

General Education Teachers' Perceptions
on
Their Ability to Implement ESOL Curriculum

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Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine the perceptions of general education teachers of their ability to implement the ESOL curriculum effectively in their classrooms. The research and its findings examine the teachers' impressions of including English Language Learners in their classrooms as well as their feelings of preparedness to meet their ELLs' needs. The review of literature examines the characteristics of English Language Learners as well as the stressors impacting their educational success. It also evaluates challenges that educators face in working with this population of students and the interventions currently in place to support these students. Based on the literature, research was conducted through the use of an anonymous and voluntary survey implemented to general content teachers at a middle school in Baltimore County. Results of the survey depict that teachers have an overall positive attitude in welcoming ELLs in their general education classrooms; however, they feel unprepared to work with these students. Teachers reported that they agreed with modifying lessons, but did not feel sufficiently trained to implement these changes. Teachers believed they were unable to locate resources for their ELLs, but were interested in receiving additional training.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The United States population is comprised of communities with a plethora of races, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Each of these communities contains students that attend public school systems where they deserve equitable educations. Among these students are English Language Learners who often face many hardships while persisting through a predominately English-speaking educational system. According to the Department of Education, in 2015 over 4,800,000 ELLs were enrolled in schools speaking over four hundred different language (para 14). ELLs comprise ten percent of the total K-12 student population. This representation is also reflected in Maryland School Report Card as 90,126 students are ELLs out of 900,766 total students (2019). Usually unknown to the general public, the Census Bureau's 2016 American Community survey revealed that most U.S. public schools students with limited English proficiency are U.S. citizens and only "23% of limited English proficiency students ages 5 to 17 are not U.S. citizens" (Bialik, Scheller, & Walker, 2018 para 8). As students categorized under all races fit into this category of English Language Learners, it is crucial that curriculum and education standards reflect their diverse needs.

Students face not only cultural challenges when adapting to an English-speaking society, but also struggle with learning content that is primarily presented in their non-native language. When students are unaware of how to interact with their teachers and peers in a culturally appropriate manner they are at a disadvantage for academic success. ELLs are often reported as having anxiety, depression and feelings of helplessness due to culture shock experienced from shifting to North American culture (Huang, Dotterweich, & Bowers, 2012). When students are

overwhelmed by their need to adjust to fit societal norms, they may not be comfortable or able to express their ideas accurately within an academic setting. Students labelled as ELLs need supports from their educators that give them an equitable opportunity for success within the educational system.

Although ELLs are a prevalent group in society, they are often not given the same rigorous education opportunities due to their educator's lack of training to meet their specific needs. Frequently, general educators assume that ELLs do not have the capacity to achieve the same level of thinking as their non-ELL peers while they are acquiring English proficiency, thus leaving the ELLs with a gap of knowledge. Educators often feel inadequate when working with ELLs as current research depicts that educators struggle to implement appropriate, effective instruction for mainstreamed ELLs (Reeves, 2006). Additionally, general content teachers face a deficit of knowing how to find resources and how to plan effective instruction for limited English proficient students (Faez & Valeo, 2012). This leaves students at a detriment.

All educators need to be trained to work with this population. Although there are specialized ESOL teachers who work with these learners in push-in and pull-out sessions, this small amount of interaction within the school day does not sufficiently support ELLs' needs. Teachers of ESOL comprise less than 1 percent of public school teachers or one ESL instructor for every 150 students (What is an ESL Teacher?, n.d., para 2), demonstrating that general education teachers also need to take responsibility for the academic success of ELLs. Providing students with an excellent education will require trained general education teachers to work with ELLs by supporting them beyond the instruction of provided ESOL specialists. General content teachers must be willing to embark on further training so that they can meet the needs of their diverse students and provide them with an equitable education.

This study was created when the researcher noticed that according to the Maryland State Report Card (2019) only 40% of English Language Learners were making progress towards English language proficiency at the researcher's school. The school does not provide current professional development opportunities for teachers to learn strategies to support ELLs; however, has an overall seasoned staff. Educators at this public school interact with ELLs so it pertinent that they understand how to support their students' need in order to provide ELLs with an opportunity for academic success.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine teacher's perspectives on their ability to implement the ESOL curriculum effectively in the general education classroom.

Hypothesis

The study is a descriptive study that utilizes one survey to gauge general content teachers' perceptions of English Language Learners and their perceptions of preparedness to teach this group of students. In this study, there is no hypothesis. The following research question was examined: What are teacher's perceptions on their ability to implement the ESOL curriculum effectively in the general education classroom?

Operational Definitions

In order to conduct this study, research was reviewed from a limited amount of literature during the time period of 2006 to 2020. Additional research related to this study has the potential for further review and examination during this time period for future studies. Research beyond the limits of this time frame has not been reviewed in order to organize this study.

An ELL (English Language Learner) is defined as a student who lacks the ability to communicate fluently or learn effectively using the English language. These students must be

actively working to learn English as English is not their home or native language. These students often need special or modified instruction in learning to use English through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The abbreviation, ESOL refers to English for Speakers of Other Languages. This is a program that helps teach English to people who have an alternate first language or languages. These students may be proficient in more than one language, but are not proficient in English. This program is designed for those who live in an English-speaking country and need to use the language to communicate in everyday life.

The abbreviation, ESL is used for English as a Second Language and is relative term to ESOL. ESL programs are for students learning English as their second language in a country where English is the official language. This helps students communicate effectively in their communities.

English proficiency is defined as having the ability to use English to make meaning and communicate effectively. In order to be proficient, students must be able to communicate effectively through their speaking and writing abilities. They must also be able to interpret English effectively through listening and reading in the language.

Push-in or pull-out services are defined as strategies of ESL or ESOL instruction. ESL or ESOL teachers may provide push-in services in which they bring necessary materials to the students during their general content classes such as Language Arts, Math, or Science. These materials give the students support to be successful academically. This allows for collaboration between the general content teacher and the ESOL specialist and is a more inclusive strategy. When a student is provided with pull-out services, the student is removed from the general content classroom to another setting where supports can be provided. This is often utilized for

additional instruction specialized to each individual's needs. Pull-out sessions can occur in small groups or with one-on-one instruction. During pull-out interventions, the material does not necessarily need to be integrated with the general education curriculum.

General content teachers or general education teachers are defined as educators in the typical classroom setting, in which educators address the needs of the class as a whole. These educators are trained primarily in the content in which they teach such as Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, Art or Science. These educators may not necessarily be trained on how to adapt their curriculum to meet the needs of all of their diverse students such as students with special needs or ELLs.

Teacher perceptions is defined as data collected from surveys given at a middle school in Baltimore County. The following teachers participated in the survey in a voluntary manner with anonymity.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review will examine the educational needs and characteristics of English Language Learners while demonstrating the impact of interventions in place within the current educational system in the United States. It will seek to explore factors that impact teachers' challenges and perceptions of efficacy in implementing appropriate curriculum for their English Language Learners. Although many general education teachers interact with non-native English speakers, the current educational interventions lack support for teacher development with regard to aiding students in this category, leaving educators' perceptions of their practices as ineffective.

Section one of this literature review provides an overview of and insight into the characteristics and placement of students defined as English Language Learners. Section two discusses the stressors that these students face as well as the challenges faced by educators in meeting these students' distinct needs. Section three outlines the current legal interventions in place for students and the current practices available for educators to utilize in working with these diverse learners. Section four provides a summary of the information included throughout this review.

Definitions and Characteristics of English Language Learners in the United States

Defining characteristics differentiate English Language Learners from their native English-speaking classroom peers. English Language Learners (ELLs) are defined as "students with limited English proficiency" (Bialik et al., 2018, para 2) and are identified as a "diverse group from many different states and native language backgrounds" (Bialik et al., 2018, para 2). Students and adults who are actively working to develop their English language skills are

deemed to fit into this category. Students meeting these criteria are referred to as ELLs in both English as a second language (ESL) specialized classes and regular content area classes that they are integrated into (What is an ESL Teacher?, 2020). This demonstrates that an ELL can be referred to as a common student descriptor in different classroom contexts as the students do not only remain in ESL specific classrooms. More formally, in the official federal definition:

The term ‘limited English proficient’ when used with respect to an individual means an individual who is aged 3 through 21, who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school, who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English, who is a Native American or Alaskan Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and who comes who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual’s level of English language proficiency; or who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual—the ability to meet the State's proficient level of achievement on State assessments described in section 1111(b)(3); the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or the opportunity to participate fully in society. (U.S. DOE, Title IX General Provision 9101 (25) as cited in Zacarian, 2012, p.6)

This demonstrates that ELLs come from many diverse backgrounds and all walks of life, yet may be hindered in the educational system or in society due to their lack of proficiency in one or more areas of English through reading, writing, listening or speaking. ELLs’ lack of proficiency in English does not necessarily reflect their proficiency levels in their native or heritage language.

Among these diverse backgrounds, ELLs share commonalities that reflect different communities across the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Education, “roughly three-quarters of students with limited English proficiency in U.S. public schools said they spoke Spanish as their primary language at home in 2015” demonstrating that Spanish is the most dominate native language among ELLs (Bialik et al., 2018, para 4). In addition, the U.S. Department of Education has recorded in 2015 that there were over four hundred different languages spoken by ELLs in public schools with Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese following as the most popular, yet significantly less common than Spanish as each representing around two percent of ELLs in public schools (para 14). These findings show that native languages vary between individuals just as their ethnicities vary as well. For example, in 2016 it was documented that in public schools, there were about 3.82 million Hispanic ELL students (77.2% of all ELL students), 521,300 Asian ELL students (10.5% of all ELL students), 314,000 White ELL students (6.3% of all ELL students), 193,500 Black ELL students (3.9 % of all ELL students) and fewer than 40,000 Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Natives and individuals of two or more races (NCES, 2019, para 8). This data shows the vast diversity and cultures among non-native English speakers represented through the United States’ school systems across the country. There is no singular profile to represent the cultural background of students labeled as ELLs.

Furthermore, data has shown that English Language Learners are clustered in common areas even though they make up a significant portion of the K-12 student population in the United States. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) located states with the largest populations of 10% or more ELL students as Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas and Washington determining that the majority of ELLs

were in the west of the nation (2019, para 3). Additionally, it was determined that there were higher percentages of ELLs in school districts in more urbanized areas than less urbanized areas. In 2016, the NCES determined that there was a total average ELL public school enrollment of “14% in cities, 9.3% in suburban areas, 6.5% in towns and 3.8% in rural areas” (NCES, 2019, para 5). This shows that ELLs are not evenly dispersed throughout the country as these students and families tend to be grouped together in urbanized areas. This information is also reflected in school enrollment in comparison to the number of districts located in the nation. For example, during the 2014-2015 school year, only 15% of public schools enrolled a large portion of ELLs; however, 61% of all ELLs in the nation were enrolled in this 15% of schools (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para 10). The same schools only enrolled 16% of the total student population, “indicating that there was a high concentration of ELLs clustered in only these schools” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para 10). This data depicts the idea that some schools across the nation seldom have enrolled or may have never enrolled ELL students in their district while contributing to the lack of nationwide district development plans for supporting teachers working with ELLs. Despite this information, it has been recorded that “by 2025, nearly one out of every four public school students will be an ELL (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition as cited in Baecher, Artigliere, Patterson, & Spatzer, 2012). This data presents the idea that ELL population is rapidly growing and will continue to impact the public school systems as more students will need support.

In addition to mentioning where non-native English speakers are located, it is crucial to note that most ELLs in the public school systems are not foreign born. According to the Census Bureau’s 2016 American Community survey, most U.S. public schools students with limited English proficiency are U.S. citizens and only “23% of limited English proficiency students ages

5 to 17 are not U.S. citizens” (Bialik et al., 2018 para 8). This magnifies the idea that the majority of the country’s ELLs are coming from within the United States and that the majority of non-native English speakers are not immigrants from other countries. Limited English proficiency students are often identified as ELLs when they enter elementary school, but frequently reach appropriate English language proficiency before entering upper grades. This explains the decreasing percentage of ELLs as they increase grade level and are able to exit ESL specific programs (NCES, 2019). Students are not necessarily labeled as ELLs for life.

Students with non-English native languages were also proven to be labeled in populations with more hardships. For example, “Homeless, Title I, and migrant students were more likely to be ELLs than the overall student population” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para 6). This demonstrates that ELLs are more likely to be at a disadvantage than their non-ELL peers. Furthermore, it was noted that “14.2 percent of the total ELL population enrolled in U.S. public elementary and secondary schools were identified as having disabilities” (NCES, 2019, para 8). These findings were reflected in the findings of the U.S. Department of Education that discovered that “14% of all ELLs were students with disabilities, compared to 13% of the overall student population” (n.d., para 7). Amidst ELLs with disabilities, almost 50 % had certain learning disabilities compared to 38% of students with disabilities who are not ELLs (n.d., para 8). This large gap also related to ELLs identified as having speech or language impairment in comparison with non-ELLs. This depicts that the students labeled as ELLs may be facing multiple challenges outside of learning English. Cultural struggles and learning challenges add to the pressure of needing to acquire a new language for success in society.

Problems and Stressors Faced by ELLs and Educators

Being labeled as an English language learner in a public school setting, students face cultural challenges beyond working to acquire a new language. ELLs struggle with finding their place in a school culture that may be drastically different than their heritage culture. For example, “insufficient English language proficiency, coupled with their unfamiliarity with the North American culture has prevented them from communicating effectively with North Americans in their cross-cultural learning” (Huang et al, 2012, p. 36). This demonstrates the idea that students may not know how to interact with their teachers and peers in a culturally appropriate manor due to their lack of knowledge of the new culture, putting them at a disadvantage for academic success. Often, ELLs have insufficient understanding of differing speech patterns and routines of English, so they default to the sociolinguistic rules of their native language, causing intercultural miscommunication (Huang et al., 2012). If students are unable to communicate their ideas, they are unable to progress academically and socially. This idea is clearly reflected through extensive evidence from “achievement test scores, grade promotion rates, graduation rates, and other common indicators of school success that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience poorer educational outcomes than their peers” (Krasnoff, 2016, p.1). This statement indicates that, overall, ELLs are often disadvantaged within the educational system. It is imperative for these students to learn to navigate a new culture while finding ways to express their ideas through their non-native language so that they may find success academically and societally.

Due to their lack of knowledge when shifting between cultural idiosyncrasies, students with limited English proficiency can develop emotional and internal stress. ELLs are often reported as having anxiety, depression and feelings of helplessness due to cultural shock experienced from shifting to North American culture (Huang et al, 2012). ELLs may become

overwhelmed by the amount of change needed to endure to be successful in society. Studies indicate that “speakers of accented or foreign-sounding English are rejected as legitimate conversation partners and also blamed for any miscommunication” (Huang et al, 2012, p.38). This shows that students often feel that their ideas are not valid to others as their peers or educators may disregard their opinions due to the incapability of expressing themselves clearly in English. In turn, educators try to instill ELLs North American cultural norms in ELLs’ content in hopes of helping students assimilate. As teachers try to educate students on the new culture, their methods can be psychologically damaging to ESOL students who have specific values, traditions and beliefs that comprise their identities (Huang et al, 2012, p.38). Without teachers and superiors acknowledging and valuing ELLs heritage cultures, students may struggle with issues of acculturation. ELLs may feel the need to reject their home cultures and languages as they desire to ‘fit in’ with the United States’ culture (Baecher et al., 2012). These teachings create an internal conflict within the students as they are trying to be accepted by their peers and educators. For example, students may “become very embarrassed and do not want to speak in fear that they will make mistakes and be made fun of by their North American peers, which can be detrimental to their academic success” (Dooley, 2009, p. 499). When students do not feel comfortable in the classroom environment, they cannot express their ideas openly which impacts their ability to demonstrate academic improvement. Their internal struggles may inhibit them from being open to acquiring English and content in English as their affective filter takes over.

Additionally, research has been conducted on teacher perceptions of student race which demonstrates that racial bias could negatively impact ELLs’ educational journey. For example, in a study completed by McGrady and Reynolds, it was determined that White teachers’ perceptions of Hispanic students do not typically differ than those of White students; however,

Hispanic teachers are more likely than white teachers to have positive perceptions about Hispanic students (2012). This shows that based on the ethnicity of the educator, ELLs of differing ethnicities may face bias from their educators. Research completed by Sirota and Bailey indicated that both White and Black teachers perceive white students more positively than they do minority students, including ELLs (2009), showing that teachers expected their white students to perform better on assignments and assessments than their minority students. Furthermore, in a research study by Cooc, teachers were more likely to perceive minorities (with the exception of Asians) such as Black, Hispanic and Native American students as having a disability in comparison to White students, demonstrating that some students may be judged incorrectly based on biased perceptions of their educators (2017). This systematic bias could be a contributing factor to the achievement gap between ELLs and their peers as ELLs are often given lower expectations for success.

Curriculum inequities and lack of rigor also contribute to challenges that non-native English speaker students face. When students do not see themselves reflected in their learning, students struggle to accept that they are able to learn the given content. Research has repeatedly shown that curriculum and instructional practices have primarily concentrated on white middle-class students, while virtually disregarding the cultural and linguistic characteristics of diverse learners (Krasnoff, 2016). Students may not see their lives or experiences reflected in typical classroom texts or assignments which in turn makes ELLs feel shy or embarrassed about speaking, writing or reading in English (Meltzer & Hamann, 2006). This shows that there is a national public school systematic issue as there are biased assessment practices and institutional racism (Krasnoff, 2016) which affect ELLs' potential academic and societal success. The lack of diversity in curriculum has also often led to the absence of rigor created for students with limited

English proficiency. ELLs have the challenge of reaching the same academic success as their non-ELL peers because they do not have access to the same rigorous materials and are not expected to achieve the same standards that are placed on their peers. Frequently, educators assume that ELLs do not have the capacity to achieve the same level of thinking as their non-ELL peers while they are acquiring English proficiency. This leaves ELLs with a content gap. This is prevalent as mentioned that “A documented history of exclusionary schooling in which ELLs were placed in peripheral programs and had limited access to rigorous content added leverage to the push for inclusive education” (Nieto, Olsen & Valdes as cited in Reeves, 2006, p.132). For ELLs to achieve the same level of success as their peers, they need to be given equitable supports making their content achievable, yet rigorous. This same idea is reflected in Baker’s study which explored teachers’ and students’ beliefs about grammar and pronunciation correction and found that ELL students wanted teachers to correct them more frequently than the teachers actually did (2014). This shows that ELLs crave improvement yet are not given adequate attention and support to be able to conquer biased systematic issues in order to achieve academic success.

In addition to English Language Learners struggling within the school systems, teachers are challenged with finding ways to support their students while feeling that they are inadequate to help this population. Teachers of ESL or teachers of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) comprise less than 1 percent of public school teachers or one ESL instructor for every 150 students (What is an ESL Teacher?, n.d., para 2) showcasing the need for more specialized teachers to work with ELLs in school systems. Although ESL teachers must achieve state-specific credentials in ESL if they work in a public school setting (What is an ESL Teacher?, n.d., para 10), ESL teachers are not the only teachers working with ELLs. ELLs are often placed

in inclusion classrooms with general content area teachers. These general content area teachers are not trained extensively like ESOL teachers, so they often feel unqualified to work with these students. Although many schools have an ESOL teacher on staff who may deliver ‘push-in’ or ‘pull-out’ services, these services are usually disconnected and sporadic and may rely on institutional supports through common planning time and co-teaching models (Baecher et al., 2012), leaving general content teachers to work with ELLs for the majority of their schooling career. This feeling of unpreparedness of working with ELLs causes educators to develop feelings of stress, pressure, isolation, frustration, disequilibrium as ideals, and praxis conflict (Brannan & Bleistein, 2012). When teachers feel ineffective, they are more likely to be defeated in their efforts for developing their practices as “Teachers’ sense of efficacy has also been associated with the quality of classroom practices such as planning and organization as well as their efforts, aspirations and investments in teaching” (Faez & Valeo, 2012, p.453). Teachers may feel that they cannot succeed with their ELLs due to a lack of knowledge of practices to work with these students, and therefore may not invest their time in those students. Additional stress-inducing factors include the idea that teachers’ effectiveness is often measured based on national, state and school district test scores which leaves teachers unsure how to aid ELLs to be able to pass these exams (Nishino, 2012). Teachers view this inadequacy as a direct reflection of their teaching skills. Furthermore, general content teachers are concerned about the possibility that ELLS will slow the class progression through the curriculum or result in inequities in educational opportunities for all students (Reeves, 2006). Finding a balance to meet all of their diverse students’ needs in a general content classroom can be extremely demanding for educators, leaving them feeling ineffective for their students.

General content teachers are left feeling helpless when it comes to aiding their ELLs because they are not provided with professional development opportunities. Elementary and secondary educators face a conundrum: a plethora of ELL students are enrolled in public schools and teachers are responsible for their students' learning and academic literacy development regardless of their preparedness or qualification of working with ELLs (Meltzer & Hamann, 2006). In numerous studies, teachers have reported that they have wanted professional development and needed more practicum to combat their inadequacies (Faez & Valeo, 2012, p. 460). This lack of appropriate trainings and professional development opportunities creates a negative impact on ELLs education (Krasnoff, 2016, p.1). If educators have not had the proper training, they may not know effective strategies or practices to support their ELLs, creating a negative cause and effect on the students' education and potential to grow academically. The National Center for Education Statistics records that "teachers in those mainstream classrooms are largely untrained to work with ELLs; only 12.5% of U.S. teachers have received 8 or more hours of recent training to teach students of limited English proficiency." (Reeves, 2006, p.131). This small portion of time and minuscule portion of trained teachers negatively impacts the education of ELLs and creates helpless teachers in working with those students as they have no opportunities for growth in this area of the profession. Due to this lack of professional development, "Teachers are often misled by students' oral proficiency assuming a corresponding level of reading and writing proficiency" (Baecher et al., 2012, p.15) where that is not always the case. Students may have different capabilities in different areas of the language. If the teacher is unaware of the ELLs' gaps in learning, the teacher will not know how to work to help the student close those gaps. Teachers are not often provided with feedback on their teaching practices of working with ELLs so that they often feel isolated in working with these students (Brannan &

Bleistein, 2012, p.521). Educators frequently feel unsupported by their districts when working with ELLs. With “approximately 40%-50% of novice teachers in North America reported to leave the profession, for teachers of ESOL students, this time has been characterized as a period of anxiety and a time of critical development” (Faez & Valeo, 2012, p.451). It is imperative that educators are provided with support and development opportunities so that they feel comfortable remaining in the profession.

Furthermore, general content teachers are unable to find adequate resources to help their students build English proficiency as they are encumbered by time and workload limitations. Many teachers genuinely want to help their ELLs succeed, but are not aware of appropriate resources for ELLs. Current research depicts that educators struggle to implement appropriate, effective instruction for mainstreamed ELLs (Reeves, 2006, p. 132). This feeling is echoed in Faez and Valeo’s research, which states that general content teachers face a deficit of knowing how to find resources and how to plan effective instruction for limited English proficient students (2012, p. 460). Due to this challenge, teachers may avoid teaching certain skills to ELLs. For example, Baker’s research found that teachers who had reported a reluctance to teach pronunciation and who were at a deficit of institutional resources with insufficient knowledge of how to assess student pronunciation avoided teaching pronunciation (2014, p. 138). This is detrimental to ELLs because they are missing key fundamental skills needed for success in education due to the fact that teachers are at a loss of how to teach these specific skillsets. Additional to the lack of resources, teachers may not have the physical time to extensively research to find their own resources while meeting all of their professional obligations. Finding resources can take teachers numerous hours of work beyond the normal school day. While teachers are often told by their superiors to differentiate instruction for their ELLs, they are often

not given guidelines on how to effectively achieve this in the classroom (Baecher et al., 2012). For some teachers, they believe they have to create multiple separate lesson plans for the same lesson, whereas others believe that they can modify activities which causes both frustration for the educators in needed planning time and with inconsistency across curriculums. Across the country, teachers are concerned about a chronic lack of time to address ELLs' unique classroom need as they have perceived intensification of teacher workloads when ELLS are enrolled in mainstream classes (Reeves, 2006, p. 132). Educators often feel overworked as they are trying to support all of their students with diverse needs. Time management can frequently become a challenge when teachers are not provided with resources for their students (Brannan & Bleistein, 2012, p.520). It is the role of the public school system to make these teachers aware of development opportunities and pathways to find these resources so that all students can be equitably supported without demanding intense workloads for general content teachers.

Interventions in Place for ELLs

In support of educational advancement for students with limited English proficiency, legal acts have been implemented across the United States. Originally, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was enacted in 1965 and then later updated to the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 to bring light to creating equitable education opportunities for ELLs (Zacarian, 2012). This demonstrated the need for a shift in the educational systems' curriculum and resources for students. The ESEA addresses the education of ELs through issues of accountability and high-stakes testing while providing a definition of the language instruction that English learners must receive (Zacarian, 2012, p. 11). Through ESEA, the idea of language instruction educational program means:

An instruction course— (A) in which a limited English proficient child is placed for the purpose of developing and attaining English proficiency, while meeting challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards, as required by section 1111(b)(1); and (B) that may make instructional use of both English and a child’s native language to enable the child to develop and attain English proficiency, and may include the participation of English proficient children if such course is designed to enable all participating children to become proficient in English and a second language. (Title III, Subpart 5, Part C, Section 3301(8) as cited in Zacarian, 2012, p.11)

This statement demonstrates that each local school system must supply ELLs with instruction in English language development while concurrently ensuring that students are held to the same educational standards and outcomes as their non-ELL peers. School systems may also use the students’ home languages as a manner of supporting English and content learning. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education and Justice released guidance reminding states, school districts, and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that ELLs “have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential” (Jchaffer, 2019). This demonstrates the importance of schools across the nation providing appropriate access to rigorous curriculum for all students. Public schools must analyze the successes of their programs for ELLs and must adapt their programs if they are not beneficial to their students. Following the *Castañeda v. Pickard* federal ruling:

Schools must provide programming that is scientifically known to be sound, properly resourced, and proven to work. Schools must show that their programming works on an annual basis and, when it is not working, must show what they have done as a scientifically research-based remedy. In addition, they must show how parents are being

provided with information about their child's education in a language that parents understand. (Zacarian, 2012, p. 15)

In addition to supporting students, these legal acts ensure that parents of ELLs are aware of their school district's programs and their children's progression of English proficiency. Parents of ELLs must be provided with supports so that they clearly understand how the public education system is supporting their children. The laws enacted by the government ensure that ELLs receive full support for the duration of their schooling needs. Laws do not place time restrictions for ELLs to be proficient in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, to be successful in English language classroom settings, and to be able to participate actively in their school, community, and general society (Zacarian, 2012, p.6). These practices are in place to ensure that ELLs are met with support throughout their education.

From the development of these legal acts, programs were formed to measure students' English proficiency and ensure that ELLs were progressing through their education. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states "must complete yearly assessments of English language proficiency of ELLs, must provide reasonable accommodations for them on state assessments and must develop new accountability systems that include long-term goals and measures of progress for ELLs" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d. para 1). This ensures that students are frequently assessed so that they may be placed in appropriate classroom settings. Federal guidelines from the U.S. Office of Civil Rights about English learners, require schools to have procedures in place for identifying their English learners and for completing these procedures within a specific amount of time so that they can inform parents of students that have been identified as English learners (Zacarian, 2012, p. 7). Frequently, home language surveys and English language assessments are used to identify ELLs. A home language survey identifies

students who may need English proficiency development services based on degree of English language exposure (Education Commission of the States, 2014a). Many states, including Maryland, use a home language survey and an assessment of English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills that is considered reliable by the state department of education. These assessments allow school systems to gauge the ELLs placement in all areas of proficiency so that they know which supports will best assist these students.

Based on the results of these English proficiency assessments, programs were created to advance the students in their education. Across the nation, there are a variety of types of programs used to support ELLs. For example, English as a Second Language (ESL) programs allow academic content to be taught in English mainstream classrooms, but students receive ESL instruction to develop English language skills (Education Commission of the States, 2014b). Another type of instruction is sheltered English or structured English immersion in which content is taught only in English and in ELL-only classrooms as instruction is adjusted to students' English proficiency levels. Additional forms of ELL programs are bilingual and dual language immersion programs. During bilingual instruction, students receive instruction in English and a second language as they have the goal of transitioning into the mainstream classroom (Education Commission of the States, 2014b). Dual language immersion programs are similar to bilingual programs, but are focused on developing proficiency in multiple languages. Each program utilizes distinct methods of supporting their ELLs and are all deemed acceptable by the federal government. In addition to these programs for ELLs, the World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) created research-based standards and descriptors as a way to evaluate ELLs. In 2004, WIDA developed standards which served as the basis for the ACCESS for ELLs test of English Language Proficiency (WIDA, 2020, para 9). The assessments and

resources created by WIDA are used by 41 domestic states and territories and more than 400 international schools throughout the world showing that they are a widely acknowledged organization (WIDA, 2020, para 1). Assessments created by WIDA vary as they consider ELLs with significant cognitive disabilities as well. This allowed states to have guidelines and methods of measuring their student's proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking. The diverse forms of assessment allow individual students' needs to be met. These reflect the standards of annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs) which measure ELLs' development and acquisition of English language proficiency through yearly progress in areas of English language development, English language proficiency, English Language Arts and Mathematics (Zacarian, 2012, p.14). Furthermore, WIDA generated professional development workshops to aid educators in practices that support students with limited English proficiency (WIDA, 2020, para 9). These are meant to relieve some pressure from the general content area teacher in trying to access ELLs capabilities in all areas of proficiency. This provides support for ELLs' education as they are able to be placed in appropriate classrooms for their proficiency levels.

During day-to-day instruction, ESL teachers have also used common practices to support their ELLs. One research driven practice that benefits ELLs is putting students in conversational groups because they have a sizeable opportunity to talk while controlling the conversation (Dooley, 2009). Allowing students to interact helps ELLs improve and demonstrate their listening and speaking proficiency. Furthermore, engaging students with stimulating and authentic tasks, reinforcing their academic literacy skills through experience and providing learning strategies in context has resulted in higher competence and efficacy among ELLs (Meltzer & Hamann, 2006, p. 34). ESL teachers are trained to ensure that these practices are implemented within their classrooms and 'pull-out' or 'push-in' classrooms. A supportive

environment allows students to succeed and progress as they feel comfortable in the classroom. As mentioned in Krasnoff's research, teachers should:

Validate students' cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials.

Educate students about the diversity of the world around them. Promote equity and mutual respect among students. Assess students' ability and achievement validly. Foster a positive interrelationship among students, their families, the community, and school.

Motivate students to become active participants in their learning. Encourage students to think critically. Challenge students to strive for excellence as defined by their potential.

(2016, p. 18)

By creating these types of environments, students are able to lower their guard and affective filter and are able to more thoroughly engage in the content. This allows ELLs to progress and acquire greater English proficiency.

Within the general content area classroom, research has shown that professional development as interventions have helped non-ESL teachers feel greater confidence when working with ELLs. Studies have exemplified that teachers "increased their perceptions of preparedness by gaining experience in the classroom; their sense of efficacy to perform within certain teaching expectations was task-specific and highly situated (Faez & Valeo, 2012, p. 450).

This validates the idea that teachers need opportunities to work with ELLs alongside ESL teachers in order to develop more positive perceptions of their abilities to teach ELLs.

Furthermore, support is crucial for general content teachers as research has demonstrated that social support is significantly connected to reduced burnout and lower levels of stress (Brannan & Bleistein, 2012, p.521). When teachers feel that they are supported, they tend to have a more positive attitude when working with their diverse students. Additionally, it has been discovered

through research that when teachers are aware of students' diverse cultures, they are more likely to be deemed as effective educators (Gay as cited in Krasnoff, 2016, p.2). With appropriate training, teachers learn to close the gap between instructional delivery and assorted learning styles. Villegas and Lucas determined that helping prospective teachers develop the concluding six characteristics would prepare teachers to be culturally responsive: socio-cultural consciousness, attitude, commitment and skills, constructivist views, knowledge of student's life, and culturally responsive teaching (Villegas & Lucas as cited in Krasnoff, 2016, p.2). This shows that general content teachers need additional professional development in these areas so that they can feel confident and prepared to work with limited English- proficient students. Informational professional development provides teachers with tools to use in their classrooms and can lower their anxiety of working with diverse students. Supports are necessary to develop general content teachers' skills in order to not only build their perceptions of efficacy but also to benefit limited English proficient students.

Summary

English Language Learners are a prevalent group within the United States' school systems. This group comprises a plethora of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds as each student possesses unique needs in comparison to their English fluent peers. ELLs frequently face hardships as they progress through the educational system as educators often do not know of strategies to suit their needs. Although there are laws in place to help ensure that ELLs are given equitable education opportunities, general content area teachers are often left unaware of resources to aid in implementing this instruction. Lack of time and large workloads contribute to stress felt by educators working to meet the needs of students in their inclusive classrooms. Teachers often perceive their abilities as inadequate when working with ELLs unless they are

provided with support through professional development or are assisted by ESL certified teachers. There is a greater need for development opportunities so that teachers may learn how to appropriately implement culturally relevant curriculum for their students. Overall, this teacher development will in turn benefit limited English proficiency students by creating safe environments in which their diversities are celebrated and their academic competence can flourish.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine teacher's perspectives on their ability to implement the ESOL curriculum effectively in the general education classroom. A review of the literature explored the complexities of English Language Learners as well as stressors that teachers encounter when working with English Language Learners. It also examined strategies used to aid these students within the general education classroom. This study replicated previous studies of examining teachers' perceptions of efficacy in working with this population of students.

Design

This study was descriptive using a survey comprised of ten statements in which the participants were asked to state the extent at which they agreed or disagreed. The questions were intended to elicit teacher perceptions of their own ability to work with English Language Learners in their general content area classrooms comprised of native English speakers and non-native English speakers. The survey also included three questions as to elicit the teachers to disclose their experience in the classroom and with English Language Learners. The final two questions determined the participants' gender and ethnicity. The survey sought to gather data on teacher willingness and confidence in working to meet the needs of this population of students.

Participants

The survey was administered to 121 teachers at a middle school in Baltimore County Public Schools of Maryland. Of those respondents, 93% of teachers had more than three years' experience teaching in the classroom and 7% had between one year and three years' experience teaching in the classroom. The participants in the survey had experience in content areas of Art,

AVID, English Language Arts, Math, Music, Physical Education, Science, Social Studies, Special Education, Technical Education, or World Language. Twenty-six of the participants were male and ninety-five of the participants were female. Three of the participants were recorded as Hispanic or Latino. Four of the participants were recorded as African American or Black. Three of the participants were recorded as Asian and 111 of the participants were recorded as White. All the participants in the sample were currently teaching grades six, seven or eight. Additionally, according to the Maryland State Department of Education and presented in Maryland State Report Card, 5% of students are English Language Learners at a middle school (2019). This indicates that the participants in this study have English Language Learners in their community.

Instrument

This survey sought to gain insight to teachers' cognizance of their preparedness and willingness of working with English Language Learners based on their current experience with teaching. The questionnaire aimed to determine teachers' opinions of their practices and beliefs in assisting English Language Learners in their general content classroom. The survey was composed of fifteen questions. Ten questions required an answer on a rating scale of how much the participants agreed or disagreed with the given statements. The options for the participants to choose were "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree". These questions were aimed to determine the beliefs that they teachers possessed about their own teaching abilities and about English Language Learners. One multiple choice question aimed to answer if the teachers had experience working with an English Language Learner in their current classrooms or in the past. Two open-ended questions were aimed to determine the teachers' experience in the classroom regarding years of teaching and grades taught. The final two

question sought to gain insight as to the gender and race or ethnicity of the participants. This survey was not tested for reliability or validity, but the questions were converted from a survey conducted by Reeves (2006) included in the review of literature.

Procedure

This survey was distributed to every teacher (121 teachers) at a Middle School on February 24th, 2020 and was completed on paper. The survey was placed in each of the teachers' mailboxes with a blank envelop to place the completed survey in to maintain anonymity. Participants completed the survey independently. The instructions stated that each participant should read each statement and check the box that best describes their opinion. When the participants completed the survey, they placed the sealed blank envelop in the researcher's mailbox to keep their responses confidential and so that the participants could not be associated with their responses. The survey was collected on February 28th, 2020. All information gathered was anonymously recorded. The questionnaire did not gather any personal data that could be attributable.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study examines what are teacher’s perspectives on their ability to implement the ESOL curriculum effectively in the general education classroom. This chapter presents in a series of tables the results of the survey. The scale used for these results were as follows: Strongly Agree = 4, Agree =3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1. A copy of a blank survey can be found in Appendix A. The data from the survey is divided into smaller tables of a limited number of questions in sequence due to the size of a single table would not be feasible.

Table 1

Question Set One

	I am excited to come to work every day.	I come to work each day because of my students.	All English language learners have the ability to acquire the English Language.	Teachers should not modify assignments for English language learners partaking in general content classes.
Mean	2.87	3.11	3.29	2.17
N	32	35	34	29
Std. Deviation	.660	.631	.629	.384

Table 2

Question Set Two

	Teachers should not modify assignments for English language learners partaking in general content classes.	English language learners belong in my classroom.	I have sufficient training to work with English learners.	I am interested in receiving more training to work with English language learners.	I would welcome the inclusion of English language learners in my classroom.
Mean	2.17	3.12	2.33	3.06	3.24
N	29	33	21	34	33
Std. Deviation	.384	.650	.658	.547	.614

Table 3

Question Set Three

	I feel prepared to teach English language learners.	I know where to find resources to aid English language learners in my classroom.	I have had an English language learner enrolled in my class.	How many years have you been teaching?
Mean	2.23	2.35		14.54
N	26	23	35	35
Std. Deviation	.430	.573		9.963

Please note for the Question of “I have had an English Language Learner enrolled in my class” that the statistical software only calculated all whom responded. The exact numbers were Yes equal 24 and No equal 11.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this action research study was to examine teachers' perceptions on their ability to implement the ESOL curriculum effectively in the general education classroom. As this was a descriptive study, there was no hypothesis posited. From the information gathered from the implemented survey, teachers were presented as having an overall positive opinion of including English Language Learners in their classrooms; however, often did not perceived themselves as prepared to work with these students.

Implications of Results

When analyzing the data, the results seem overall positive for the future of English Language Learners. From the survey, it is interesting to note that teachers in the sample agreed that they came to work each day for their students even though they may not be excited to come to work every day. This shows that students may be the driving force for encouraging their educators to work. Furthermore, participants were very positive that all English Language Learners have the ability to acquire the English Language. This shows that educators believe in their students. Based on the data, participants on average agreed that ELLs belong in their classrooms and that they would welcome them in their general content classrooms. This shows that the educators in this building feel that their students belong and that teachers are willing to work with this group of students.

When reflecting on the preparedness of general education teachers, it is clear that teachers do not feel as confident planning for ESL instruction. Based on the study, educators tend to disagree with the idea that they should not modify assignments for English Language Learners partaking in general content classes. This shows that teachers know that they should be

adapting their materials for ELLs, even if they feel unprepared to do so. It also should be noted that for this question, six participants did not answer. The researcher suspects that rationale for this lack of response could be that some participants were not sure if they should modify their work or that they may not want to admit their beliefs about this subject. Modifying work takes more time and effort from the teacher, so participants may have reflected on their own workloads. On average, educators in the study disagreed that they had sufficient training to work with ELLs; however, agreed that they would like more training to work with ELLs. This shows that teachers have a desire to learn more about supporting their students. Participants felt that they were unprepared to work with ELLs. This shows that though they positively view ELLs in their classroom, they may not be ready for them. Educators in the study also disagreed when stating that they knew where to find resources for aiding ELLs in their classrooms. Not knowing where to find resources could impact their own perceptions of being prepared to teach this demographic of students. Based on the data, educators do not feel that they are sufficiently trained in locating resources, but these participants are willing to put in the work to support their students with distinct needs. Despite the fact that the sample proved to be a mix of highly seasoned teachers with having 67% of faculty with between four and twenty-four years of experience, teachers did not feel prepared to implement ESOL curriculum effectively. This demonstrates that though these teachers have had a plethora of classroom experience, they do not have as much knowledge of working with English Language Learners.

When examining the number of teachers in the study who have interacted with ELLs, only twenty-four participants out of thirty-five have had these students in their classrooms. As recorded in the Maryland School Report Card, 5% of students the middle school are English Language Learners (2019). As this is a large school with 1,877 students, this data shows that

there is not a very large number of ELLs present; yet, ELLs are still a distinct part of the community. Knowing this data, it is possible that teachers' perceptions and trainings were impacted by the low number of students in this category.

Overall, this data shows that teachers in this building welcome ELLs and feel that they belong in general education classrooms, but feel that they, as educators, have not had sufficient training to support this group of students. Additionally, it appears that they are willing to do the work of attending more trainings and that they need more access to materials for support. This poses a positive outlook for future opportunities for professional development for supporting English Language Learner in the future.

Threats to Validity

There are a number of variables that may threaten the validity of a descriptive study such as this study. An external variable that may have impacted the validity of this research study would be the limitation of the sample itself. The sample was conveniently selected because the researcher had access to the participants at the school in which she was employed. The sample size was restricted to the voluntary status. While the participants were voluntary and anonymous, this study only reflects the views of participants at the middle school and the results may not be applicable to generalize for the perspectives of educators at other schools in the county and beyond.

Additionally, internal variables pose threats to the validity of this study. For example, there was a low return rate of the survey. The survey was placed in a total of 121 educators' mailboxes with a blank envelope for anonymity; however only thirty-five participants responded and returned their surveys to the mailbox of the researcher. With only having around 29% of participants return the survey, this low return rate can impact the findings of the survey. This

small sample may not reflect the whole of the school community. A larger sample size may prove statistically stronger. The design of the survey does not demonstrate a connection between cause and effect, but solely reports on perceptions.

Connections to Previous Studies or Existing Literature

When reviewing this study, it is evident that its findings align with previously conducted research. The researcher's findings are specifically congruent with the findings of Reeves (2004) in determining that teachers desired more training for Second Language Acquisition techniques. Teachers wanted to have more strategies to better support their students. This study's results are also aligned with the findings of Reeves (2006), stating that educators had a slightly positive attitude to ELL inclusion in the general education classroom and that educators had a somewhat positive attitude to coursework modification. This study showed that, overall, teachers believe that they should modify their coursework, although six teachers did not respond to that specific question. Despite the similarities to Reeves' (2006) research, this study conducted a more positive outlook for professional development as the previous study found teachers were ambivalent to completing professional development. The educators in this study had a positive attitude towards participating in professional development for supporting ELLs which mimics the findings of Kabernick and Noda (2004).

While this study inquired about general education teachers' perceptions, the study conducted by Faez and Valeo (2012) inquired about ESOL teachers' perceptions. In their study, the researchers determined that novice teachers increased their perceptions of preparedness by gaining experience in the classroom. This is important to mention as teachers in this research study on average had around fourteen years of experience, yet did not feel prepared to teach

ELLs. The general education teachers were not given the same training as the specialized ESOL teachers, which could result in the differences between these findings.

Furthermore, this study opposes the findings of Walker, Shafer, and Iiams (2004), who determined that teacher attitudes toward ELLs appeared neutral to strongly negative. Walker et al. (2004) determined that differences did exist across contexts; however, the researcher of this study did not examine the findings between specific content areas. Teachers in this study demonstrated a positive attitude of educators toward ELLs. This discrepancy in finding may be attributed to the low return rate of surveys from the participants.

Implications for Future Research

Based on this study, the school can start seeking out more professional development opportunities for supporting English Language Learners. These professional development opportunities should be focused on helping educators locate resources and strategies to modify their lessons to best aid their diverse students. After providing these opportunities for educational growth among teachers, it would be beneficial to reconduct the survey to determine if the teacher perceptions of preparedness to implement the ESOL curriculum improved. If this study was to be replicated, it may prove insightful to observe the participants in working with this demographic of students in their classrooms. As this was an anonymous survey, there was no way of observing the participants take the survey.

Additionally, it may be beneficial to research ELLs' perceptions of participating in general education classrooms in comparison to push-in or pull-out specialized sessions with the ESOL specialist. This may help determine if ELLs feel that they belong in the general education classroom as well as could evaluate the teachers' practices of implementing their beliefs of including ELLs in their classrooms.

Furthermore, research could be conducted with the age of the participants and the amount of training that they have experienced with regard to English Language Learners. It may be insightful to determine if more training is given to teachers in schools or counties with a greater number of ELLs. It would be beneficial to determine if professional development was based on the impact of ELLs in the community.

Conclusions

This study was performed to gauge general education teachers' perceptions of their ability to implement the ESOL curriculum effectively. Based on the data gathered for this study, it appears that teachers have an overall positive outlook to having ELLs included in their classroom, but that they need more sufficient training in order to be prepared to teach these students with the proper supports. The data retrieved from this study appears to coincide with previous studies, but it should be replicated in other schools to determine a greater understanding of teachers' perspectives in areas with a greater impact from ELLs. These results may not be generalized to the entire school system in Baltimore County Public Schools or beyond due to the small, convenient sample size and low return rate; however, from this data it is clear that further teacher development needs to be implemented to best meet the needs of their diverse students. Further research is encouraged to determine if teachers in this sample would respond differently after experiencing more ESOL specialized professional development. Overall, this study has indicated that general education teachers need guidance for creating lessons that support the education of English Language Learners. By supporting these teachers, ELLs will have a better opportunity for receiving a more equitable and rigorous education like their native English-speaking peers receive.

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Appendix A

Survey

Please read each statement and check the box that best describes your opinion:

1) I am excited to come to work every day.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

2) I come to work each day because of my students.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

3) All English language learners have the ability to acquire the English language.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

4) Teachers should not modify assignments for English language learners partaking in general content classes.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

5) English language learners belong in my classroom.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

6) I have sufficient training to work with English language learners.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

7) I am interested in receiving more training to work with English language learners.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8) I would welcome the inclusion of English language learners in my classroom.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

9) I feel prepared to teach English language learners.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

10) I know where to find resources to aid English language learners in my classroom.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

11) I have had an English language learner enrolled in my class.

Yes	No

12) How long have you been teaching?

13) What grade(s) do you teach?

14) What gender do you identify as?

15) My race is:

American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Asian	Black or African American	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Other: _____

16) My ethnicity is:

Hispanic or Latino	Not Hispanic or Latino