009), and the IRA (2010) required students to be proficient readers by third grade. Under normal circumstances, LTELLs are expected to read to learn at their grade level with minimal support. Unfortunately, most LTELLs in Malaika School District struggle with reading and writing skills and still require linguistic support. Ziegenfuss, Odhiambo, and Keyes (2014) found a link between literacy skills and middle school academic achievement in math and ELA. Consequently, LTELLs cannot be successful if they lack grade-level literacy skills.

According to Sheng et al. (2011), more ELLs were being retained for poor classroom performance and not meeting minimum standards on state standardized tests. Olsen (2010) and Menken et al. (2012) found that most of the LTELLs remained emergent bilinguals and did not develop adequate academic language. Olsen (2010) and Slama (2012) found that LTELLs had significant gaps in their educational backgrounds, weak academic language proficiency, and deficits in reading and writing skills. Most LTELLs developed habits of non-engagement, passivity, invisibility in school, and a lack of enthusiasm, and they are at risk of not graduating from high school. The findings of the study provided an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions of the limited literacy skills among LTELLs.

Definition of Terms

Adequate yearly progress (AYP) is the index of improvement for schools to meet the federal and state set standards. For a school to achieve the AYP, most of the subgroups, including ELLs, must meet the achievement target (Robinson et al., 2012).

Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) is the language ability required for face-to-face verbal communication (Cummins, 1999).

Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) is the language proficiency needed for the academic achievement (Cummins, 1999). Cummins coined the acronyms BICS and CALPS to describe the two levels of language mastery for students learning English as a second language.

English-language learners (ELLs) are active learners of English who have limited English proficiency and speak a language other than English. These students have difficulty in performing grade-level work in English (Grady & O'Dwyer, 2014).

English as a second language (ESL) refers to a program of instruction designed to meet the learning needs of ELLs and facilitate their language acquisition (NCTE, 2008; TEA, 2013).

ESL beginners refer to students with no knowledge of English language. This group mainly comprises of students who are new to the country (TEA, 2015b).

ESL intermediate is a term used to classify ELLs for instructional purposes. It refers to students who can read and understand simple high-frequency words but have limited vocabulary to handle grade level tasks (TEA, 2015b).

Language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC) is a decision-making committee that makes decisions concerning ELLs' instructional placement, assessments, and exit (TEA, 2015a).

Long-term English-language learners (LTELLs) refers to a subgroup of ELLs who have been enrolled in school in the United States for more than 6 years (Menken & Kleyn, 2010; Olsen, 2010). These are ELLs either in middle school or high school who have not met the exit criterion and still need linguistic support.

Oral language proficiency test (OLPT) is a norm-referenced test used for identification or placement of ELLs. It is also used for annual assessment to determine growth in language proficiency (TEA, 2013).

Second-generation English-language learners is a term used to refer to children who are born in the United States to parents who are migrants to the United States and speak another language (Simms, 2012).

Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment of Systems (TELPAS) is designed by TEA to assess the progress that LEP students make in learning the English language to meet the NCLB guidelines (TEA, 2015c).

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) is the testing program for students in third grade through eighth grade in public schools in the state of Texas (TEA, 2015a).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in the field of education because, in it, I address an issue that affects the most rapidly growing student population, ELLs, in the U.S. school system (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition [NCELA], (2011). I examined the middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELLs' limited literacy skills and

how LTELLs affected teachers' classroom instruction. Robinson et al. (2012) observed that most schools with a high enrollment of ELLs did not meet AYP because of poor performance by ELLs. The poor performance is associated with limited literacy skills (Menken, 2010). According to Ziegenfuss et al. (2014), students' academic achievement in math and ELA are connected to literacy competencies. Therefore, my study is important because literacy skills affect students' academic performance.

Issues related to the lack of literacy skills not only affect individual students, but they also affect schools negatively and have a long-term implication on the U.S. economy. Olsen (2010) found that more than 60% of ELLs were classified as LTELLs and are at risk of not graduating from high school. Similarly, Grady and O'Dwyer (2014) noted that the high dropout rates among the Hispanic students were associated with low income and low scores**.** Based on the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), Hispanics account for more than 50% of the ELLs in U.S. schools. An analysis of the 2013 data from the U.S. Department of Labor by Stark and Noel (2015) indicated that most of the unemployed adults were school dropouts. According to American Federation of Teachers (AFT; 2013), the increase in the number of LTELLs is a national crisis, and it should be addressed.

Specifically, my goal was to examine how middle school teachers perceive the limited literacy skills among LTELLs and how LTELLs affect the classroom instruction. Therefore, this study is significant because students' academic achievement in math and ELA are connected to literacy skills (Ziegenfuss et al., 2014), and the students'

performance affects the schools' AYP (Robinson et al., 2012). My underlying goal of this study was to have an in-depth understanding of the issue of limited literacy among LTELLs and use the findings to address it.

Guiding Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of middle school teachers' perceptions of the limited literacy skills among LTELLs. The study was conducted at Pearls Middle School in Malaika School District, a Title I school with the highest number of LTELLs in the district. The guiding research question for this study was: Why do some ELLs who have attended school in the United States for more than 6 years have limited literacy skills? This study endeavored to find teachers' perspectives on the issue of limited literacy skills among LTELLs by answering the following research questions:

1. How do middle school teachers perceive the limited literacy skills among LTELLs?
2. How do middle school teachers perceive the effect of LTELL students on their classroom instruction?

Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by Cummins' (2000) concept of SLA and Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD; Berk, 2008). Cummins' theory of SLA provided a framework for the process of SLA, whereas Vygotsky's theory of ZPD created a frame for the role of the teachers in language development among LTELLs.

According to Cummins, the SLA process has two domains: (a) BICS and (b) CALP. Cummins defined BICS as the interpersonal communicative skills that include basic vocabulary and pronunciation that help the learner to derive meaning from the situation and nonlinguistic cues such as tone, gestures, and facial expressions. Conversely, CALP is the academic language that allows an individual to process and make meaning of language independent of situations. The Cummins' theory of SLA states that it takes 1 to 2 years to develop BICS, but 5 to 7 to develop CALP with appropriate intervention. The language acquisition process occurs on a continuum (Cummins, 1999), and it requires significant support (Cummins, 2000).

It is important for educators to understand the difference between BICS and CALP because students' BICS level can be misleading. In some cases, students' command of BICS can result in students being denied services they desperately need (Bylund, 2011). For example, most of the LTELLs possess BICS, the communicative language, but they cannot process the academic language associated with academic achievement (Cummins, 2011). The NCTE (2008) report stated that some teachers assumed that ELLs with good oral English did not need support. According to Olsen (2010), teachers' misconceptions have led to the underdevelopment of literacy skills among ELLs. Studies (Ardasheva et al., 2012; Menken et al., 2012; Valera, 2010) have supported Cummins' concept of SLA. Although these studies confirmed that it takes more than 5 years to master a second language, students' progress should be on the

anticipated language continuum. They are expected to show growth, and not remain emergent bilinguals (Olsen, 2010; Flores et al., 2015).

Cummins (1999) observed that cognitive skills played a vital role in developing language and suggested that instructional programs for ELLs should be designed to promote cognitive, language, and academic components simultaneously. The author advocated for bilingual programs that were cognitively challenging and capable of improving high-order critical thinking skills to enable students to transfer the knowledge and the expertise they already possessed in their first language. Cummins (2011) stated that educators should create an environment that supports SLA for ELLs to develop academic vocabulary.

Berk (2008) described Vygotsky's theory of ZPD regarding the development of children's social and language skills and explained how they interconnected. According to Berk, Vygotsky's theory of ZPD explains the importance of the social environment, scaffolding, and gradual release in the learning process. Children learn to perform challenging skills with the support of an adult around them. Children cannot do certain tasks on their own. The adult working with children challenges them to do the tasks, supports them up to a certain level, and then gradually releases them to work independently. Vygotsky's theory promoted assisted discovery learning and emphasized the role of teachers and more capable peers in the acquisition of new skills and knowledge. Lantolf and Poehner (2011) confirmed that the knowledge of Vygotsky's

theory helped teachers determine the skills and knowledge students needed to accomplish a challenging task within the ZPD.

Lantolf and Poehner (2011) analyzed interactions between students and a teacher who taught Spanish as a foreign language and discussed the relationship between Vygotsky's theory of ZPD and language development. The theory of ZPD provided a framework for intervention and helped the teacher to identify students' abilities and the support they needed to develop higher-level skills. The interaction, appropriate ongoing support, and feedback the teachers provide positively affect students' language development help learners to move toward independence. In this case, LTELLs need continuous scaffolding to allow them to take risks and perform tasks that are beyond their linguistic ability, a process that helps them acquire needed academic skills (Flores et al., 2015). Teachers should provide LTELLs with adequate opportunities to practice and use the academic language (Goldenberg, 2011; Lau, 2012). Therefore, the role of the teacher in students' language acquisition process cannot be underestimated.

Based on Cummins' concept of SLA, LTELLs are expected to have attained an advanced level and moved toward high English proficiency by the time they reach middle school (Cummins, 1999). The proficiency level descriptors in TEA (2015c) indicated that ELLs at advanced high English proficiency level should perform grade-level activities with no linguistic support. According to Vygotsky's theory of ZPD, LTELLs should participate in learning activities that can help them develop academic language (Berk, 2008; Lau, 2012). Therefore, in this study, I investigated teachers' perceptions of the

limited literacy skills among LTELLs to understand the underlying factors that contribute to their limited literacy skills despite being in an environment in which they could access and practice the English language.

Review of the Literature

I accessed relevant resources from the Walden University Library databases and other credible sources such as the national and state department of education websites using various search terms. These phrases or words included LTELLs, ELLs, emergent bilinguals, teachers' perceptions, SLA, ELLs' performance and achievement, literacy development for ELLs, literacy skills, and English language proficiency. Despite the scant literature on LTELLs (Menken, 2013a), several themes emerged from the review of the literature. These central ideas include characteristics of LTELLs, the effect of LTELLs' poor performance, and factors contributing to literacy deficiency among LTELLs. These factors included the lack of well-trained teachers, misplacement of students, a lack of appropriate support, inadequate classroom instruction, ineffective language programs, teachers' negative attitudes, home environment, and educational policies and systems. Although my study focused on teachers' perceptions of the limited literacy among LTELLs, it is important for educators to know the basic characteristics of LTELLs and how they contribute to their limited literacy skills.

Characteristics of LTELLs

LTELLs are ELLs who have been enrolled in school in the United States for more than 6 years and have not met the ESL exit criteria. According to TEA (2013), LTELLs

are in middle and high schools, they have diverse learning needs, and they exhibit certain characteristics. Olsen (2010) described LTELLs as emergent bilinguals with inadequate academic vocabulary while Flores et al. (2015) described them as semi-lingual students, neither fluent in the first language (L1) nor the second language (L2), which is English in this case. They lack basic literacy skills associated with academic success, do not perform well on state standardized tests, and they are at-risk for not graduating from high school. Flores et al. (2015) noted that LTELLs consider themselves as native-English speakers because of their social and verbal skills, but they perform below their native peers. LTELLs tested 3 years below their actual grade level in L2 literacy and three-and-a-half years below in L1 literacy. LTELLs have limited academic skills necessary for college-level courses, yet they want to go to college (Olsen, 2010; Kim & Garcia, 2014). According to Flores et al. (2015) and Olsen (2010), LTELLs are mainly associated with poor performance, have significant gaps in academic background knowledge, and struggle with reading and writing skills.

The Effect of LTELLs' Poor Performance

LTELLs bear a stigma of poor performance due to the lack of skills related to academic success. According to Menken et al. (2012) and Olsen (2010), LTELLs have not progressed in the SLA process, they struggle with the development of literacy skills in both their L1 and L2, and still need linguistic support and accommodations to participate in grade-level activities. As emergent bilinguals, LTELLs are less skilled in the academic language associated with school achievement, but they have well-developed

communicative skills and are orally bilingual for social purposes. Kim and Garcia (2014) observed that LTELLs experience persistent academic underachievement despite several years of schooling. Sheng et al. (2011) found that more LTELLs were retained in the same grade level due to poor performance, and they were at the risk of not graduating from high school.

LTELLs' poor performance affects their morale, has a negative effect on schools' rating, and will have a long-term nationwide implication. According to Robinson et al. (2012), schools with a high enrollment of ELLs do not meet AYP due to ELLs' poor performance on state standardized tests. Menken (2013a) noted that emergent bilinguals scored 20-50 points below their peers and failed to meet the AYP. AFT (2013) observed that by 2025, the nation's workforce would comprise 20% of ELLs and they will have a significant effect on the country's economic and social issues. Therefore, ELLs should be equipped with knowledge and skills that will allow them to participant in the global economy. Statistics indicate that students who are not performing well in school are likely to drop out of school. The NCELA (2011) report showed that the dropout rate for ELLs is 15% to 20% higher than the overall number of non-ELLs due to a lack of academic success. The Comprehensive Biannual report, TEA (2015a), revealed a higher rate of school dropout among Latino students who are also classified as LTELLs compared to students of other ethnicities. Stark and Noel (2015) found a similar trend at the federal level. An analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Labor 2013 indicated that most of the unemployed adults are school dropouts.

Literacy Deficiencies

Fernandez and Inserra (2013), Luster (2011), and Zetlin et al. (2011) found that literacy deficit among LTELLs is a result of complex, interrelated factors. These factors include a lack of well-trained teachers, misplacement of students, inadequate classroom instruction, ineffective language programs, teachers' negative attitudes, and educational policies among many others. According to Flores et al. (2015), LTELLs have continued to have literacy deficiency because teachers are unaware of this subgroup and their unique learning needs. Calderon et al. (2011) and the NCTE (2008) noted that teachers considered ELLs as a homogeneous group. Calderon et al. (2011) and Flores et al. (2015) stated that teachers focused on helping ESL beginners (newcomers) develop basic language skills at the expense of LTELLs' developing academic language and teaching content.

Lack of well-trained teachers. The lack of well-trained teachers is considered as the main factor contributing to the current increase in the number of ELLs with limited literacy skills (Banks & Banks 2012). According to Shapiro (2008), academic competence could not be attained if teachers were not well prepared to meet students' learning needs. Some LTELLs have limited literacy skills because of gaps in learning; they did not receive the support they needed in elementary school (Olsen, 2010). The lack of well-trained teachers has manifested itself in various ways. For example, Fernandez and Inserra (2013) found that the disproportionate number of ELLs in special education was due to the lack of well-trained teachers and inconsistent Response to Intervention

(RtI) program; a multi-level prevention system to improve student achievement. Some teachers reported that they did not know the RtI plan in their school, and they were not prepared to work with diverse learners, especially ELLs. Most LTELLs come from low socio-economic families. Banks and Banks (2012) noted that teachers who were not well equipped to meet students' learning needs taught students from lower social class, and emphasized the importance of training teachers in SLA to help them to respond to students' diverse needs.

According to O'Brien (2011), some school districts required teachers to be ESL certified and attend mandatory ESL professional development (PD) to teach ELLs. Despite this requirement, a lack of teachers' preparedness to meet students' literacy learning needs is still a major issue at middle and high school levels (Luster, 2011). Richards-Tutor et al. (2012) observed that most middle school teachers were not trained to handle the RtI process. If middle school teachers are not prepared to meet the learning needs of ELLs, the cycle of poor performance will continue to the high school level (Robinson et al., 2012). O'Brien (2011) conducted a study among high school social studies teachers to examine the effect of the mandatory training to teach ELLs and found that teachers were not well trained to meet ELLs' learning needs. Fernandez and Inserra (2013) found that 11 of 12 teachers had never received any professional training related to ELLs, and confirmed that the lack of teacher training in SLA resulted in many special education discrepancies. De Oliveira (2011) observed that teachers who were not trained in ESL teaching strategies and SLA process did not know why ELLs shut down or

became disruptive in class. According to Menken et al. (2011), teacher preparedness and engagement played a vital role in the quality of the classroom instruction.

Menken, Funk, and Kleyn (2011) found that Spanish teachers at the high school level were not prepared to teach Spanish (Elective) to native Spanish speakers who had experienced language loss and had low literacy skills. Goldenberg (2011) noted that teachers who were not well trained in SLA neither tapped into students' funds of knowledge nor used students' L1 knowledge and skills as a resource. Martinez (2010) observed that *Spanglish*, a blend of English and Spanish, could be leveraged as a resource to help students cultivate academic and literary skills if teachers tapped into the funds of knowledge ELLs brought to class. This approach could help students develop metalinguistic awareness and extend the skills embedded in their use of *Spanglish* by applying them to specific academic literacy tasks (Martinez, 2010). Menken (2013b) found that some teachers and administrators regarded students' home language as an impediment to learning instead of an invaluable resource to support students' education.

Misplacement of students. According to Fernandez and Inserra (2013), a lack of well-trained teachers resulted in referral and misplacement of ELLs in special education. Teachers who were not trained in the SLA process found it difficult to decipher if ELLs struggle due to language proficiency or cognitive abilities (Cummins, 1989). Fernandez and Inserra also found that most mainstreamed ELLs were referred to special education because teachers did not have basic knowledge in SLA. For instance, some teachers did not know that acculturation and students' English proficiency affected students' academic

performance and behavior, and assumed that referring ELLs for special education helped ELLs to overcome their academic struggles.

Zetlin et al. (2011) found that ELLs in the primary grades lacked achievement in basic literacy skills and had failing grades. Teachers did not have intervention plans for ELLs, who had been retained in the same class, and this resulted in continued academic failure and referral for special education assessment. Fernandez and Inserra (2013) and Zetlin et al. (2011) confirmed that students who were referred for special education were tested in a language in which they were not proficient. Fernandez and Inserra observed that ELLs who were not proficient or literate in their native language performed poorly on bilingual assessments given for special education consideration. These findings supported earlier studies by Cummins (1986) that suggested the need to follow the right protocol for special education assessment, evaluation of the intervention plan and assessment tools before assessing ELLs for special education services. Because of these multifaceted problems, many ELLs are misplaced in special education classes

According to Swanson, Orosco, and Lussier (2012), the lack of an identification tool to determine reading disability in ELLs contributed to the wrongful placement of ELLs in special education classes. While Fernandez and Inserra (2013) noted the disproportionate number of ELLs referred for special education services, Richards-Tutor et al. (2012) found that teachers did not refer ELLs for special education assessment because they attributed the ELLs' academic struggles to language proficiency and did not consider the possibility of cognitive-related issues. Zetlin et al. (2011) found that teachers

did not refer ELLs for special education services because of low expectations for ELLs. Also, Swanson et al. (2012) found that ELLs were underrepresented overall in special education given the proportion of the overall population. They linked the reading disability among the ELLs to a lack of an established method in identifying reading disability in ELLs. Fernandez and Inserra (2013) found that the number of ELLs identified for special education escalated from fifth grade and continued to increase to high school.

Despite these contradictions, researchers tend to agree that the ELLs do not get the right support because they are either misdiagnosed or denied services (Swanson et al., 2012). This unfortunate situation could be a major contributing factor to the literacy deficit among LTELLs. Robinson et al. (2012) also noted the possibility of some ELLs not being identified correctly and continued to experience literacy deficit, thus, making it difficult for them to meet the exit criteria.

Student assessment for special education is an area that needs more research to establish guidelines that help teachers overcome the problem of student misplacement. Zetlin et al. (2011) noted that some teachers misinterpreted children's lack of English proficiency as a learning disability. On the other hand, Richards-Tutor et al. (2012) pointed out that ELLs with disabilities were misdiagnosed as requiring English proficiency and denied special education services. Based on these differences in handling ELLs, it is evident that some ELLs did not get the right support or intervention they

needed to meet their learning needs. These differences could be a possible explanation as to why some LTELLs have limited literacy skills.

Lack of appropriate learning support. According to De Oliveira (2011), a lack of well-established language support for ELLs could be a possible reason why ELLs have gaps in learning as they progress through grade levels. Fernandez and Inserra (2013) found that ELLs in mainstream classes did not get the support they needed and teachers lacked the knowledge of effective strategies for ELLs. According to O'Brien (2011), mainstream teachers did not get any classroom support from the ESL district personnel. Menken et al. (2011) and O'Brien (2011) found that teachers who taught ELLs did not have adequate instructional material or supplemental material. Olsen (2010) noted that most LTELLs were mainstreamed and did not receive any support to promote language development.

Lack of appropriate learning programs and classroom instruction for ELLs. Researchers should examine the curriculum and programs ELLs are exposed to in their earlier days of schooling to understand the reasons for the lack of literacy skills. ELLs programs for elementary school include early-exit bilingual, late-exit bilingual (or maintenance), bilingual/biliteracy, two-way (or dual language), and structured English immersion programs (Olsen, 2010). Although most elementary schools have these programs, the programs are not well developed to target ELLs' learning needs. According to Menken et al. (2012), ELLs often received inconsistent programming, moving in and out of various ESL or bilingual programs without consistent support. Menken (2013a)

and Olsen (2010) noted that some of the bilingual programs did not provide a firm foundation for students' home language. Therefore, a lack of appropriate programs targeting SLA has contributed to the LTELLs' inability to develop literacy skills and acquire linguistic proficiency.

Menken et al. (2011) found that teachers at the high school level were not aware of LTELLs subgroup and their learning needs. Due to a lack of this knowledge, many middle and high schools do not have educational programs tailored to meet the learning needs for LTELLs. Ardasheva et al. (2012), Flores et al. (2015), and Olsen (2010) observed that most schools had ESL transitional programs where LTELLs are placed in the same class with students who were new to the country. According to Olsen (2010), transitional programs are subtractive. Subtractive programs are those programs that do not allow LTELLs to progress in academic language acquisition and do not take advantage of students' L1. Menken et al. (2011) and Olsen (2010) suggested that LTELLs should have classroom instruction that focuses on the development of academic language rather than the basic language proficiency that the new arrivals need. Kim and Garcia (2014) noted the scarcity to almost non-existence of formal or informal programs that address the linguistic needs of LTELLs. At the middle school level, ELLs are mainstreamed and receive minimal support from teachers due to large class sizes.

Banks and Banks (2012) observed that students from low socio-economic status were not exposed to valued curricula, they were taught less of whatever curricula they studied, and teachers had lowered their expectations. As a result, they were not well

prepared for the next grade level. Menken (2010) confirmed this disparity and pointed out that such discrepancy contributed to the gaps in knowledge and skills among LTELLs. For example, Olsen (2010) found that 59% of LTELLs did not meet exit criteria from the ESL program due to a lack of language development instruction, narrowed curricula, and materials that did not meet students' learning needs. Most LTELLs were enrolled in weak language development program models that were poorly implemented. According to Menken (2013b), histories of inconsistent programs, partial access to the full curriculum, social segregation, and linguistic isolation contributed to the presence of LTELLs at the middle school and high school level.

Kim and Garcia (2014) explored the perceptions of LTELLs about their schooling in the context of their school history including program placements, special education referral**,** and academic outcomes. They found that ineffective and non-motivating curricula that lacked connections between students' background knowledge and new concepts contributed to LTELLs' lack of achievement than the perceived learning disability. Their findings revealed a gap between students' postsecondary aspirations and the reality of their academic performance because students were enrolled in courses that did not prepare them for college. Olsen (2010) observed a similar discrepancy. LTELLs aspired to go to college, but they were not being equipped to meet those goals (Flores et al., 2015; Irizarry, 2011a).

Bunch, Walqui, and Pearson (2014) articulated the challenges ELLs were likely to encounter with the introduction of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS

ELA curriculum requires students to read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently, but teachers were likely not to prepare ELLs for this challenge because of their low expectations for ELLs. Some teachers believe that limited English precluded ELLs' academic engagement with social complex moral issues (Lau, 2012). As such, teachers postponed lessons that involved critical literacy until students achieved the required high level of English proficiency. Lau found that ELLs could engage in critical literacy depending on the teacher's ability to mobilize students' existing linguistic, cultural, and cognitive resources to support them.

Critical literacy is essential in developing students' literacy skills. According to Lau (2012), critical reading encourages students to become active readers and writers, yet most teachers did not expose ELLs to critical reading because of the misconception that ELLs could not participate in critical reading due to limited English proficiency. Berkeley et al. (2012) observed that ELLs were deficient in core areas of literacy for adolescents due to a lack of metacognitive skills at an early age. Metacognitive skills such as critical thinking and use of reading strategies are necessary for reading comprehension and should be part of ELLs' curriculum (Cummins, 1989). Martinez (2010) stated that quality of classroom instruction influenced the acquisition of literacy skills in L2.

Forms of assessment that some teachers use to evaluate ELLs could also be a contributing factor to the poor literacy skills among LTELLs. Risko and Walker-Dalhouse (2010) observed that the use of data from the benchmark or periodic tests to

inform classroom instructional decisions did not benefit students. They emphasized that classroom assessment should include students' engagement in literacy activities both in and out of school with appropriate feedback. Appropriate feedback plays a vital role in language acquisition (Krashen, 1989; Lantolf &Poehner, 2011). Teachers should develop relevant multidimensional, formative, and authentic forms of assessments to meet their teaching goals and students' learning needs, and tailor instruction to promote students' higher-level thinking skills to meet the educational challenges (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2010).

Cummins (1989) stated that the nature of classroom instruction contributes to the limited academic skills of ELLs. Intensive instruction that confines students in passive learning does not empower and liberate them to generate their knowledge. Classroom instruction should foster feelings of success; the pride of accomplishment, a sense of control over their learning, and peer collaboration and approval. According to Cummins (1989) and Krashen (1989), literacy acquisition occurs when there are appropriate interaction and feedback between the teacher and the students, and among the students.

Educational policies. The literacy crisis among ELLs at the secondary school level could be connected to restrictive literacy policies. According to Olsen (2010), restrictive language educational policy limits students' usage of home language in school to support their learning. Statewide antibilingual education mandates such as Proposition 227 in California (1997), Proposition 203 in Arizona (2000), Question 2 mandates in Massachusetts (2002), and NCLB (2002) accountability policies are examples of

restrictive policies that have negatively affected ELLs (Menken, 2013b). Policies enacted by certain states contribute to the limited literacy skills among LTELLs because they influence classroom instruction.

NCLB was passed to ensure equal education for all; instead, it has had an adverse effect on ELLs (Menken, 2010). Palmer and Rangel (2011) confirmed that accountability policies based on high-stakes testing hurt language minority students. The most notable effect of NCLB (2002) accountability policy is the narrowing down of the curriculum. The state's accountability system created pressure for teachers to narrow the curriculum they teach. Palmer and Rangel found that teachers taught to the test and neglected subjects that were not assessed at their grade level. This approach to teaching created gaps in students' learning, took away the fun of teaching and learning, lacked authentic learning, and deprived students the opportunity to acquire literacy skills. Pressure to perform well on state standardized test informed instructional practices in the classroom, such that some schools required teachers to prioritize students' success on state accountability tests at the expense of students' language development. Teachers focused on the state test and not authentic classroom instruction, and denied students opportunities to engage in critical thinking that could foster the development of literacy skills.

Besides narrowing the curriculum and taking away the authentic classroom experience, accountability policies have also led to the elimination of bilingual programs in most school districts (Palmer & Rangel, 2011). A study conducted by Palmer and

Rangel revealed that some school principals eliminated bilingual programs and encouraged English-only instruction because they thought that bilingual programs were the cause of ELLs' poor performance. According to Menken (2013b), the loss of bilingual education programs will have a lasting effect not only on bilingual students but also to the nation. When ELLs are not supported at school, they experience language loss, do not develop literacy skills, are not successful in school, and thus, they drop out of school. Despite the highly politicized antibilingual instruction, research shows that students whose L1 is supported and built upon in school experience better academic success than those in English-only programs (Krashen, 1989; Cummins, 2000).

Student tracking is another method some schools use to deprive LTELLs the best form of education. Banks and Banks (2012) found that tracking students by academic levels in elementary schools was widespread, particularly in schools with a large, diverse student population. Irizarry (2011a) advocated for differentiation instead of tracking. Tracking has an adverse effect on student achievement, but differentiation helps teachers to meet students' learning needs and increases student achievement.

Flores et al. (2015) noted that most educational policies and programs advocated for English-only instruction for ELLs. Schools idealize English, and LTELLs are not encouraged to use their bilingual skills. Most teachers marginalize the role of L1 in acquiring the academic language, such that LTELLs do not even understand the role of L1 in their academic achievement. The lack of clear district language policy and

guidelines, administrators' knowledge in SLA, appropriate ELLs' supplemental material, and adequate PD are contributing factors to the limited literacy skills among the LTELLs.

Home environment. According to Goldenberg (2011), most LTELLs have a deficit in literacy development because of the home environment. Simms (2012) found that parents' level of education and socioeconomic factors impede students' development of early literacy skills. Parents' level of education determines the nature and level of literacy activities in the home (Caesar &Nelson, 2014; Goldenberg, 2011). Krashen (1989) observed that children from low socio-economic status (SES) did not have a home environment that encouraged the development of literacy skills. According to Krashen (2013), access to print and SES are strong predictors of student achievement. According to Chen et al. (2012), parents from low SES had fewer books than parents from higher socioeconomic status, but they used other household items to engage children in literacy activities. Caesar and Nelson (2014) noted that the problems children experience when learning to read were related to deficiencies in their emergent literacy skills development; skills that are typically acquired during the preschool years. Therefore, home literacy experiences play a significant role in children's language and literacy development.

According to Goldenberg (2011), literacy instruction in students' primary language provided opportunities for development of foundational literacy skills and vocabulary; skills necessary for the development of English oral proficiency. Cummins (2011) observed that bilingual education promotes reading achievement in English and enhances higher literacy competencies in L1 and transfer of knowledge. Swanson et al.

(2012) found that high levels of vocabulary in L1 influenced the acquisition of L2, English language. Students in a bilingual class should have instruction and opportunities to learn English and academic skills in English (Cummins, 1991). Without these opportunities, L1 skills will be insufficient to support the transfer of knowledge and expertise into English. Goodrich, Lonigan, and Farver (2013) conducted an experimental study on children's ability to transferred literacy skills and vocabulary from L1 to L2 and from L2 to L1 and found that children with strong literacy skills in L1 had strong L2 skills. Ardasheva et al. (2012) found that children from lower SES families acquired linguistic proficiency at a slow rate. According to Simms (2012), most second-generation ELLs are from low socio-economic families, and they take longer to gain English proficiency.

Teachers' negative attitudes. Teachers' negative attitudes can affect students' learning because it can result in significant gaps in students' knowledge of content and failure to develop the necessary literacy skills. De Oliveira (2011) conducted a study on teachers' attitudes and beliefs about ELLs and found that teachers who were not trained to teach ELLLs displayed a negative attitude towards ELLs and lacked empathy and understanding of students' backgrounds. Irizarry (2011b) observed that teacher attitudes, low expectations, and prejudices affected the way Latino students perceived school. These positions communicated to students that they were not valued and accepted, so they lost the enthusiasm to learn and did not see the value in learning.

According to Zetlin et al. (2011), teachers perceived ELLs as incapable of learning and were not as demanding of those students as expected, so they directed more recall and less cognitively demanding questions to Latino students. Gutek (2009) and Irizarry (2011b) noticed that educational expectations were based on race, gender, and ethnicity, and contributed to stereotyping and propagated the view that certain ethnic groups were bound to fail in school. In his article, Irizarry (2011a) explained that Latino students were expected to: dislike school, disrupt instruction, score low on standardized tests, and eventually drop out of the education system. Shapiro (2008) reported that the ELLs in elementary schools experienced the stigma associated with low teacher expectations of academic competence. The findings of Palmer and Rangel (2011) indicated that some teachers had preconceived notions that ELLs could not do well, so they had very low expectations and did not hold students to high standards.

Irizarry (2011b) conducted a two-year ethnographic study of Latino high school students found that racial discrimination, oppressive policies, and instructional practices that limited students' educational and personal development contributed to the poor performance of Latino students in public schools. Menken et al. (2011) found that teachers' attitude and work ethics were significant factors in implementing literacy programs that would benefit LTELLs.

Implications

The effect of LTELLs on the nation's education system cannot be underestimated because their lack of academic success could have a long-term effect on the country's

economy and workforce (AFT, 2013). Most of the LTELLs remain emergent bilinguals with very weak academic language and continue to perform poorly (Olsen, 2010). If this trend continues, more ELLs will be retained at the same grade level, and school districts will continue to experience an increase in the number of LTELLs (Sheng et al., 2011). Consequently, the growth of LTELLs population will result in a high rate of ELLs' dropout, low graduation rate (Slama, 2012), and schools with a high enrollment of ELLs will not meet the AYP (Robinson et al., 2012). Problems associated with LTELLs are of great concern to all stakeholders and must be addressed. The findings and implications of this study were shared with the interested parties in the district in a detailed white paper.

Positive Social Change

The concept of positive change was instrumental in the selection of the research topic and the project. Although my study focused on middle school teachers' perceptions of the limited literacy skills among LTELLs, the goal was to address a problem that affected students' achievement negatively. Participants reflected on their pedagogical practices and school policies, and then they shared their views on the limited literacy skills among LTELLs. They examined their instructional practices to determine their role and identified other factors that contributed to the research problem; limited literacy skills among LTELLs and increased number of ELLs. With a better understanding of the underlying problem, teachers can address the issue of limited literacy skills among LTELL. If the problem of limited literacy skills among LTELLs is addressed, most ELLs

will be successful, thus, increasing student achievement and reducing the number of LTELLs in the district.

Summary

Most LTELLs have remained emergent bilinguals for various reasons. Based on the literature reviewed, as well as local school personnel, LTELLs do not have adequate literacy skills to perform grade level tasks, perform poorly on state standardized tests, and are at-risk of not graduating from high school. The literature review also indicated that misplacement of students, inadequate classroom instruction and support, restrictive educational policies, ineffective language programs, teachers' negative attitudes, a lack of well-trained teachers, and home environment are possible causes of the literacy deficit among LTELLs. In the next section, Section 2, I discuss the research design, participants and population sampling, methods of data collection, analysis, and reported the findings. Finally, I will examine possible limitations of the study.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

Current research on ELLs is focused on how to improve literacy outcomes with less emphasis on literacy development (Goldenberg, 2011). LTELLs need well-developed literacy skills and academic vocabulary to meet the ESL exit criteria. My goal in this study was to explore how middle school teachers perceived the limited literacy skills among LTELLs and how LTELLs affected the teachers' classroom instruction. I used qualitative research methods to gather and analyze information from teachers who worked directly with LTELLs. Data from interviews and document analysis provided insight and understanding of the issue of limited literacy skills among LTELLs.

Research Design and Approach

According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), the purpose and nature of the study determine the research design. My goal in this qualitative case study was to explore middle school teachers' perceptions of the limited literacy skills among LTELLs and how LTELLs affected the teachers' classroom instruction. I did not seek to prove or disprove a hypothesis nor involve any form of treatment. The qualitative research method is useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon based on participants' point of view (Creswell, 2012), and the reality is constructed based on one's experiences (Lodico et al., 2010). Therefore, a qualitative case study was the ideal method to answer the proposed research questions.

Creswell (2012) identified three forms of case studies: collective, intrinsic, and instrumental. An instrumental case study is a qualitative research design in which the researcher examines an issue and finds one or more examples that illuminate the issue with a goal of generalizing the results. Stake (2006) recommended the use of the instrumental case study method if the researcher intends to gain insight and understanding of the issue. The ultimate goal of the study was to find the underlying reasons that would help to explain why LTELLs had limited literacy skills despite the number of years they had attended school in the United States. The study focused on the issue of literacy deficiency among LTELLs in one middle school and used the data to illuminate the problem. I used instrumental case study research design because it provided opportunities for me to collect data through interviews using open-ended questions and document analysis to gain a deeper understanding on the issue of limited literacy among LTELLs.

Other forms of qualitative research methods such as ethnography, narrative phenomenological, and grounded methods were not appropriate for the study. For example, ethnography design usually requires an extended period in the field and emphasizes on observational data (Yin, 2009). Grounded theory is used to generate a full theory about the central phenomenon, and it is ideal for studies that examine processes, or how something is done (Creswell, 2012). Although collective case study design would have provided more information and increased the credibility of the study, it could not help me to fulfill the purpose of the study; collective case study is used for comparison.

Participants and Research Site

I conducted the study at Pearls Middle School (Pseudonym) in Texas, a Title I school with the highest number of ELLs in the school district during the 2014–2015 academic year. The school had a total population of 1,448 students with 179 identified as LEP, and the majority were LTELL. LTELLs were mainstreamed, and ESL certified teachers provided extra support in core content areas (ELA, math, science, and social studies) as coteaches with teachers who were not ESL certified and had ESL students in their classes. LTELLs were also assigned to a literacy class taught by an ESL-certified teacher for extra instructional support in reading and writing.

In a case study, participants are selected based on the value they add to the study (Laureate Education, Inc., 2013). In this qualitative instrumental case study, participants included four teachers selected from core content areas (ELA, math, science, and social studies), one ESL coteacher and one literacy teacher. I purposefully selected participants (Yin, 2009) from a pool of 26 teachers based on their teaching experience and the number of LTELLs in their classes. I chose the participants from all core content areas to provide multiple perspectives on the issue. The lead school counselor helped me to identify the participants included. The participants did not include first-year teachers because they did not have adequate teaching experience working with LTELLs to make quality contributions to the study. In addition, the participants' selection did not include teachers who taught LTELLs in special education program, because their students might not have met the ESL exit criteria due to specific cognitive disorders.

Description of Participants

I invited 26 qualifying teachers through email, and 11 teachers responded; 10 were females, and one was male. Of them, 10 were willing to participate, and one declined to participate in the study. The 10 teachers who responded and were ready to participate in the study met the participation criteria. Next, I selected six participants from the pool of 10 teachers—one teacher per core content area. The other two teachers included one ESL coteacher and one literacy teacher. The number of years of experience ranged from 3 to 29. Gender was not a factor in selecting participants. However, participants included one male and five females. Four of the participants were ESL certified, and two were not. Among the participants, there was one department head and two team leaders. In addition, all grade levels (6, 7, & 8) were represented as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Participants' Information

Teacher code	Years of experience	Grade level	ESL certified
T1	15	7	No
T2	17	6 & 8	No
T3	5	6 & 8	Yes
T4	10	7	Yes
T5	26	7	Yes
T6	3	8	Yes

Note. ESL, English as a second language.

The initial group of participants was composed of four teachers, one from each core content areas (ELA, math, science, and social studies), and two ESL coteachers. One of the ESL coteachers opted out a day before the day of the interview. To choose another participant, I used the pool of the teachers who responded and accepted to participate in the study but were not selected in the first round. The new member of the group taught ELA and literacy. I gave the new participant time to become familiarized with the contents of the consent letter and the interview questions before I scheduled the interview session.

Access to Participants

Before I gained access to participants and the research site, I shared my intention to conduct the study with the principal of Pearls Middle School by sending her an email request (Appendix B) for permission. Next, I sought permission from the school district by completing the District's Research and Evaluation Application forms, which included a request for open records. Once I received the principal's approval, I completed the Walden University Institute Review Board (IRB) application form. Based on the organizational structure at the school district, Walden University granted me partial approval, which I presented to the school district as part of their approval process. When I received the district permission, I resubmitted the IRB application along with the district's permission letter, and I was granted full IRB approval to collect data. My IRB number is 05-17-16-0396836.

After I received the IRB approval, I sent an email (Appendix C) to the lead school counselor requesting for a list of qualifying teachers to participate in the study. The lead counselor provided a list of 26 teachers who met the participation criteria. I visited with each potential participant and informed each of them to expect an invitation sent from my Walden University email address. During the visit, I discussed the study briefly and explained the recruiting process and the content of the invitation email (Appendix D). In the email, I stated the purpose and nature of the study and explained the invitation to participate in the study.

Once I received an acceptance to participate in the study, I emailed that participant copies of the consent letter and the interview questions (Appendix E) to help them familiarize with the contents of the consent letter and prepare for the interview. After three days, I visited with each participant I had selected to set the interview date and gave them a hard copy of the consent letter to review the content. I also used that opportunity to explain the recruitment process to those who were not selected. I scheduled interviews at the participant's convenience and made one phone call reminder to each participant two days before the interview date.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Throughout my research, I upheld the Human Subject Protection law as required by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research concerning participants, and adhered to the IRB guidelines. To protect the research site and participants' identity and maintain their confidentiality, I used a pseudonym (Pearls Middle School) for the research site and codes (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, & T6) to refer to teachers, also,I did not use the participants' real names or the subject they taught when I discussed the results. In addition, I asked the participants to use the personal email address and phone for any communication that pertained to the study. I secured all data I collected for this study, including the digital voice recorder, and kept them safely under key and lock in a cabinet in my house. I will keep the device for the next five years (Creswell, 2012) before erasing all recordings on the digital device. I saved the interviews transcripts in PDF format and stored them in a web-based file that requires a

password to access, and shredded all field notes and printed materials I used for data collection and analysis.

At the beginning of every interview session, each participant and I reviewed the contents of the letter of consent, and I explained the purpose and nature of the study to ensure that participants understood their role in the study. I informed the participants of their participation rights and the fact that their involvement was voluntary (Creswell, 2012) with no monetary gains or rewards (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I also explained the format of the interview and reminded the participants that I would audio record the interviews. Finally, I assured them that the information was confidential and would be used for the study only. Once the participant understood these facts about my study and agreed to participate, we signed the letter of consent and conducted the interview. Two days after the interview, I provided each participant with a copy of the signed consent letter for personal records. I conducted the interviews with dignity, treated participants with respect, and remained truthful during and after the research (Creswell, 2012).

I conducted the interviews in a safe and secure environment; a room within the school library. It was a locked room that required prior arrangements with the school librarian to access and use. I invited the participants to the room before and after school. The choice of the interview room and the time of the interview were to ensure that the participants' confidentiality was not compromised (Creswell, 2012). I handled all documents per the district's policy of confidentiality. I did not distribute nor share in print or electronically the open record documents I received from the school district for

this study. I saved all documents in a folder on my work computer, a property of the school district, and it requires a password to access it. After I compiled the report, I shredded all material that I had printed for analysis.

Another ethical issue I considered was my position as an ESL/Reading teacher at Pearls Middle School. Although I worked with the participants at the research site, I did not have any supervisory role at the school, and none of the participants was forced to participate in the study. Participants were aware that their participation was voluntary and there were no repercussions because of their involvement and honest responses.

Data Collection

Laureate Education, Inc.(2013), Lodico et al. (2010), and Yin (2009) recommended the use of interviews, observation, focus groups, artifacts, and document analysis as primary sources of information for case studies. For this study, I used face-to-face interviews and document analysis as tools of data collection. To maintain consistency and get the best results from the interviews, I used pre-written open-ended interview questions (Appendix E) that I wrote and reviewed for clarity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lodico et al., 2010). I audio recorded the sessions on a digital voice recorder and later transcribed into Word document.

To ensure that I collected accurate and detailed information and professionally conducted the interviews, I organized pilot interviews with two non-participant teachers. I used the interview rehearsal to ensure that the interview questions were clear, comprehensible, elicited the right response (Lodico et al., 2010), and reviewed the

etiquette of conducting interviews (Creswell, 2012). I did not record the pilot sessions nor use the information as data in the study.

I also used document analysis as a tool for data collection. I analyzed documents from the district website and the open records that the district provided for this study and recorded it in a chart (Appendix F), a summary of documents analyzed and the information collected. The data I collected included:

- District ESL focused professional development sessions (PDs).
- The ESL program.
- Literacy programs.
- End-of-year LPAC records.
- Campus-based leadership team (CBLT) minutes.
- Campus ESL program records.
- State and district ESL curriculum guidelines and program policies.
- District and school report cards and test analysis for ELLs.
- Archived district research on the ESL program.

Despite the use of one research site, detailed data from the interviews and document analysis provided an in-depth insight and understanding of the issue and answered the research questions (Yin, 2009).

Role of Researcher

During the interview, I maintained the role of an interviewer and structured the interview procedures to avoid deviation from the topic (Creswell, 2012). I asked each

question clearly and listened as the participants responded without interfering (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The use of open-ended questions allowed participants to provide detailed information (Laureate Education, Inc., 2013). Occasionally, I paraphrased participants' responses and requested clarification of information if the answer was irrelevant to the study, and focused on pertinent data that answered the research questions.

I conducted the interviews in May 2016 within three weeks. A one-time 30-minute face-to-face interview took place before or after school except one, which was held on a Saturday. Participants did not verify the verbatim transcription of the interviews. However, they confirmed the accuracy of the information in a detailed report of the results that I emailed to them. I allowed participants a duration of two weeks during which they reviewed the document and sent their feedback.

Next, I analyzed the open records that the district provided and other relevant materials on the district's website. The data I collected included: state and district policies regarding ELLs, ELL-focused PDs, ESL mission, vision and curriculum, LPAC reports, district and state reports on ELLs assessment, and reports on ESL program. To collect relevant data, I carefully read and interpreted the information (Yin, 2009), focused on the qualitative data, took notes under subheadings, and recorded the information in the document presented in Appendix F.

Data Analysis

According to Laureate Education, Inc. (2013), case study data analysis entails examining, categorizing, coding, describing, interpreting, drawing conclusions, and

determining the significance of data. Data analysis for my study was an ongoing activity, and I used descriptive analytical approach to analyze, organize, and interpret it. First, I transcribed verbatim the recorded interviews into a Word document. After data transcription, I printed a copy of each participant's response, read through, and made notes in the margins. Next, I used the interview protocol chart (Appendix E) to organize the data by cutting and pasting each participant's responses to the corresponding interview question. The analytical approach allowed me to examine participant's response to the specific question and establish similarities and differences in the responses (Creswell, 2012), and check for areas that needed clarification or additional information.

The second level of data analysis involved the use of the color-coding method to identify common codes (Creswell, 2012). I assigned a specific color to a code and created a legend to make the categorization of the codes easier and less confusing. After the first color-coding, I printed out the document and read it and I made comments or observations in the margins. I repeated this process to identify common codes in the participants' responses before I created a Word document chart and used the hard copy to color-code the same sections. I sorted the data manually without the intrusion of a computer program (Creswell, 2012). Although the approach was labor-intensive, I had direct interaction with data which deepened my understanding of the issue; crucial for drawing conclusions and identifying major themes.

Upon the completion of the interview analysis, I wrote a full narrative report. I organized the report based on the interview questions and checked how each response answered the research questions. Next, I started document analysis. I analyzed the open records that were provided by the district and other materials I accessed from the district website and recorded the information in the document analysis chart, Appendix F document. I organized, categorized, analyzed and triangulated all the data from the two sources; interviews and document analysis (Creswell, 2012). Finally, I wrote the results using a linear analytic structure approach in a narrative form; a standard format for compiling a case study report (Yin, 2009).

As an ESL teacher, I was aware of personal biases. I focused on the goal of the study and maintained an open mind to any information that would be contrary to my experiences to avoid any prejudices (Yin, 2009). During the analysis phase, I constantly referred to the central issue of the research to maintain the credibility of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and triangulated data from the interviews and document analysis (Creswell, 2012). I relied on the literature reviewed and conceptual framework to interpret the data, and included quotations from participants to lend clarity, transparency, and relevance to the study (Yin, 2009). During the writing process, I used member check to maintain the credibility of the study. I emailed the original copy of the results and discussion to the participants to verify the accuracy of the information. After the revising and editing process, participants also reviewed the final report for accuracy of the

information. Additionally, I used a peer reviewer who reviewed the results and conclusions I had made.

Results

The following themes emerged from data analysis:

- Characteristics of LTELLs.
- LTELLs' literacy skills and learning needs.
- Teachers' efficacy and professional development.
- Evidence of a lack of knowledge of LTELLs.
- Strategies and efforts to make content comprehensible for LTELLs.
- Challenges of working with LTELLs.
- Effects of organizational and pedagogical practices on LTELLs.
- Misconceptions.

Theme: Characteristics of LTELLs

Although most participants shared similar perspectives and concerns about ELLs, they had varying descriptions of LTELLs. T2, T3, and T5 described LTELLs as quiet, shy, unmotivated, non-risk-takers, easily intimidated by peers, overwhelmed, passive and hesitant to participate, share, read aloud in class, or ask questions. They observed that LTELLs were limited in academic vocabulary, lacked comprehension skills, had gaps in their learning, and were scared to make mistakes. On the other hand, T1, T4, and T6 described LTELLs as social, fluent, motivated and risk takers, well-behaved, active in class, hardworking and confident. Specifically, T1 described the LTELLs in the Pre-AP

classes as cautious, smart, risk takers, motivated, willing to help others, and disciplined. This group of participants noted that most LTELLs were at the same level with the peers in the same class, and did not need linguistic support in that class. Although participants had varied views about LTELL, they all agreed that LTELLs had communicative language but lacked the academic vocabulary and needed more time to process information.

Theme: LTELLs Literacy Skills

Participants noted that most LTELLs experienced difficulties with comprehension, understanding concepts, interpreting texts, solving problems and writing. They also stated that most LTELLs had BICS but lacked CALP and grade-level literacy skills, and had deficits in background information and gaps in content knowledge. Although LTELLs had knowledge of reading strategies and understood concepts, they lacked application and problem-solving skills. They interpreted texts at the literal level, lacked inferencing skills and grade-level vocabulary. As T4 said, “They can read and retell the story, but they struggle with analysis, inferencing, and applying the new knowledge.” T6 also observed that LTELLs did not like to read and remarked that, “To be better at reading, you have to read more. If LTELLs were focused on reading, their skills would be better than they are now”.

According to T1, T2, and T5, LTELLs in the Pre-AP classes could read, comprehend, and understand concepts, but they struggled with their writing skills. Participants stated that most LTELLs did not have mastery of the English sentence

structure, grammar, and punctuation, and struggled with mechanics of writing. They participated in class discussions but could not write coherently, used simple sentences, and avoided usage of complex sentences and grade level vocabulary. Regarding the level of LTELLs literacy, T5 explained, “They tend to use simple words, avoid grade-appropriate complex words, and they use incomplete sentences. Grammar and punctuation are not there, but most of them have content.” Similarly, T1 said, “They can probably tell you something, but when it comes to writing it down, they lose the concept.” T2 also remarked and explained that LTELLs lacked the writing proficiency one would expect from seventh-grade students. In fact, T4 and T5 observed that most LTELLs did not know they were struggling due to a lack of academic language.

Participants who taught the three grade levels (6, 7, & 8) reported that they had observed much improvement among the eighth-grade students. T2 indicated that LTELLs come to middle school with low literacy skills, deficient in both writing and comprehension, but they show much growth in their literacy skills by the time they get to eighth grade. In fact, T4 and T5 were optimistic that with the right support, most of the LTELLs could exit the ESL program in eighth grade. An analysis of the 2015 Texas Assessment Performance Report (TAPR) revealed that 47% of sixth-grade ELLs met the standards on the state reading assessment, 57% of seventh-grade ELLs met standards on the reading assessment and 43% on writing state assessment. As for the eighth-grade ELLs, 58% met standards on the reading assessment, 33% in science, and 27 in social

studies, with 9% exceeding the growth progress. This analysis revealed that most seventh-grade students struggled with writing skills.

Participants indicated that most LTELLs showed progress in their literacy skills by eighth grade. However, they expressed concern for LTELLs who were still rated as intermediates on TELPAS. The school's ESL records showed that ELLs accounted for 14.8% of the school's total population; of these, 34% scored intermediate on their TELPAS Reading, and 17% of the LTELLs were still at the intermediate level.

T3 observed that most of the sixth- grade students who were in bilingual classes struggled with transitioning to an English-only environment in middle school and lacked the knowledge of the English sentence structure. This transition issue was due to the nature of the bilingual program. The document analysis showed that the district was transitioning from a late exit ESL program to an early-exit model to prepare students for English-only classes at middle school level.

All participants identified academic vocabulary and reading comprehension as the most common learning needs of LTELLs. T3 and T4 explained that most LTELLs could decode, but did not comprehend texts due to limited vocabulary, a lack of background knowledge, and an inability to apply metacognitive reading strategies that enhanced comprehension. For example, T1 explained, "These students miss simple things because they cannot interpret the question."

Most of the LTELLs could not work on challenging or complex tasks without scaffolding. Although LTELLs had the verbal communication skills, they had difficulties

with writing, especially research papers. They lacked skills to organize information in a legible, coherent, and well-sequenced paper. T1 and T4 observed that not all LTELLs learning needs were second language issues. Some of them could be having unidentified learning disabilities because teachers assumed that LTELLs' learning difficulties were language related. As T4 explained, "Because of the ESL label, we overlook the possibility of learning disability among LTELLs."

Theme: Teachers' Perceived Efficacy of Professional Development

Participants had a broad range of qualifications. Four of them were ESL certified, but two of them were not. Three had master's degrees, but not related to working with ELLs. One participant had formal college training to work with ELLs, but the other five went through alternative certification. From the analysis of the campus ESL program records, I confirmed that all ELA teachers at the research site were ESL certified except two, but most of the math, science, and social studies teachers were not ESL certified. Although all participants had attended several PDs to equip and prepare them to teach ELLs, they felt that they were not well prepared to teach ELLs; especially LTELLs. For example, T4 responded, "When I first started teaching, I was trained in sheltered instructions. That created a foundation, and about three years ago, I got my ESL certification. But, do I know what to do with LTELL? Well, I do not know." [Sic]

Three of the participants were trained in Sheltered Instruction (Sheltered Instruction Observational Protocol (SIOP) Model, and in 2014-2015, all teachers at the research site received a series of ELLs targeted PDs. T1, T3, and T4 felt that both district PDs and

school-based ELL training were valuable, but did not provide adequate information on how to meet LTELLs' learning needs. The PD facilitators treated ELLs as a homogeneous group, as stated by T1, "The only limitation I see is that the district assumes that all ELLs are on the same proficiency level." Overall, participants felt that the PDs were helpful, but they still needed more training, specifically for LTELLs.

Although participants reported that they were not equipped to teach LTELLs, data from documents analysis revealed that the school district had provided several ELL-focused professional training to all core content area teachers at the district level. My research site also received campus-based ELL focused PDs for two consecutive years, 2013-2015. During the 2014-2015 academic year, the district offered 83 ELL-focused PD workshops to ESL teachers, administrators and core content area teachers.

Theme: Evidence of a Lack of Knowledge of LTELLs

During the 2014-2015 academic year, the research site served 179 ESL students, the highest number in the district. Unfortunately, most participants did not know how long the ELLs in their classes had been in the ESL program. T1, T2, T3, and T6 had never had ESL students referred to as LTELLs. The term LTELLs was new to four participants except for T4 and T5. T2 and T6 explained that it was not easy for teachers to identify LTELLs until they received the ESL roster from the counselors. T2 said, "They are like any other students in the classroom." Although participants did not know the LTELLs in their classes, they knew that some of the ESL students were born in the United States. For example, T1 responded,

> Well, I do not know how long these students have been enrolled in the USA school. All I know is they are on my ESL roster, and they are advanced. Was I supposed to know how long my ELLs have been in the country? As for that term, I have never heard it before. If I heard, it went over my head. I just look at kids as ESL.

T1, T2, and T6 complained that the district training personnel did not make any distinction among the ELLs. They regarded ELLs as a homogeneous group, as stated by T2, "The district assumes that all ELLs are on the same proficiency level." Also, the district and state data on students' performance did not consider the number of years ELLs had been enrolled in school in the United States. They presented data on ELLs as one homogeneous group.

Theme: Strategies and Efforts to Make Content Comprehensible for LTELLs

One of the interview questions required participants to explain how they made instruction comprehensible to LTELLs, and their responses revealed several misconceptions. For example, T2 and T6 stated that they did not differentiate instruction for LTELLs, or provide any linguistic accommodations because LTELL were fluent and even performed better than non-LEP students. T1, T2, and T6 acknowledged that the presence of LTELLs did not determine the lesson plans or the strategies they used, and they did not use any specific strategies for LTELLs. They argued that as good teachers, they met the needs of all students irrespective of students' classifications and whatever strategies worked for ELLs were good for all students. T1, T2, T5, and T6 stated that the

LTELLs in their classes did not need any extra support. Instead, the non-LEP students in their classes needed additional linguistic support and accommodations.

Although the presence of LTELLs did not drive classroom instruction, participants adjusted their lessons based on students' learning needs. Three participants indicated that they did not know how to support LTELLs because the LTELLs were just like other students in their classes or performed academically better than the non-LEP other students. In fact, T2, T5, and T6 differentiated for non-LEP students and acknowledged that they did not provide any specific support for LTELLs in their classes. T6 observed, "Whatever is beneficial to ELLs is beneficial to all students." [sic]

Data from document analysis showed that the district provided the following ESL curriculum and guidelines:

- The ESL curriculum must be intensive.
- It should provide instruction that accelerates the acquisition of English language proficiency and the development of literacy skills.
- The ESL instruction must be based on Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) to meet ELLs' academic and language development learning needs.
- It should accommodate students' level of English proficiency and level of academic achievement.

- Lessons must address the key components of language - comprehension, speaking, reading, and the composition of both oral and the written English language.

Participants were not aware of these curriculum guidelines. Despite a lack of awareness, participants used a variety of instructional strategies, as shown in Table 2. The use of these strategies showed teachers' efforts to meet the diverse learning needs of ELLs, make content comprehensible, enhance participation, reduce discipline issues, and develop students' metacognitive skills and expressive language. Participants were aware that LTELLs needed language to access content and advocated for the teaching of literacy skills across the curriculum. However, they did not provide specific linguistic support to LTELLs due to misconceptions about LTELLs and a lack of knowledge of SLA. Table 2 shows that participants shared similar strategies to meet LTELLs' learning needs and make content comprehensible.

Table 2

Strategies Teachers Used to Make Content Comprehensible

Participants	Strategies used
T2, T3, T5	Accommodations and differentiation for ESL beginners only.

T2, T3, T4, T6	Pre-teaching content and unit vocabulary, pre-assessment, activate students' prior knowledge, use of visuals, and repeating directions in different ways.
T3	Check for understanding, use of a dictionary, contextual clues, and technology.
T5	Use of real-world examples, connecting content to students' experiences.
T1, T2, T5	Use of visuals, manipulative, lecture, group work, small group instruction, whole group direct instruction, and peer tutoring.
T2, T4, T6,	Building background knowledge, activating prior knowledge, pre-teaching unit vocabulary, group discussions, peer-teaching, ongoing assessment, and checking for understanding.
T1, T3 T4, T5	Provide sentence stems, different questioning strategies, projects, scaffolding information, use of simple language, and restating the same information using academic language.
T3, T5	Online textbook, adjusting the Lexile level of texts.
T2, T4, T5, T6	Teaching both content and academic vocabulary, and giving students several opportunities to use language in class.
All participants	Chunking, slow pace, scaffolding, and pre-teaching of unit vocabulary.

Theme: Challenges of Working With LTELLs

Participants shared some of the problems they encountered because of having LTELLs in their classes. The problems included: a lack of enough time to teach both content and language, frustration for both teachers and learners, a lack of motivation, organizational, and study skills among students, difficulty in meeting the broad range of LTELLs' learning needs, and too much paperwork involved. T6's main challenge meeting the varied learning needs of LTELLs, while T4's major struggle was not knowing how to work with LTELLs:

> To be honest, most teachers do not know what to do with these kids you call LTELLs. While we have some good strategies, but when they have been behind such a long time, we do not know what to do to raise them up. We have little bits of things we do know how to do, but comprehensively, I do not think we know what to do. Working with LTELLs is hard. When someone is new, you know where to start. You start where all kids begin in acquiring language and writing skills but these advanced kids we get in junior high we do not know what to do with them.

T6 described LTELLs as another layer or subgroup of students whose learning needs must be met. Participants indicated that the lack of comprehension skills and gaps in learning among LTELLs made it difficult for them to cover the extensive curriculum at the expected pace. T2 and T6 pointed out that a lack of time to teach both language and

content was a major issue because they spent a lot of their instructional time teaching vocabulary, and that slowed them down. For example, T2 explained,

> LTELLs are not a problem. There is just no time to teach both language and content and work with individual students. They want us to teach language and content at the same time. That is not easy. I do not do writing in my classes. That will take forever. If they prove to me they are getting it; I move on.

Although participants indicated that the LTELLs were doing better than non-LEP students, they also identified low abilities among some LTELLs. This mixed response could be due to a lack of proper identification of LTELLs. T2 stated that LTELLs were slow in grasping concepts; therefore, it was difficult to bring them to grade level. Low abilities among some LTELLs and a lack of understanding caused frustration among both teachers and the students. Additionally, T1 observed, "There is a level of frustration on kids as well as the teacher when little Bobby and Josue do not understand."

Theme: Effect of Organizational and Pedagogical Practices on LTELLs

Participants' responses revealed their perceptions of LTELLs and other issues such as parental involvement, student scheduling, teachers' attitudes and expectations, a lack of collective responsibility among educators, and the ESL exit criteria. Student misplacement included using the ELL label to overlook ELLs' learning needs and scheduling LTELLs in large-size classes, and placing LTELLs in inclusion classes with more special education students. T1 and T5 emphasized that LTELLs need different instructional support. T1 remarked,

> Ok, look here, you have been in this country for six plus years, you have been in public education, and you are now in middle school, and you have not got it. Are we missing something? Is there anything we have not done? Are those kids in blocked classes with an ESL teacher? Are they in a Writing Lab with ESL support? [sic]

T1 and T4 shared a similar opinion and observed that most educators used the ESL label to explain LTELLs' poor performance on standardized tests and did not consider other possible causes of the lack of academic achievement; therefore, they did not provide appropriate interventions. Data from document analysis showed that literacy classes were offered and RtI programs reinforced in middle schools to provide extra support to struggling readers. It is possible that the LTELLs' inability to develop literacy skills might not be language related, in particular for those still classified as ESL intermediate. As T4 explained,

> Another big gripe is that ESL label they have. We always assume that because of that one label, the problems LTELLs have are due to language, and we miss any other underlying issues. It is like that one label seems to explain everything. It is possible that we can have ELLs who are dyslexic, ELLs who need special education as well as ESL support, but because they have that one label that seems to explain why they are behind and nothing is being done. If those other things are overlooked or assumed, they cannot exit.

Another issue that affected LTELLs achievement was students' schedules. T1 and T5 were concerned with the scheduling of ELLs in general. They noted that low-performing LTELLs were placed in classes with more special education students. This placement influenced the kind of activities and interaction ELLs were exposed to negatively. T5 observed, "If there is anything I can think of, it is scheduling and placing these kids in the right classes." T1 and T5 suggested that low-performing ELLs should be placed in classes that did not have special education students with behavior issues. Redirecting and working with students with behavior issues took away instructional time for ELLs, and the learning environment did not provide ELLs with opportunities to improve their literacy skills. Participants suggested that LTELLs with very low literacy skills should be placed in small-size classes for teachers to meet their learning needs through small group instruction, or one-on-one interventions. T5 commented, "It seems like ELLs are placed in the inclusion class. Putting the two groups together is overwhelming to the teacher and the environment is not good for them." T3 stated that it was easier for teachers to support and provide accommodations to ELLs in small groups. T4 noted that it was harder for LTELLs to acquire literacy skills and develop academic language if they were in large classes where their needs were not being met. T1, T3, and T4 advocated for small-size classes for LTELLs so that teachers can meet their diverse learning needs.

Data from document analysis showed that ESL programs were organized and managed per the state and federal guidelines, and the focus was to increase student

achievement. The state and the federal government funds the ESL program under Title III. Therefore, schools should adhere to policies governing the establishment of ESL program, student classification, identification and placement, academic achievement, retention and promotion, state assessments, and the students' graduation plans.

Participants identified home environment as a possible contributing factor to the limited literacy skills among LTELLs. They observed that the home environment did not encourage ELLs to practice the English language or read to improve their literacy skills. Students depended on classroom instruction and social interactions with peers at school for their language development.

Participants also discussed how teachers' attitudes and expectations contributed to the limited literacy skills among LTELLs. Two participants described some classes as stressful and intimidating for ELLs, yet all participants displayed a high sense of responsibility and admiration for their ELLs and were happy to work with them. For example, T2 stated, "I enjoy teaching, and I believe every student can learn. It is just a matter of trying to find out how they learn and tap into it", and T5 responded, "Well, I see ELLs as students I can help, but sometimes teachers see them as a burden. For me, I want to help them to be successful and move on. That is our job. That is what we are supposed to do." [sic]

The development of students' literacy skills should be a combined effort of all teachers. Four participants discussed the lack of collective responsibility among teachers. Two participants stated that it was the responsibility of the ELA and literacy teachers to

teach literacy skills, and agreed that they did not reinforce writing, and did not require students to respond using complete sentences. Those two participants argued that they were not ELA teachers and did not have time to teach and assess students' writing. T5 remarked and said that some core content area teachers said, "If the student gives me the right answer, I compliment the student and keep moving." T1 said,

> "I know that literacy has an impact on their learning, but there isn't much writing in my classes because writing takes a lot of my time that I would use to cover what they need to learn in my class, but I keep trying."

Although T4 and T6 were emphatic about teaching academic language, they were aware that students were not exposed to academic vocabulary across the curriculum. T4 explained,

> Academic vocabulary. I feel like they are not exposed to it. Most of the things are explained to them in a conversational language, in a way that they understand it, yet it hinders their language acquisition. All of us should address the issue of academic vocabulary. Everybody needs to get on board.

T5 commented, "When it comes to literacy, I believe in the concept of practice makes perfect. I know if they were to read and write in all their classes they would do well." T3, T4, and T6 indicated that TELPAS writing samples from some classes showed that some teachers did not teach writing, yet students were required to write for TELPAS. T5 observed,

> "The best way to improve writing is by writing. Some teachers think writing is for ELA teachers. You should hear them say that they are not ELA teachers and they do not have time to teach content and writing. This is not just to one department; it cuts across the departments."

The ESL exit criterion was another concern that participants discussed. They described it as rigid. T1 noted that the TELPAS writing section kept most of the LTELLs in the ESL program. T4, T5, and T6 observed that some ELLs had passed the state standardized assessment STAAR reading but could not exit the ESL program because teachers had assigned them accommodation during testing. The Texas exit criteria (TEA, 2016) states that any student assigned accommodations on the reading and writing portions of the STAAR test cannot exit the ESL program even if the student did not use it. The 2014-2015 end-of-year LPAC records indicated that most of the advanced and advanced high proficiency level students did not meet the ESL exit criteria because of the writing component and having accommodations on STAAR reading test. Most LTELLs scored advanced level on TELPAS writing, thus not meeting the ESL exit criteria. To exit the ESL Program, ELLs are required to score advanced high proficiency level on their writing.

T5 and T6 expressed their concerns about the administration of assessments that are used for students' exit. They observed that the way teachers administered the assessments demoralized ELLs and hindered them from exiting the ESL program. For example, Oral Language Proficiency Test (OLPT) was administered in an environment

that did not support student focus and concentration. T5 pointed out that ELLs required writing samples from ELA, math, science, and social studies for their TELPAS assessment, but not all teachers taught writing in their content areas. Also, T6 observed that some teachers did not give students enough time to respond to TELPAS writing prompt. These responses indicated that most teachers did not understand their role in helping LTELLs acquire skills they needed to meet the ESL exit criteria. T4 reflected, "We created a label to give them services and address their needs, but the label holds them back. Exiting the ESL program is difficult. The expectations are too high, and the label is a disservice to some of them." In conclusion, T6 commented,

> There are some of the students I have wondered why they are ELLs. As I said, there is a range of ELLs. The ones on the higher level regarding understanding content, I feel they should not be there, yet there are those I want to be on my list because of their speech, vocabulary, and the level of understanding, but they are not on the list. There are some students you might guess that they are ESL, but there are those you might never have guessed. They are confident, social and they do well when you give a test. They do not need to take that test at all. I mean the TELPAS or OLPT. Whatever!

Theme: Teachers' Misconceptions about LTELLs

Several misconceptions emerged from the data. All participants acknowledged that parents of ELLs would do a better job if they understood their role, the education system and if they had direct communication with teachers. T2, T4, and T6 held some

misconceptions about the parental involvement of the parents of ELLs. For example, T4 and T6 assumed that all parents of ELLs had limited English proficiency, so they did not contact them or involve them in decision-making. They did not include parents of ELLs as much because they assumed that parents would be uncomfortable due to a language barrier. Reflecting on this issue, T6 explained, "It is two-sided. I have not been keen on this or directly solicited parental support for all my students. However, I imagine that parents of ELLs would be uncomfortable to attend a meeting if they cannot follow." Analysis of school document showed that parental involvement was discussed by the CBLT, and included in the school improvement plan. The school's 2015-2016 performance goals focused on improving ELLs' performance in science and social studies and increasing parental involvement to improve the campus climate and culture.

Although participants attributed LTELLs' lack of academic achievement to limited language, they did not recommend the RtI process. This misconception was due to a lack of knowledge of SLA. However, T4 explained, "We always assume that because of that one label, the academic challenges ELLs experience is due to language, and we miss the underlying issues." Another misconception was the fallacy that LTELLs were fluent in their oral communications and did not need linguistic support. T2 and T6 assumed that LTELLs did not need any support because they outperformed the non-LEP students. This misconception contradicted the fact that LTELLs lack the academic language and need linguistic support.

Discussion

I discussed findings of this study in the light of Vygotsky's theory of ZPD (Berk, 2008) and Cummins' concept of SLA (Cummins, 1989). Vygotsky's theory of ZPD provided insight into the role of the teachers while Cummins' concept of SLA provided the basic knowledge educators should have to provide effective classroom instruction and support. I found that a lack of knowledge about LTELLs and SLA process among teachers resulted in misconceptions and student misplacement, and teachers' misconceptions affected the quality of classroom instruction and the support that LTELLs received. Because of this misunderstanding, most LTELLs did not develop grade-level literacy skills and academic vocabulary they needed to meet the ESL exit criteria. The following themes emerged from the data analysis: a lack of teachers' knowledge, characteristics of LTELLs, student misplacement, the quality of classroom instruction, misconceptions, and the ESL exit criteria. Although most of the findings in my study were similar to the results of earlier studies in the literature reviewed, I had a few that did not align with previous studies.

Lack of Teacher's Knowledge About LTELLs

Results of my study revealed that most middle school teachers lack basic knowledge about LTELLs and are not aware of this group of students. Similarly, Menken et al. (2011) found that teachers and administrators at the secondary school level were not aware of the LTELLs subgroup and their learning needs. Due to a lack of this knowledge, many middle and high schools treat ELLs as a homogeneous group and do not have

educational programs tailored to meet LTELLs' learning needs. This finding indicates that the learning needs of LTELLs are not met because of a lack of knowledge. This finding also aligns with the results of Flores et al. (2015) who found that LTELLs have continued to have literacy deficiencies because teachers were unaware of this subgroup and their unique learning needs. Vogt (2012) observed that a one-size-fits-all instruction for ELLs with diverse backgrounds, needs, and level of proficiency was ineffective. Vygotsky's theory of ZPD emphasized the need for teachers to know students' capabilities and provide tasks within the learners' ZPD (Bylund, 2011; Johnson & Keier, 2010). Language acquisition and development is a complex process that requires the educators to have necessary competencies and pedagogies to instruct LTELLs successfully (Ziegenfuss et al., 2014).

Teacher preparedness. Vygotsky's ZPD theory emphasizes the role of teachers in the development of students' literacy skills (Berk, 2008, Bylund, 2011). Pettit (2011a) and Andrei, Ellerbe, and Cherner (2015) found that most of the mainstream teachers were not certified to teach ELLs. Participants in my study felt that they were not well equipped to instruct LTELLs despite several ELL-focused PDs the school district provided. They stated that they were not prepared to teach LTELLs, a subcategory of ELLs, which was consistent with earlier findings by O'Brien (2011) and Luster (2011). O'Brien and Luster found that a lack of teachers' preparedness to meet ELLs' literacy learning needs was a major issue at middle and high school levels. Ortega, Luft, and Wong (2013) and

Wenger, Dinsmore, and Villagomez (2012) found that most teachers believed they were not prepared to meet the unique needs of ELLs.

Professional development. The results of this study showed that the school district provided adequate PDs for teachers working with ELLs, but only designated ESL teachers attended the sessions. During the 2015-2016 academic year, the district offered 83 ELL-focused sessions of PDs and 98.4% of ESL supporting teachers, 47% of core content area teachers and 3% school administrators attended. Core content area teachers working with ELLs need job-embedded PDs to equip them with relevant skills and strategies to instruct and help LTELLs learn course content material and acquire the academic language (Himmele & Himmele, 2009). PDs should equip teachers with skills to determine tasks within LTELLs' ZPD, strategies to support them (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011), and build teacher capacity (Ortega et al., 2013). The Center for Public Education, (2007) recommended SIOP model PDs for teachers working with ELLs because it focuses on how to make content comprehensible to ELLs. Effective ELL-focused PDs should include content knowledge, explicit instruction with demonstrations, practical teaching strategies, and opportunities to implement theory realistically (Webster & Valeo, 2011). PDs should help teachers to improve their instruction, adapt lessons that support students' learning (Daniel & Conlin, 2015), and develop a clear understanding of the SLA process (Himmele & Himmele, 2009). PDs could include: peer lesson demonstrations, observations, co-teaching, peer coaching, and collaboration, based on the school's needs (Kim et al., 2014) to be meaningful and practical.

Teachers' attitude and expectations. Participants had a positive attitude toward ELLs and created a positive learning environment. The positive attitude and conducive learning environment contributed to the language growth ELLs experienced between 6 and 8 grade, and the 54% who were successful on the 2015 state reading assessment. These results align with De Oliveira (2011), who found that teachers' positive attitudes and beliefs about ELLs had a positive effect on student achievement. Similarly, Irizarry (2011b) found that negative teachers' attitudes and low expectations affected student achievement negatively.

Characteristics and Literacy Skills of LTELLs

This study revealed that LTELLs are not all the same; while some remain emergent bilinguals, the majority of LELLs make slow but steady progress toward English proficiency and have ambitions of going to college. Olsen (2010) and Menken (2013a) found that most LTELLs remained emergent bilinguals, but Ardasheva et al. (2012) and Flores et al. (2015) found that LTELLs were articulate in English, motivated and planned on going to college. Kim and Garcia (2014) and Tran (2015) described LTELLs as fluent students who viewed themselves as native speakers of English with aspirations of going to college. The difference in proficiency among LTELLs aligns with Cummins' concept of SLA. According to Cummins' theory of SLA, it takes 5-7 years to acquire language proficiency with appropriate interventions, and that language acquisition occurred on a continuum. The finding of my study shows that some students need longer time to acquire English proficiency depending on the comprehensible input

and intervention. This finding agrees with Krashen (1989) and Cummins (1989). LTELLs are struggling readers whose needs must be addressed with appropriate instructional strategies (Berkeley et al., 2012). LTELLs should be exposed to practical classroom instruction and a learning environment that enhances language acquisition and development of literacy skills (Himmele & Himmele, 2009).

The results also revealed that LTELLs did not like to read, lacked CALP, grade-level literacy skills, vocabulary skills, reading comprehension skills. They also lacked metacognitive skills and higher thinking skills such as critical thinking, and reading strategies are necessary for reading comprehension (Lau, 2012). These findings aligned with previous studies by Berkeley et al. (2012), who observed that ELLs were deficient in core areas of literacy for adolescents due to a lack of metacognitive skills. The findings of this study also indicated that the problem of limited literacy skills is not an issue associated with ELLs only, but it is a common problem many middle school students experiences (Robinson et al., 2012). Middle school teachers should know that there is no simple solution to literacy challenges that confront adolescent ELLs (Tran, 2015).

Student performance. Although LTELLs are associated with a lack of academic achievement and linguistic development, I found a degree of success among LTELLs. The results showed that 80% of the 6 - grade LTELLs exited the ESL program by 8 - grade. These results align with SLA theory. Cummins' concept of SLA states that language occurs on a continuum, LTELLs are expected to show growth in their language development, and it takes 5-7 years to master a language with appropriate classroom

instruction and interventions (Cummins, 1999). This finding is similar to the results of a recent study by Brooks (2016), who found that LTELLs were successful when academic reading activities were conceptualized and built upon students' ability. Therefore, with appropriate intervention and identification of students' learning needs, most LTELLs could meet the ESL exit criteria. Teachers should focus on students' strengths instead of their deficits to help them navigate through complicated concepts (Gutierrez & Orellana, 2006; Stoddard, Tieso, & Robbins, 2015).

Kim and Garcia (2014) found that LTELLs experienced persistent academic underachievement despite several years of schooling. In contrast, the results of this study show that LTELLs are doing well academically, willing to learn, and very few attended summer school for not passing the grade-level. This finding aligns with Brooks (2016) but contradicts Sheng et al. (2011) who found that more ELLs were retained for poor classroom performance.

Student Misplacement

The findings of my study revealed that student misplacement had a negative effect on students' development of literacy skills. I found that low-performing LTELLs were placed in large-size classes with more special education students. Scheduling LTELLs in large-size classes and placing them in classes with more special education behavior students affected the classroom interaction and, subsequently slowed the SLA process. Large classes deprived LTELLs of the opportunities to practice English and participate in activities that accelerated language acquisition and development of literacy skills. Kim

and Garcia (2014) found that middle school ELLs who were mainstreamed received minimal support from teachers because of large class sizes. According to Flores et al. (2015) and Olsen (2010), these were subtractive practices that did not enhance students' progress. LTELLs should be provided with adequate opportunities to practice and use the academic language and support (Goldenberg, 2011; Lau, 2012). Contrary to these observations, the Council of Chief State Schools Officers ([CCSSO], 2012) Report indicated that class size had no significant effect on student achievement.

ELLs who miss the correct identification continue to experience literacy deficits. Another level of student misplacement I found was a lack of proper identification of students' learning needs. Teachers used the ESL label to explain students' lack of academic success or development of literacy skills. The results of my study show that teachers assume that LTELLs struggle in class because of limited English language proficiency. Cummins (1989) and Swanson et al. (2012) found that teachers who were not trained in the SLA process found it difficult to decipher if ELLs struggled academically due to language proficiency or cognitive abilities. Richards-Tutor et al. (2012) also found that most of the middle school teachers were not trained to handle the RtI process and did not consider the possibility of cognitive-related issues among LTELLs. Vaughn et al. (2010) found that most middle school teachers did not implement the RtI process with fidelity. I found that teachers had not referred the LTELLs who had remained at the intermediate level for more than three years for RtI process. Although studies by Olsen (2010) and Slama (2012) showed that most LTELLs remained emergent

bilinguals, it is possible that these students had other learning needs that were not language related. This unfortunate situation could be a major contributing factor to the literacy deficit among LTELLs.

Quality of Classroom Instruction

According to Vygotsky's theory of ZPD theory (Berk, 2008), the teachers' role in the development of students' literacy skills is undeniable (Bylund, 2011; Lantolf & Poehner, 2011). Martinez (2010) noted that the quality of classroom instruction influenced the acquisition of literacy skills in L2. I found that most teachers focused on teaching content vocabulary and not academic language. Content vocabulary is specific and linked to a subject while academic vocabulary is not related to a particular course, but it is what students need to understand concepts (Himmele & Himmele, 2009). Academic language is the language found in books, and students can access it through reading. It includes phrases or signal words that connect and communicate concepts and must be taught through specific classroom activities. Irvin et al. (2010) emphasized the importance of making the teaching vocabulary and academic language a school-wide project. Teachers must make a deliberate choice to teach academic language for students improve their literacy skills.

Olsen (2010) found that 59% of LTELLs did not meet exit criteria from the ESL program due to a lack of language development instruction, narrowed curricula, and materials that did not respond to their learning needs. Ardasheva and Tretter (2012), Calderon et al. (2011), and Flores et al. (2015) found that teachers focused on helping

ESL beginners to develop basic language skills at the expense of LTELLs' developing academic language. I found that students were not provided with the learning experiences that enhanced literacy development. Participants did not focus on the four domains of language development -listening, speaking, reading and writing - as stipulated in the curriculum. Ardasheva et al. (2012), Flores et al. (2015), Menken et al. (2011) and Olsen (2010) suggested that classroom instruction for LTELLs should focus on the development of academic language rather than the basic language proficiency that the new arrivals need. Teachers should be trained on how to approach instruction and teach content and language simultaneously (Himmele & Himmele, 2009). Core content area teachers should equip students with content-based skills and strategies to read for information and write coherently. Educators should be trained in SLA the process, informed of the importance of appropriate classroom instruction for LTELLs, and know their role in the development of literacy skills among LTELLs.

Teachers' Misconceptions About LTELLs

Misconceptions affected classroom instruction, thus, limiting language development and student achievement (Webster & Valeo; 2011, Shapiro, 2014). The following misconceptions emerged from data analysis:

- Parents of ELLs could not provide parental support due to the language barrier.
- ELLs who were fluent did not need support.
- ELLs were a homogeneous group.
- ELLs struggled academically because of language-related issues.

- ELA teachers were responsible for teaching literacy skills.

Parental involvement. Participants did not require the parental involvement of ELLs' parents because they assumed that the parents would feel uncomfortable or intimidated due to a language barrier. Because of this misconception, parents of ELLs were not involved in making decisions for their children. These results were similar to Greenfield (2013), who found that teachers did not involve parents of ELLs in making decisions for their children due to misconceptions. Contrary to teaching staff's misconceptions, Greenfield found that the parents of ELLs were eager to come for meetings and provide parental support despite the language barrier. Pereira and Gentry (2013) and Shapiro (2014) found that parents of ELLs had higher expectations for their children than the children's educational aspirations. A well-informed staff can create an environment and a culture that includes all parents and recognize that, with or without formal education, parents have a great influence on their children's education (Shim, 2013). Therefore, educators should be trained on how to foster student/parent/teacher relationship.

Fluent ELLs do not need support. Another misconception that I identified was that LTELLs were articulate and did not need linguistic support. This finding was similar to earlier studies by Ardasheva et al. (2012), Himmele and Himmele (2009), Olsen (2010), and Simms (2012). Also, NCTE (2008) reported that some teachers assumed that ELLs with good oral English did not need help. Olsen found that teachers' misconceptions and a lack of knowledge of SLA led to the underdevelopment of literacy

skills among ELLs. Himmele and Himmele found that LTELLs born in the United States were more fluent in English than their home language and considered themselves as native English speakers, but they experienced academic challenges due to a lack of academic language. Ardasheva et al. (2012) observed that LTELLs were not aware that language could be a source of academic challenge.

Cummins (1989) cautioned teachers that students' BICS could be misleading because LTELLs have verbal BICS but lack the CALP they need to interpret and understand the content. Bylund (2011) found that students' command of BICS resulted in students being denied services they desperately needed. In my study, LTELLs did not get the support they needed because teachers did not identify LTELLs' unique learning needs. They lacked knowledge about second generation ELLs, who were fluent in English and considered themselves as native speakers, but lacked academic language (Simms, 2012). Teachers need to be aware of the various groups of ELLs and their unique learning needs and recognize that LTELLs are conversationally fluent, but they still need additional linguistic support. LTELLs need specialized instruction to meet their learning needs, instead of the homogeneous pedagogy that most of the teachers provide (Brooks, 2016; Menken & Kleyn, 2010).

ELLs are homogenous. The results of this study showed that teachers treated ELLs as one group due to a lack of knowledge about LTELLs. According to NCTE (2008) and Tran (2015), ELLs are highly heterogeneous, yet most educators consider them as a homogenous group; an assumption that limited teachers' abilities to meet the

varied learning needs among ELLs. Webster and Valeo (2011) and Shapiro (2014) found that teachers regarded ELLs as a homogenous group and assumed that the English language curriculum was enough to make ELLs proficient in English. This misconception affected classroom instruction, language development, and student achievement among LTELLs**.** There should be a clear distinction between LTELLs and other ELLs for teachers to meet their unique learning needs.

I also found that both the state and the school district considered ELLs as one group. For example, the TAPR did not isolate data for LTELLs. The report was inclusive of all ELLs and did not show the percentage of LTELLs that met the standards on the state assessment. Also, among the LTELLs, there are students whose parents declined ESL services. Although these students are classified as ESL, they do not receive linguistic support. Flores et al. (2012) found that students whose parents refused the ESL services were not successful as those who received ESL support. Zhao et al. (2015) found that ELLs whose parents declined the services took longer to exit the ESL program. The ESL data does not segregate data for students whose parents refused the ESL services and those new to the country. This finding shows a need for data segregation and proper analysis that will provide a better picture of LTELLs' performance.

ELLs struggle academically because of language-related issues. The results of my study indicated that teachers did not meet the learning needs of some of the LTELLs' because of a lack of proper student identification. Participants attributed LTELLs' poor performance to limited language proficiency. It is possible that some of the LTELLs,

especially those at the intermediate level needed different instructional support other than linguistic support. Students in the upper grades who were still classified as ELLs might have a low academic ability or a lack of motivation and need more or different help as they encounter rigorous academic demands in middle and high school (CPE, 2007).

ELA teachers are the ones responsible for teaching literacy skills. I found that teachers lack a shared responsibility of helping LTELLs develop literacy skills. Participants in my study indicated that math, science, and social studies teachers did not teach literacy skills because they assumed that it was the duty of ELA teachers. Similarly, Tellez and Manthey (2015) identified the lack of shared responsibility among teachers as one of the factors that affected language acquisition and development of literacy skills among ELLs. According to Andrei et al. (2015), literacy instruction should be embraced across the curriculum and not considered as a responsibility of ELA and ESL teachers, or literacy coaches. Johnson and Keier (2010) suggested that teachers working with struggling readers should be trained in basic reading strategies specific to their content area. Martinez, Harris, and McClain (2014) emphasized the need for teachers to foster academic English at all stages of SLA, explicitly teach vocabulary, use strategies that enhance cross-linguistic transfer, and support ongoing oral and written language development. Teachers should understand their role and realize that they are language teachers for their content area.

The ESL Exit Criteria

ESL exit criterion does not affect students' linguistic or literacy skills development, but participants identified it as a contributing factor to the increasing number of LTELLs. I found that most LTELLs had grade level linguistic skills, but they were still classified as LEP because they had not met the ESL exit criteria. This finding is similar to earlier findings by Hakuta, Butter, Witt (2000) and Yang, Urrabazo, and Murray (2001). Hakuta et al. found that some ELLs were classified as fluent based on the oral language proficiency assessment, but could not exit the ESL program because the exit criteria included passing an academic achievement test. Yang et al. found that most LTELLs remained in the ESL program due to rigid ESL exit criteria.

I found that some LTELLs did not exit the ESL program because of poor administration of TELPAS writing and OLPT, and lack of writing skills. The writing was not taught across the curriculum, teachers did not give students enough time to complete the writing section for TELPAS assessment, and the OLPT testing environment did not allow students to focus on the test. These findings indicated a need for training. Teachers should be trained in test administration, and the school administrators should monitor TELPAS writing and OLPT assessments. Core content area teachers are not aware of their role in students' performance on TELPAS, and lack of this awareness contributes to the increased number of LTELLs.

Conclusion

This qualitative instrumental case study investigated middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELLs and how the LTELLs' limited literacy skills influenced the teachers' classroom instruction. It was important to examine the teachers' perceptions to understand the reasons why LTELLs continued to struggle with the development of literacy skills. The major theme that emerged from the data analysis was a lack of teachers' knowledge of LTELLs and SLA process which resulted into misconceptions. Teachers' lack of knowledge about LTELLs affected the quality of classroom instruction teachers provided to support the development of literacy skills among LTELLs. Moreover, the lack of knowledge about the SLA process resulted in assumptions such as fluent LTELLs did not need linguistic support, LTELL struggled academically because of limited language proficiency, parents of ELLs were not capable of providing parental support, and it was the responsibility of ELA teachers to provide literacy instruction.

The face-to-face interviews and document analysis provided enough data that answered the research questions. Middle school teachers perceived LTELLs as students who struggled academically due to various reasons, and LTELLs had a significant effect on the classroom instruction due to a lack of metacognitive skills, limited vocabulary, and writing skills. Cummins' SLA and Vygotsky's ZPD theories provided the framework for the study. Vygotsky's theory explained the role of the teacher in the development of literacy skills among ELLs, and Cummins theory provided an in-depth description of the SLA process to understand LTELLs' learning needs. It is imperative that any teacher

working with ELLs should be knowledgeable in SLA process. Knowledge of the SLA process would help teachers have a better understanding of LTELLs, clear the misconceptions, and provide classroom instruction that meets LTELLs' learning needs.

Participants' responses to interview questions provided adequate information that answered the research questions. The results of my study revealed that middle school teachers have limited knowledge of LTELLs, and they perceive LTELLs as students who do not need linguistic accommodations, and yet they lack academic language. Although participants stated that LTELLs did not influence their classroom instruction, data analysis revealed that LTELLs affected teachers' classroom instruction.

The next section of this paper is a discussion of a doctoral project that emerged from the findings of my study. Based on the nature of the results, the selected doctoral project is a white paper for the stakeholders. The purpose of the white paper is to share the findings of the study and make recommendations that will benefit LTELLs when implemented. The findings will illuminate the issue of limited literacy skills among LTELLs and provide research-based information for stakeholders.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

In Section 3, I provide a detailed description of the project that emerged from the study. The project is a comprehensive white paper, Appendix A, where I shared the findings of my study and made recommendations to the stakeholders. For my research, I explored middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELLs' limited literacy skills and how LTELLs affected teachers' classroom instruction. LTELLs are ELLs who have attended school in the United States for more than 6 years and have not met the ESL exit criteria (TEA, 2015b). The problem that I addressed in this study was based on the premise that LTELLs did not have literacy skills to accomplish grade-level tasks and meet standards on the state assessments. I conducted an instrumental case study at a Title I middle school in Texas using qualitative methods to collect and analyze data. The participants included six teachers: four core content area (ELA, math, science, and social studies) teachers, one ESL coteacher, and one literacy teacher.

In this section, I also discuss the goals of the project, rationale for the choice of genre, and the review of the literature on the genre. I also discuss resources, barriers, timeline, and personnel responsibilities during the implementation phase of the project. According to Creswell (2012) and Lodico et al. (2010), it is important to disseminate research findings in the best way possible. My goal is not only to share the results of the study with the stakeholders but also to make recommendations that might have a positive

social influence (Laureate Education, Inc., 2013) on student achievement. Implementation of the recommendations will depend on the principal at the research site.

Rationale

The choice of the white paper as a project for this study was influenced by both the results and the stakeholders. Both the principal of the research site and the district research and program evaluation coordinator were interested in the findings of the study, and they requested a summary of the results and recommendations. I considered PDs as a possible project option, but the decision of developing and conducting a 3-day PDs would depend on the school principal and the district ESL coordinator. Conducting a 3-day PD would require the school district's approval because it involves finances and scheduling. Considering these constraints and the findings, I chose to write a white paper that outlines the findings and recommendations that would be shared with the teachers and the administrators. The white paper will provide the CBLT with information that could be included in the school improvement plan.

According to Bean and Swan Dagen (2012) and Fullan (2011), change is well received when stakeholders identify the needs and are involved in the process of findings the solution. This genre, the white paper, will allow the stakeholders to participate in finding solution(s) to the problem(s) and make decisions that will meet their school's needs. It will also provide a reference document that the principal and the district ESL coordinator could use to discuss the implications of the findings with teachers and make decisions to improve students' achievement. The white paper not only provides a forum

for me to share the findings of my study and make recommendations, but it is also an appropriate strategy to create awareness and advocate for changes that could improve achievement among LTELLs. I focused on middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELLs' limited literacy skills and how LTELLs affected the teachers' classroom instruction. It is important to inform the district ESL department and school principal of the teachers' perceptions of LTELLs and how they affect student achievement. Therefore, the use of white paper is the most appropriate way to present and share the findings and make suggestions based on the results of this instrumental case study.

Review of the Literature

Historically, the term *white paper* was first used in 1922 after the publication of a document by Winston Churchill, then Great Britain's secretary for the colonies (Purdue OWL, 2015). Currently, the *white paper* is referred to by different names including *proposition paper*, *executive summary*, *business document*, or a *marketing tool* (Graham & Gordon, 2001). A white paper is an informative document or report written for a specific audience on an issue that needs to be addressed, and it is based on research (Scotten, 2011). According to Srikanth (2002), a white paper is a marketing tool that is used to create awareness and provide information to influence the buyers' decision. Sakamuro, Stolley, and Hyde (2015) described a white paper as an informative document that can be used to make decisions or changes. The purpose of a white paper is to advocate for something or influence the decisions made by the audience concerning issues. The writer of the white paper identifies the problem or problems to the audience,

provides facts that are research-based, and lets the reader make decisions. Sakamuro et al. also described a white paper as an informative document that could be used to make decisions or changes.

According to Graham and Gordon (2001), Sakamuro et al. (2015), and Xavier University Library (2014), a white paper is an effective way to communicate information to a group of people at different locations and make recommendations on existing problems or issues. This genre also allows the writer to propose possible solutions to a problem, suggest changes to an existing policy, or take a stand on specific issues or ideas. It is meant to inform and persuade the audience into making a change or decision. It is also used when it is not easy to get all parties of interest together or provide feedback on research.

Xavier University Library (2014) outlines the structure of a white paper; introduction, a body, and conclusion. The introduction includes the problem and the author's position. The body provides background information with evidence and discusses both issues. The conclusion summarizes the main concepts and includes suggestions and possible solutions. In Appendix A, I outlined the objectives, the problem of LTELLs, explained how it is an issue at local and state levels, discussed the findings with evidence from the study and the literature reviewed, made some suggestions of possible solutions to the problem, and summarized the information in the paper.

Conclusion

I chose to write a white paper as the project for this study based on the findings of the research and the stakeholders' request. The white paper is a summary of the findings of the study I conducted at Pearls Middle School and research-based recommendations that I suggested. As an informative document, it will be available for the school administrators and teachers to use as a reference text to initiate discussions about LTELLs. It is the most relevant genre and efficient way to disseminate the findings of my study and make recommendations to stakeholders. The use of a white paper provides opportunities for stakeholders to review the results and recommendations and make decisions that meet the needs of their organization.

Project Description

A white paper is an executive summary, and it outlines the goals and problem, states the conceptual framework and how it fits in the study, and summarizes the findings and recommendations. I wrote this white paper for teachers and the principal at Pearls Middle School and the district ESL coordinator, and my goal is to share the findings of my research with the stakeholders and make recommendations on how to address the issue of limited literacy skills among LTELLs. The results of this research study revealed that the issue of limited literacy skills is not just a problem associated with LTELLs, but non-LEP students also lack grade-level literacy skills. In addition, the literature review indicated that the increase in the number of LTELLs is not a problem at Pearls Middle School only but a state-wide issue (Robinson et al., 2012). Although I wrote this paper

for the staff and principal of research site and the district ESL coordinator, it will be made available for other schools to access.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

I will share and disseminate the white paper within the first month of my project being accepted and approved by Walden University. I will disseminate electronic copies of the white paper to the designated personnel immediately, and request for a formal meeting with the principal within two weeks. Although the implementation of the recommendations depends on the principal and the district ESL department coordinator, I will work with the CBLT to develop a plan and timeline of operation.

First, I will have a formal meeting with the principal to discuss the contents of the white paper and answer any questions related to the findings and recommendations. After meeting with the principal, I will disseminate electronic copies of the white paper to the district coordinator of research and program evaluation, the principal of the research site, and the district ESL coordinator. Based on the administrative structure at Pearls Middle School, it is the responsibility of the school principal to initiate the implementation of such recommendations or involve the CBLT and the district ESL coordinator in deliberations to develop an action plan.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The implementation of the recommendations is the responsibility of the school principal and district ESL department. The school administration, personnel from the district ESL department will provide guidance and financial support if needed, and

teachers will be instrumental in executing the recommendations. I will be available to answer any questions, provide additional research-based information that supports the recommendations, and develop monitoring and evaluation tools.

Potential Barriers

The potential obstacles I can foresee is the high turnover of teachers and administrators. In the case of any changes in the school administration, I do hope that the new administrator will be knowledgeable and supportive the ESL program to continue with the implementation. Besides the high turnover of teachers, a lack of funds might be another barrier due to deep budget cuts in the available funds. Implementing some of the recommendations might require training teachers, an extra strain on the already compressed budget and tight teacher schedule.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

My responsibility will be to send an electronic copy of the white paper to stakeholders, discuss the contents of the white paper with the principal, answer any questions related to the details of the document. The principal will recommend the implementation of the recommendations as they are or make changes to fit in the school's improvement plan, and delegate responsibilities. Teachers will address the recommendations as per the principal's and the district ESL coordinator's guidelines. Students will be required to be active learners and parents will provide parental support and be involved in the decision-making process. I will also provide research-based

information during the implementation phase and participate in the monitoring and evaluation process.

Project Evaluation Plan

Although the implementation of this project depends on the principal at the research site and the district ESL Coordinator, evaluation of the project will be ongoing. The nature of evaluation will vary depending on the school administration's decision to implement the recommendations as suggested or modify some of them. Irrespective of the nature of the implementation, I will monitor what and how teachers will implement them through observation and ongoing discussions with teachers to solicit feedback. At the end of the academic year, I will conduct a survey to find how teachers implemented the recommendations and the effect of the changes made. I will analyze LTELLs' performance on state standardized assessment to determine the increase in student achievement. I will also analyze the end-of-year LPAC minutes to find the number of ELLs that would have met the exit criteria.

Project Implications

Local Community

Social change is one of the goals of the doctoral study at Walden University. An effective doctoral study project should bring about social change through various activities that advance the betterment of individuals, communities, or organizations. In this case, the findings of my study might provide educators in Malaika School District with a better understanding of LTELLs' learning needs and develop literacy programs to

meet LTELLs' diverse learning needs. My goal of writing this project is to present the findings of my study and make recommendations to stakeholders. Currently, there is no evidence that my study will have any effect on student achievement unless the recommendations are implemented. Some of the proposed recommendations include a change in the administration of the OLPT and TELPAS, teaching of writing across the curriculum, coaching LTELLs on how to meet the ESL exit criteria, training teachers in SLA process, and equipping teachers with strategies for LTELLs. I will disseminate the white paper to the school principal with a hope that it will be made available for teachers to access and utilize it.

Far-Reaching

The findings of my study should lead to further research. Based on the results of my study, it is necessary to investigate the mainstream teachers' knowledge of LTELLs and implementation of the ESL curriculum in the district. The ESL curriculum is an intensive program of instruction meant to accelerate the acquisition of proficiency in English language and literacy, yet there is an increase in the number of LTELLs. The district's goal is to have ELLs show one proficiency level each year growth on TELPAS, thus, achieving a rating of advanced high within four years. Despite the district's clear vision for ELLs and intensive ESL curriculum, the increase in the number of LTELLs in Malaika School District has remained a challenge and of great concern to stakeholders. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the implementation of the ESL curriculum at the elementary and secondary school levels and the knowledge of teachers in SLA.

Conclusion

I conducted an instrumental case study to examine middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELL's limited skills and how LTELLs influenced teachers' classroom instruction. I shared the findings with the stakeholder and made recommendations in the form of a white paper. The implementation of the recommendations depends on the principal and the district ESL coordinator. The next section, Section 4, is a reflection on my doctoral journey. In this section, I will examine the strengths and limitations of this project and my growth as a scholar, practitioner, project developer, and future research possibilities.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In this section, I reflect on the entire process of working on this project with a particular focus on the strengths and limitations of the project, as well as my personal growth as a scholar, practitioner, project developer, and an avid advocate for ELLs. I also discuss future research possibilities. In my conclusion, I outline lessons learned from various experiences I encountered along the way. Although some of the experiences were heartbreaking, they shaped my identity as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer, and helped me to have a voice as an advocate for LTELLs.

The purpose of this study was to examine middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELLs and their literacy skills, and how the LTELLs affected teachers' classroom instruction. This study was a response to several reports and concerns from educators in Malaika School District that LTELLs did not have literacy skills to manage grade-level material and that their poor performance on the state standardized assessments had an adverse effect on schools' rating and teachers' morale. The results of this study revealed that teachers have several misconceptions about LTELLs due to a lack of knowledge about the LTELLs and SLA. These misconceptions and other pedagogical practices contributed to the limited literacy skills among LTELLs. I also found that the rigid ESL exit criteria and poor instructional and poor assessment practices accounted for the increase in the number of LTELLs in the district. Based on the findings of the study and the request from the school principal, I wrote a white paper to share the results and make

recommendations with a hope that it will initiate discussion among the educators and address the learning needs of LTELLs.

Project Strengths

This project focused on ELLs, the fastest growing category of the student population. It is important for teachers working with ELLs to have adequate knowledge of SLA process and understand their role. I examined middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELLs, and the main strength of this study is that it provided insight into understanding LTELLs and their learning needs. Data from interviews revealed middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELLs and led an in-depth understanding of the topic of LTELLs, and the data provided a possible explanation of the limited literacy skills among LTELLs. Through this research, I learned that teachers who lack knowledge of LTELLs and SLA process are likely to have misconceptions, and those misconceptions have an adverse effect on LTELLs' academic achievement.

In the white paper, I provided a summary of the findings of the study and made recommendations that could improve students' performance if implemented. The recommendations focused on various ways teachers could enhance their knowledge and addressed teachers' misconceptions about LTELLs. They also included research-based information on how to support ELLs and increase students' achievement. Furthermore, the information in the white paper could generate discussions among educators in the district on how to help LTELLs develop literacy skills and, thus, improve students' achievement. The findings could lead to more studies on the knowledge of mainstream

teachers regarding LTELLs and SLA process. During the literature review, I realized that there is limited literature on LTELLs and literacy among ELLs. With my study, I add current information about LTELLs to the database. The findings of this study provide information on the learning needs of LTELLs, challenge educators to discard their bias and misconceptions and provide the necessary support LTELLs need to be successful. The study can be replicated at a different school and compare the findings.

Limitations, Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The major limitation of this project is that it limits the target audience to the administrators and teachers at the research site and the district ESL coordinator. The project could have a far-reaching effect if the contents and recommendations were shared at the district level. Another limitation of the study is the research design. The use of instrumental case study limited participants to one research site. I should have used participants from different middle schools to get a better understanding of middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELLs. Although the use of face-to-face interviews and document analysis provided in-depth of data more methods of data collection could have provided more data for triangulation. The inclusion of other sources such as surveys and classroom observations could have provided a variety of information, increased the credibility of the study, and provided a variety of perspectives to the problem.

The findings of my study revealed a lack of accurate data on LTELLs' performance. District and state records treat ELLs as a homogeneous group. The current data on ELLs do not reflect the actual performance of LTELLs on state standardized

tests. The white paper did not provide suggestions on how this issue will be communicated to the district's and state's data entry and analysis departments. As a researcher, I should work with the district ESL personnel to have the information disseminated to departments that handle student performance data.

An alternative project for this study would have been a series of PDs. PDs would have provided teachers with opportunities to collaborate and generate more ideas and addressed the problem of limited knowledge about LTELLs and SLA process, and teachers' misconceptions about ELLs. PDs would also have addressed the issue of strategies that work for LTELLs and how to teach academic vocabulary effectively. PD sessions were not feasible because they would require funds. The school might not have the funds for ESL focused training available because of budget cuts. Also, scheduling for these sessions in the middle of the year for already overbooked teachers would have been a challenge.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship

To discuss my scholarship experience, I reflected on my doctoral journey that included the completion of coursework and research with a project. The scholarship is defined as the pursuit of knowledge through investigation and acquisition of funds of knowledge leading to expertise in a specific area or topic (Embry-Jenlink & Peace, 2012). For a doctoral student, it is a process through which students develop qualities and achievements of a scholar. These achievements include investigating current literature,

collaborating with other doctoral students, accepting feedback, networking, participating in PD forums, and adhering to the norms of scholarly writing. The process of becoming a scholar is not easy, and it takes time. One cannot be a scholar in isolation; it requires the support of others.

As a student at Walden University, I have developed a love for knowledge, and acquired skills that have made a major difference in my profession and personal growth. During coursework and the literature review, I learned how to identify credible articles, synthesize, evaluate information and draw conclusions. At the research analysis phase, I developed critical thinking, an ability to avoid bringing personal bias into the study, and how to identify valid findings from the data. The writing process was the most challenging phase of the journey. It was time-consuming, and it took several sessions of revising and editing, phone conferences with the project team, accepting both negative and positive criticism, and understanding that scholarly writing was different from general writing. The APA manual was a great resource, and most importantly, I learned the value of honesty and integrity. I also learned the importance of students developing and acquiring the 21st-century literacy skills - academic vocabulary, critical thinking, and literacy skills including reading comprehension, writing, study skills, and the use of technology.

Apart from creating and applying the knowledge, I learned a lot about my topic of research, LTELLs. The literature review about LTELLs and the findings of my study have given me confidence and a voice to talk about LTELLs, share the funds of

knowledge, and become an agent of change. Publishing my scholarly work on LTELL and having the recommendations I made implemented at the research site will be the symbol of my academic achievement and social change.

The Walden University doctoral program is designed to develop scholars who meet societal expectations. My growth as a scholar has been supported by my professors through quality feedback and challenging me to look at the issue from various perspectives. During doctoral coursework, they guided me through the process of analyzing and synthesizing text to identify ideas and themes. The research process exposed me to the value of integrity, the importance of crediting sources of information and using the information to respond to issues in a scholarly manner. As I progressed through the stages of study and writing process, I acquired skills and knowledge that have changed my professional outlook and practice positively. I intend to continue being a scholar, network with others, participate in PDs both at the local and national levels and share research-based information through publishing. This project has ignited a new quest for knowledge in literacy among ELLs. The writing process was the most stressful aspect of the doctoral journey, but I learned a lot about scholarly writing.

Project Development and Evaluation

Initially, the idea of developing a project instead of a traditional dissertation was challenging. The process of formulating a project was not easy. Developing a project entails critical thinking, collaborating and consulting with others, researching, networking, and a willingness to view things from different perspectives. In this case, it

involved consultation with my doctoral committee, in-depth research, and critical thinking about other options. My initial choice of project for this study was to develop PDs, but the PD workshops would not have met my goal and disseminated the information to my target audience. My main goal was to use an effective medium to share the results of the study with stakeholders. After discussing with the committee, reviewing the literature on the three options, and considering the request from the stakeholders, I decided to write a white paper. Project development requires the input of other people and having a clear picture of the outcome of what you want.

The process started with identifying the problem, developing the prospectus, writing a proposal, conducting research, analyzing data and discussing the findings, then choosing the best way to share the results. According to Perdue Owl (2015), a white paper is an informative document or report written for a specific audience on an issue that is significant a challenging. The purpose of the white paper is to advocate for something or take a particular stand on a subject or a certain to a problem (Sakamuro et al., 2015). With this understanding, I wrote a white paper to share the findings of my study and make recommendations that would increase student achievement if implemented. Through the white paper, I shared the results and made recommendations. This genre accorded stakeholders opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and finding solutions to the issue of limited literacy skills among LTELLs. Most likely, the principal of the research site might request that I develop and facilitate PDs, and I am willing to share the knowledge I have acquired in the process of working on this project.

This process was long and painful, but it equipped me with lifetime analytical and interpretive skills that I will always use.

Leadership and Change

During the doctoral coursework, I was exposed to information on leadership. I have not only experienced professional and personal growth, but I have also evolved into a leader ready to serve the community. As I expanded my knowledge and skills in literacy among LTELLs, I became resourceful and willing to provide support or make suggestions to colleagues. I have also been called upon by my principal to facilitate workshops and PDs for my school. Being a doctoral student and proving to colleagues that I am knowledgeable has earned me positions on various committees both at campus and district level. As I work with colleagues, I realize that my leadership style has changed. I am more inclusive and ready to take risks. I also embrace other people's ideas and opinions with respect even when I disagree with them. As an ESL teacher, I serve as a spokesperson for my students. After working on this project, I see myself as an advocate for my students. I feel empowered and well equipped with the research-based knowledge to provide guidance and share best practices that support LTELLs. My goal is to work with teachers so that ELLs can get the help they need to avoid becoming LTELLs.

In education, changes are inevitable and challenging. As I prepare for a leadership position, I know that people react differently to changes and leaders. I also understand the importance of involving stakeholders in decision-making and implementing the changes

(Fullan, 2011). In the white paper, I made recommendations that could improve students' achievement, but I know that not all parties involved are positive and ready to embrace them. As a leader, I should not only consider my personal convictions about things but also be mindful of how my decisions affect others (Bailey & Gautam, 2015). I should respect other people's opinion and perspectives, and let others understand my position on issues through focused discussions, clear vision and mission, and clarify any misunderstanding. The doctoral studies have strengthened my leadership skills, such that I am confident and ready to handle challenging and stressful situations as I advocate for my students or introduce new ideas to stakeholders or colleagues.

As I stated in the project outline, I would like to provide research-based information and help in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the recommendations based on the principal's and the district ESL coordinator's decisions. Should the principal and the district decide on a PD, I am ready to develop one tailored to the needs of the campus. Finally, I learned that leadership is not in the position of an office, but in one's involvement, contribution and influence in the society.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

It is overwhelming to see the abundance of knowledge I acquired from what started off with looking for answers to two research questions and a goal of having a social change. The idea of social change was central in deciding the area of study. A desire to become a better teacher and to find better ways to support my ELLs helped me identify my research topic before I narrowed my focus on LTELLs. As I worked on the

coursework, I shifted my pedagogical practices from theory to practice and accepted the responsibility of educating ELLs. I defined my identity as a practitioner as well as an advocate because I found a voice and a forum to advocate for ELLs. The process of the review of literature deepened my understanding on the topic, and the interviews provided a better perspective on the plight of ELLs.

Personally, I was astonished by the findings of my study. It was beyond my imagination that the participants did not know the LTELLs in their classes, lacked knowledge of the SLA process, and held several misconceptions about ELLs. The effect of misconceptions on student achievement was overwhelming. Another surprise was the contrary results. Several studies had associated LTELLs with the lack of success and at-risk of not graduating from high school. My study revealed that LTELLs could be successful if they receive appropriate support and intervention.

Although the local effect might be limited to the response to information in the white paper, I anticipate a wider influence. A district-wide PDs might emerge from the discussions with the district ESL coordinator and a new look at the ESL data. The results of this study will create awareness about LTELLs and might lead to proper segregation of data to provide accurate data for LTELLs. I intend to reach more educators with the publication of this project.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

As the student population in the United States continues to diversify, teachers should be aware of the various categories of students, their diverse learning needs, and

how to effectively meet those needs. Although participants indicated that LTELLs did not affect their classroom instruction, the findings of this study showed that LTELLs affected teachers' classroom instruction. The white paper provides research-based information about LTELLs, clarifies the misconceptions about ELLs, and emphasizes the role of teachers in the development of literacy skills among ELLs. With appropriate support and intervention, LTELLs can acquire both academic language and literacy skills, improve their performance, and meet the ESL exit criteria; resulting in a reduction in the number of ELLs who become LTELLs.

Although the choice of participants was confined to one research site, the study could be replicated, but include participants from various middle schools within the district for comparison purposes. A follow-up study could also be conducted at the high school and compare the results.

Conclusion

Reflecting on my doctoral journey has been a humbling experience. I did not realize how much I had grown professionally in the last four years. Although I have participated in many ELL-focused workshops as a participant, presenter, and facilitator, I had not taken the time to reflect on the effect of my doctoral studies on my professional growth. I have also grown in the area of leadership, and most importantly, my knowledge and interest in ELLs have soared. I have become a better teacher, well-equipped, and ready to advocate for ELLs at my school. As a scholar, I have developed lifetime research skills that will always be useful.

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Appendix A: The Project

Improving Literacy Skills among Long-term English Language Learners

A White Paper by Rachel Butiko

Objectives:

- **To share with the staff of Pearls Middle School and the district ESL personnel the findings of a study that investigated middle school teachers' perceptions of the limited literacy skills among long-term English language learners (LTELLs).**
- **To make research-based recommendations that will improve literacy skills among LTELLs and increase student achievement.**
- **To educate the staff at Pearls Middle School about LTELLs.**
- **To initiate collaboration among the educators that will enhance pedagogical practices and programs to improve literacy skills among LTELLs.**

Introduction

This white paper was written for the school principal of Pearls Middle School and Malaika School District (pseudonyms) the district ESL coordinator. It is a summary of the findings and recommendations of a qualitative case study – *Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of Limited Literacy Skills among Long-term English Language Learners* conducted by Rachel Butiko, as a requirement for a doctoral degree at Walden University. Although the focus of this project is to create awareness about LTELLs, my goal is to advocate for LTELLs to get the classroom support and instruction they need to develop grade-level literacy skills, improve their academic achievement, and meet the state's ESL exit criteria.

Long-term English Language Learners (LTELLs) are ELLs who have been enrolled in school in the USA for more than six years and have not met the exit criteria *(Olsen, 2010).*

ELLs are active learners of English that have limited English proficiency, speak a language other than English and have difficulty in performing grade-level work in English *(TEA, 2013)***.**

The Problem

The study was conducted on the premise that LTELLs did not have literacy skills to accomplish grade level tasks and could not meet standards on state assessments. An analysis of the 2014 - 2015 Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment of Standards (TELPAS) showed that 48% of ELLs in Malaika School District did not show growth in their English proficiency in reading and writing. Also, the 2013 - 2014 Texas Assessment Performance Report (TAPR) (TEA 2015) for the school district revealed that 42% of the middle school ELLs did not meet the minimum standards on STAAR. Because of the poor performance on state assessments, the district has continued to experience an increase in the number of LTELL. Although Pearls Middle School met the standards, only 48% of the ELLs subcategory met standards, and the school's end of year LPAC records showed that 60% of the ELLs were LTELLs.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out how middle school teachers perceived the limited literacy skills among LTELLs and how LTELLs impacted teachers' classroom instruction. Qualitative data were collected from six core content area teachers and analyzed to establish middle school teachers' perceptions of the limited literacy skills among LTELLs and establish middle school teachers' perceptions of LTELLs. Two research questions guided the study:

1. How do middle school teachers perceive the limited literacy skills among LTELLs?
2. How do middle school teachers perceive the impact of LTELLs on their classroom instruction?

Cummins' concept of second language acquisition (SLA) (Cummins, 1989) and Vygotsky's theory of zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Berk, 2008) provided the framework for the study. The ZPD Theory explained the role of teachers and classroom instruction in the development of literacy skills (Harvey & Teemant, 2012) while the concept of SLA provided an in-depth understanding of the process involved in acquiring the literacy skills by students learning English as a second language (Tellez & Manthey, 2015).

A copy of this document will be available on the district website to provide information about LTELLs, a group of students that have a great impact on our current education system, yet little is known about them (Menken, Kleyn, & Chae, 2012).

Summary of the Findings

Although several themes emerged from the study, teachers' lack of knowledge about LTELLs and SLA process and teachers' misconceptions about LTELLs were identified as the major factors that impacted ELLs' academic achievement. The findings indicated that the lack of this knowledge resulted into misconceptions that affected the quality of classroom

instruction and the instructional support LTELLs received. In this white paper, I discussed the results under two broad themes; the effects of lack of knowledge about LTELLs and SLA process and misconceptions. Teachers' lack of knowledge about LTELLs and SLA resulted in:

- students' needs not being met
- misconceptions
- student misplacement
- ineffective classroom instruction
- students' poor performance on state assessments
- limited literacy skills students' inability to meet the ESL exit criteria.
- Limited parental involvement.
- The lack of appropriate classroom instruction that meets the ELLs learning needs.
- The lack of linguistic support.
- Student misplacement.
- Treating ELLs as a homogenous group.

The outcome of these misconceptions and the lack of knowledge about LTELLs and SLA process is the limited literacy skills LTELLs experience and inability to meet the ESL exit criteria. A study by Flores, Kleyn, and Menken (2015) confirmed that most teachers and administrators at middle and high schools did not understand the learning needs associated with LTELLs due to a lack of knowledge of SLA.

The theme of misconceptions highlighted the following:

Theme 1: A Lack of Knowledge about LTELLs and SLA

The results of this study revealed that most teachers at Pearls Middle School lacked basic knowledge of LTELLs and SLA process. Participants did not know the LTELLs in their classes. It is important for teachers to know the various categories of students in their classes, including LTELLs. Due to the lack of knowledge about LTELLs and their learning needs, participants reported that they did not provide any explicit support for them. Knowledge of SLA is crucial in informing classroom instruction and providing support for ELLs; especially LTELLs.

According to Téllez and Manthey (2015), most teachers working with ELLs do not have adequate knowledge about the SLA process. Educators should be aware that it takes 2 - 5 years for ELLs to acquire the basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and 5 – 8 years to acquire the cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) with appropriate intervention (Cummins, 2011). Some students might take longer depending on the kind of curriculum they were exposed to, their personality and motivation, and their home environment (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Therefore, teachers working with ELLs should understand the SLA process and know about language acquisition to avoid misconception. The lack of adequate knowledge about SLA resulted into misconceptions, which had

an adverse impact on student achievement and development of literacy skills.

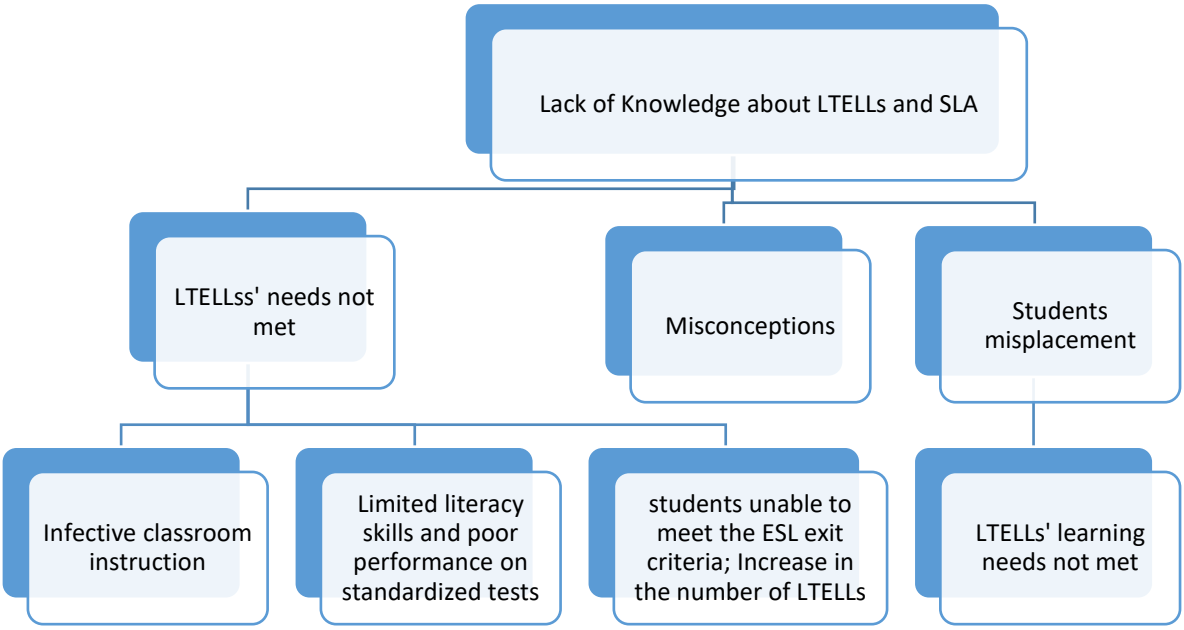

Figure 1. Effects of a lack of knowledge about LTELLs and SLA process.

Quality of Classroom Instruction

Although participants indicated that they provided quality classroom instruction using a variety of strategies, the analysis of the data revealed that they did not focus on the four domains of language development; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Participants also reported that they taught content vocabulary, but they did not specify how. They focused on teaching content at the expense of academic vocabulary; the most critical area of need for LTELLs (Cummins, 2011). The writing was not done across the curriculum, and content area reading strategies were not addressed, thus affecting LTELLs' performance on TELPAS and STAAR writing assessments.

The findings on how LTELLs impacted the classroom instruction were two-fold. One group of participants indicated that ELLs changed their classroom instruction negatively due to a lack of reading comprehension skills, the inability to apply metacognitive skills, limited vocabulary, and limited writing skills. They also observed that ELLs slowed classroom instruction due to limited academic vocabulary. Because of the limited vocabulary, they spent much time teaching content vocabulary and building background knowledge. Academic vocabulary is a language of books (Himmele & Himmele, 2009) and students can best acquire it through reading. Teachers should know that ELLs are simultaneously learning content and acquiring academic language (Ascension-Moreno, Kleyn, & Menken, 2013), and this process impacts the pace at which ELLs accomplish tasks or show mastery of content. Cummins (2011) and Himmele and Himmele (2009) emphasized that teachers should create a classroom environment that promotes the development of both general and content-specific language.

Another group of the participants specified that LTELLs did not impact their classroom instruction because the ESL students in their class were the same as other students, and their learning needs were similar to other students' learning needs. This misconception impacts students' development of literacy skills. Himmele and Himmele (2009) observed that LTELLs have unique learning needs that should be addressed for them to be successful. According to Harvey and Teemant (2012), the presence of LTELLs in the classroom requires differentiation in instruction, and they need support in academic vocabulary and how to read and produce complex sentences (Ascension-Moreno et al. 2013).

An analysis of the language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC) minutes revealed 75% of LTELLs were orally fluent and had met some sections of the exit criteria, but poor writing skills limited their chance to exit the ESL program. Educators working with ELLs need to understand that acquisition and development of academic language is a complex process that requires much support (Ziegenfuss, Odhiambo, & Keyes (2014).

ESL Exit Criteria

The findings the document analysis showed that some LTELLs passed their State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) reading, but did not meet the ESL exit criteria due to the state's rigid ESL exit criteria. The ESL exit criteria (TEA, 2016) states that students who are given any form of accommodation on STAAR reading and writing cannot exit the ESL program even if they passed the test. Yang, Urrabazo, and Murray (2001) found the Texas ESL exit criteria to be unrealistic and made it difficult for some ELLs to exit the ESL program. Hakuta, Butter, Witt (2000) observed that 36% of native speakers would never be able to meet the exit criteria, and Thompson (2015) found that most students who were labeled as

LTELLs had met at least some of the measures necessary for exiting the program. These findings highlight the discrepancy in the ESL exit criteria.

Also, the analysis of data revealed that the administration of TELPAS and OLPT did not provide students with opportunities to do well. Teachers did not give ELLs enough time to complete their writing samples that were used for TELPAS rating, and the OLPT was administered under unfavorable conditions for students to focus. These findings show that some fluent LTELLs were still classified as ELLs because of teachers' discrepancies on the OLPT and TELPAS writing section, and the rigid ESL exit criteria (Estrada & Wang, 2013). Hakuta et al. (2000) found that ELLs were classified as fluent in speaking based on the oral language proficiency assessment (OLPT), but they did not meet the ESL exit criteria until they scored fluently on the state's academic achievement test. Yang et al. (2001) observed that the lack of the cognitive ability and higher-order thinking skills hindered the academic progress of some of the LTELLs. Cummins (1989) and Maxwell (2012) emphasized the need for ELLs to be exposed to a well-structured rigorous curriculum that develops students' critical thinking, second language acquisition, and development of literacy and grade-appropriate vocabulary skills.

Theme 2: Misconception About LTELLs

Several misconceptions emerged from data analysis. The results of the study showed that the misconceptions were because of the lack of adequate knowledge about LTELLs and SLA process. These misconceptions had an adverse impact on the classroom instruction; consequently, most LTELLs did not develop literacy skills and acquire academic language they needed to perform well and to meet the ESL exit criteria. Although misconceptions about ELLs is a common phenomenon, the issue can be resolved by gaining knowledge in SLA and developing a better understanding of ELLs and their learning needs.

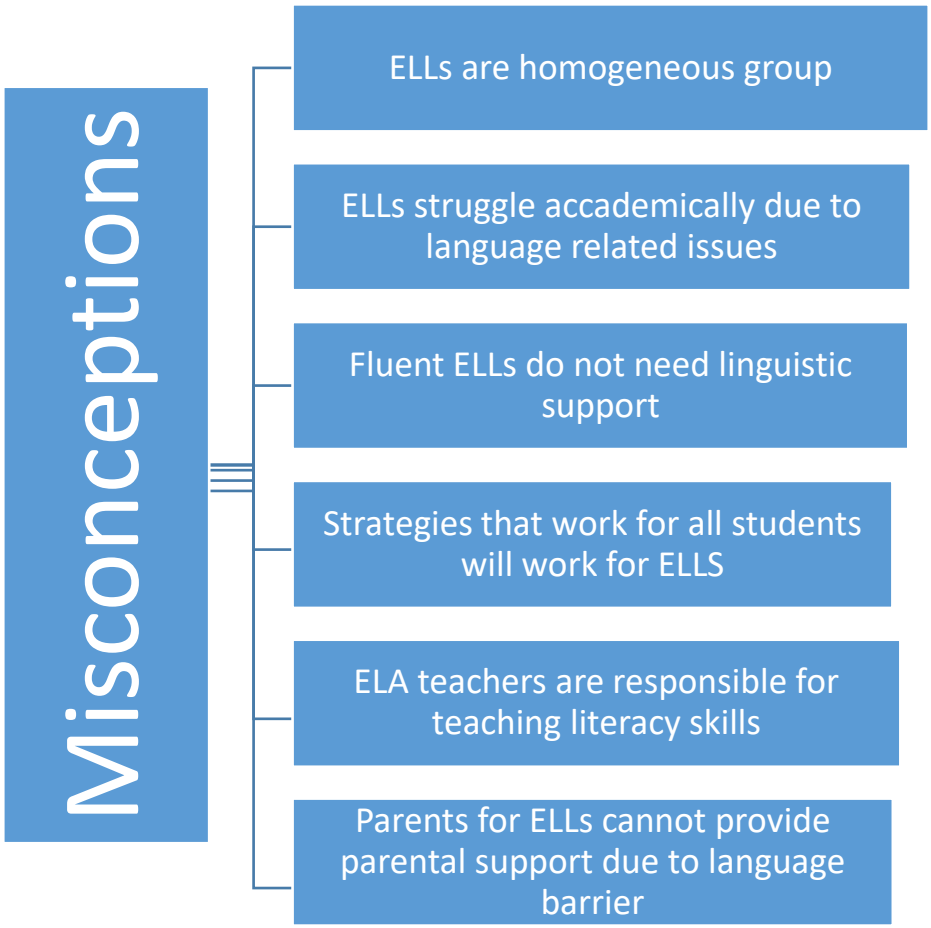

Figure 2. Teacher's misconceptions about LTELLs.

Fluent LTELLs do not need linguistic support. Educators should understand that most LTELLs at the middle school level were born in the USA, and they are fluent in their verbal skills, but they lack academic language needed for academic success (Olvera, 2015). The assumption that LTELLs who are fluent in English and academically strong do not need linguistic support can lead to the underdevelopment of literacy skills among ELLs (Olsen, 2010b). I found a similar case at Pearls Middle School. According to Cummins (1977), teachers often assume that LTELLs should excel academically due to their native-like basic oral communication skills.

Although most of the LTELLs possess BICS, they lack CALP; the ability to process the academic language associated

with academic achievement (Cummins, 2011). They need linguistic support.

ELLs are a homogeneous group. ELLs are the most diversified group among the student population, and they all have different learning needs (Menken & Kleyn, 2010; Olsen, 2010b). For example, ELLs born in the USA need academic language support while those new to the country need support in both basic communication skills and academic language. This assumption limits teachers' ability to meet ELLs' varied learning needs. Olvera (2015) noted that some educators considered ELLs as a monolithic group that their learning needs could be fulfilled with a one-size-fits-all approach. Knowledge of SLA will clear these misconceptions. The same discrepancy was evident in the way the district and state reported ELLs' performance. The Texas Assessment Performance Report (TAPR) (TEA, 2015) on ELLs' performance is the most inclusive data. It treats ELLs as a homogeneous group and does not differentiate data for LTELLs and those new to the country. According to Maxwell (2012), there were no statewide policies on reporting requirements that would separate LTELLs from the general ELL category.

Disaggregating students' performance data is necessary to help educators determine if they are meeting students' needs (Hosp, Hosp, & Dole, 2011). ELLs are not a homogenous group of students because ELLs have varied learning needs and language proficiency.

Parents of ELLs cannot provide parental support due to the language barrier. Parental involvement for parents of ELLs was limited or denied due to the misconception that parents for ELLs have limited English proficiency and would feel uncomfortable or intimidated because the parent conferences are held in English. This misconception denied parents the opportunity to provide parental support and participate in decision-making for their children. It is important for educators to note that not all parents to ELLs are limited in English (Greenfield et al., 2010). Despite parents' level of education or proficiency in English, parents of ELLs have high expectations for their children and can still provide parental support irrespective of the language barrier (Pereira & Gentry, 2013).

Teachers need to be culturally sensitive and build relationships with both parents and students. A healthy relationship with parents translates to students' strong academic achievement (Olvera, 2015).

ELA teachers are responsible for teaching literacy skills. This fallacy impacted the development of literacy skills among students negatively because writing is not taught across the curriculum. Most students did not meet the ELS exit criteria due to poor performance on the writing section of TELPAS. Language and literacy should be integrated across the content by all teachers (Ascension-Moreno et al., 2013; Himmele & Himmele, 2009). All teachers have a responsibility of

educating and teaching ELLs language (English, 2009). Core content area teachers can support LTELL to develop language and literacy skills if they view themselves as language and literacy teachers teaching language through content. ELLs flourish when teachers realize that they need to improve their instructional practices and develop a sense of shared responsibility (Harvey & Teemant, 2012).

ELLs struggled academically due to language-related issues. Some teachers were hesitant to refer LTELLs for response to intervention (RtI) process (Greenfield et al., 2010) due to the fallacy that ELLs struggled in class due to language-related issues. This misconception led to misplacement of ELLs and failure to provide right interventions to meet students' learning needs. According to Cummins (2011), teachers without the knowledge of SLA associated ELLs' academic struggles with limited English proficiency only. Teachers should be able to decipher when a student is struggling due to other reasons and provide appropriate intervention and not to assume that all ELLs struggle in class because of limited English proficiency. Thompson (2015) found that 35 % of students who were classified as LTELLs also qualified for special education.

> *Teachers should consider other possible reasons why LTELLs are struggling in class and provide appropriate support or intervention. It might be true that ELLs struggle in class due to limited language proficiency, but it does not apply to all ELLs.*

ELLs are like any other students. Most teachers did not differentiate instruction for ELLs. They believed that the teaching strategies they used and worked for other students, they were effective and worked for LTELLs. ELLs' major learning need is academic vocabulary (Himmele & Himmele, 2009) and the English sentence structure, but most teachers overlooked this need. According to Ardasheva and Trotter (2012), LTELLs have different learning needs, but teachers overlooked these needs due to a lack of knowledge about LTELLs and treated ELLs as a homogenous group. Although the LTELLs might be fluent and perform at the same level as their peers, they still lack the academic vocabulary, and that is why they are still classified as limited English proficiency (LEP) students.

Recommendations

1. The principal should consider an immediate school-based professional development to equip teachers with the basic knowledge about LTELLs and SLA. Teachers cannot provide effective classroom instruction for LTELLs when they lack knowledge about LTELLs and SLA.

2. Creating awareness among LTELLs is critical. A representative of the LPAC should hold regular meetings with LTELLs to discuss the exit criteria and what they should do to exit the ESL program, and explain the

implication of their LTELL status on their academic progress (Ascension-Moreno et al., 2013; Maxwell, 2012).

3. Restructure the current literacy program and start a schoolwide literacy initiative that would increase student achievement. Writing should be taught across the curriculum, and teachers should address the four components of language and literacy acquisition; listening, speaking, writing, and reading as they teach both content and academic vocabulary. LTELLs should be enrolled in a literacy course that is connected to all core subjects (Menken and Kleyn, 2010). The Literacy class should focus on teaching academic vocabulary, critical thinking, and literacy skills and equip students with strategies they can use in other classes (Maxwell, 2012).

4. Create a school-based task force to assess and evaluate the needs of LTELLs, ensure that teachers provide quality classroom instruction and linguistic support to LTELLs, use strategies that enhance the development of academic vocabulary and literacy skills (Harvey & Teemant, 2012) and increase student achievement, and monitor students' progress.

5. Conduct a needs assessment among teachers and involve the district ESL and teacher development departments to develop campus-based, ongoing job-embedded professional development with a focus on strategies that work for LTELLs. Teachers should seek to increase and deepen their knowledge about LTELLs, their learning needs, facts about ELLs and SLA process through book studies, PLCs, PDs, and research. School administrators can initiate ELL-focused book studies and encourage core content area teachers to attend ELL-focused PDs (Irvin, Meltzer, Dean, & Mickler, 2010). The best way to address LTELLs' learning needs involves regular conversation within the building by bringing together core content area teachers to explore and share best practices (Walker & Edstam, 2013).

6. Train teachers on how to administer oral language proficiency test (OLPT). OLPT should be conducted in an environment that allows students to focus, students should be given enough time to respond to TELPAS writing prompts, and school administrators should oversee OLPT testing and TELPAS writing.

7. The district ESL department should provide in-class support for teachers who are not well equipped to teach LTELLs.

8. ELLs should be scheduled in small-size classes, and if possible, they should not be placed in the same class with special education students with behavior issues.

9. LTELLs that score advanced on listing and speaking skills, but continue to score beginning or intermediate level on TELPAS reading and writing for two consecutive years should be referred to RtI committee.

10. Develop a school culture that is inclusive of all parents and involves parents of ELLs in decision- making process (Irvin et al., 2010).

Implementation

Although the implementation of the above recommendations depends on the school principal, I will be available to provide support and take a leadership role. If the principal decides to have PDs based on the findings, I will gladly facilitate it. The implementation process will involve the collaboration of the principal, reading specialist, dean of instruction, department heads, teachers, and the district ESL coordinator. Restructuring of the current literacy program will not interfere with student scheduling, but it will require training of the current teachers.

Conclusion

This white paper endeavors to create awareness among the educators. The target audience, the teachers, and administrators at Pearls Middle School, will have a better understanding of LTELLs and their learning needs identify misconceptions teachers have about LTELLs, and how misconceptions impact students' achievement. Teachers should realize their responsibility in educating LTELLs, and engage in meaningful collaborations to find a way to meet the LTELLs' learning needs.

Note 1

ESL programs should be organized and managed per the state, and federal guidelines and the focus should be to increase student achievement. The ESL program is funded by the state and federal under Title III. Therefore, policies governing the establishment of ESL program, student classification, identification and placement, academic achievement, retention and promotion, state assessments, and the students' graduation plan should be observed. Teachers should be aware of Article 19 TAC Chapter 89, Subchapter BB - Texas Education Agency.

Note 2

Teachers working with ELLs should understand and embrace the district vision, mission and goals for ELLs enrolled in the school district.

Mission: To provide a quality education with the highest expectations for culturally and linguistically diverse students, so that they are academically successful and prepared to be productive members of a multicultural and multilingual society.

Goals: ELLS will progress a minimum of one level of proficiency in English each school year, achieve a rating of Advanced High in proficiency in English within

four years, and meet the ESL program exit criteria and become fully integrated into the general education program.

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Appendix B: Request for Permission of Study

Principal,

Pearls Middle School

I would like to inform you that Malaika School District Research Department has permitted me to conduct research, and your school is one of the schools I indicated in my proposal as a research site. The study focuses on long-term English language learners (LTELLs). The purpose of the study is to explore teachers' perspectives of LTELLs, how they explain the limited literacy skills among the LTELLs, and how LTELLs impact their classroom instruction. The participants will include four core content teachers who are working with LTELLs and two ESL co-teachers.

To collect data, I will interview six teachers and analyze district open records that will be provided by the school district, and use information from the district website to triangulate data. The participants will be informed that their participation will be purely voluntary, and it will not interfere with instruction time. I will carry out interviews before or after school. Please contact me if you have any question.

Thank you in advance,

Rachel Butiko

Appendix C: Email to Lead Counselor

Lead School Counselor

Pearls Middle School

I am writing to inform you that I will be conducting a research study next month as a requirement for my doctoral degree. I have been granted permission by both the district and the building principal to conduct research at Pearls Middle School. The focus is on ELLs who have been enrolled in school in the USA for more than six years and have not met the exit criteria. As you oversee the master schedule and assigning students, I would like you to provide a list of core content area teachers who have been teaching for more than two years, and they have ELLs in their classes. Please include the ESL co-teachers on the list.

I hope you are willing to help me. If you have any questions, please let me let me know.

Sincerely,

Rachel Butiko

Appendix D: Participants Recruitment Email

I am Rachel Butiko, and I am writing to inform you of a research study I intend to carry out next month as part of my doctoral requirement at Walden University. I am working on a research project that is focused on long-term English language learners (LTELLs). These are English language learners (ELLs) who have been enrolled in school in the USA for more than six years and have not met the exit criteria. The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perspectives of LTELLs, how they explain the limited literacy skills among the LTELLs, and how LTELLs impact their classroom instruction. My study has been approved by Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University, Malaika School District Research Department, and the building principal. The IRB project number for this study is 05-17-16-0396836. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott, the University's representative, and her phone number is 612-312-1210.

In recent years, our school district has experienced an increase in the number of LTELLs. Research shows that most of the LTELLs remain emergent bilinguals and their deficiency in literacy impacts their academic achievement. I would like to conduct a study to examine teachers' perspectives on LTELLs and how LTELLs impact their classroom instruction. I believe that the information I will gather from the study will provide some insight into the underlying factors that contribute to the limited literacy skills among LTELLs. I will conduct the interviews before or after school, and it is purely voluntary.

I hope you will be willing to assist me by agreeing to participate in a onetime 30 minutes one-on-one interview session. I will send you open-ended questions for interviews in advance.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact me. I can be reached at (provide personal phone number and email address)

Thank you for your willingness to participate. Please respond by sending me a yes or no to my email using your email account. To protect your identity and ensure the confidentiality of the study, all future communications will not be linked to our school email accounts.

Sincerely,

Rachel Butiko

Appendix E**:** Interview Protocol Questions

Project: Research – LTELLs

Time of the Interview_____ Date _____

Interviewer _____ Interviewee _____

I am glad you accepted to participate in this study. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes, but you are welcome to stay after the discussion and ask any questions you might have. Although I will record the interview, your responses will remain confidential. We will discuss ELLs, who have been in school in the USA for more than six years, yet they are still functioning at an intermediate level in their reading and writing skills. These students could be struggling for various reasons. The main objective of this study is to explore teachers' perspectives of LTELLs, how they explain the limited literacy skills among the LTELLs, and how the LTELLs impact their classroom instruction.

Research Question 1: How do middle school teachers perceive the limited literacy skills among LTELLs?		
Interview Questions	***Interview Response***	***Comments***
How would you describe the LTELLs in your class? Do you have any examples or data that support your response?		
How do you describe the literacy skills among the LTELLs in your class?		

What do you consider as the learning needs associated with LTELLs?		
How do you attempt to meet their needs?		

Research Question 2: How do middle school teachers perceive the impact of LTELLs on their classroom instruction?		
Interview Question	***Interviewee Response***	***Comments***
Describe your preparation to teach LTELLs.		
Describe the professional activities and additional support that assist your classroom instruction for LTELLs?		
How does your knowledge about LTELLs drive your classroom instruction?		
How do you make content comprehensible and accessible to LTELLs in your classroom?		
Do you face any challenge in your classroom because of having LTELLs in your class?		
Is there any additional information about LTELLs regarding their literacy skills that you would like to add?		

Appendix F: Data From Documents

Source: Documents	**Gathered Information**	**How the information relates to data from the interviews**
ESL Department Professional Development		
ESL Program		
District, State and federal documents governing ESL program		
Literacy Programs		
End of Year LPAC Reports		
Campus ESL Program Reports		
ESL curriculum and instruction guidelines		
District Research Archive on ESL		
Reports on District/school report cards and test analysis for ELLs		