FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO TEACHERS’ ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS
TOWARD TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Enrollment of English language learners (ELLs) in United States schools has increased more rapidly than general enrollment, resulting in an urgent need for teachers to be prepared to meet the needs of ELLs in their classrooms. The purpose of this qualitative case study design was to identify teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to influence English learners’ academic success, instrumental factors in teachers’ learning, and essential factors in building common understanding among teaching colleagues in order to strengthen a positive school culture for English learners. The data were derived from qualitative, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews and focus group interview. The study was conducted at one elementary school site ranging from kindergarten to sixth grade in an urban district with a culturally and linguistically diverse student population. Teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, practices, and needs related to ELLs were examined. More specifically, this study sought to understand whether teachers’ beliefs and attitudes were influenced by the specific instructional factors of support, expertise, and time. This case study was framed utilizing the theoretical framework of culturally sustaining pedagogy to examine the influence and impact made on English learner instruction. Recommendations for schools and teachers to acknowledge the experiences and culture of each student were provided.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

With the vast increase in English language learners (ELLs) attending United States schools, teachers need to be equipped and prepared to address this emerging population (Oliveira & Burke, 2015). According to Gomez and Diarrassouba (2014), researchers in education and language have shown that many educators are not adequately prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students. Teachers themselves have expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of preparedness they feel when teaching ELLs (Roblero, 2013). As a result of some of these concerns, teachers’ perceptions about what it is like to teach ELLs have created additional issues that need to be addressed.

According to Byrd (2016), teachers’ knowledge base and cultural awareness affect classroom practice and school climate. While the issues regarding English language instruction are multi-faceted, one of the pressing aspects is the question of how ELLs fully access academic content in all subject areas. Research has suggested that ELLs have not been receiving necessary support in their regular classrooms (Yoon, 2008). Students who speak a language other than English face many obstacles and several challenges in the classroom (National Education Association, 2008). Unfortunately, teachers often lack the resources of research-based strategies that are useful when addressing the different backgrounds and experiences of ELL students. According to the National Education Association (2008), “Teachers expressed frustration over the wide range of English language and academic levels and the fact that they received little professional development or in-service on how to teach ELLs” (p. 2). Teachers have stated that they feel unprepared and lack knowledge on linguistic background or
methodology to instruct ELLs in a mainstream classroom (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014). It is imperative that explicit efforts are made to ensure that teachers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively provide the specific instructional approaches needed to address the needs of ELLs in the classroom.

**Background of the Problem**

According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA), there was a 60.76% increase in the number of enrolled ELLs between 1994–1995 and 2004–2005 (O’Neal, Ringler, & Rodriguez, 2008). Ruiz Soto, Hooker, and Batalova (2015) stated that in 2012–2013 a total of 4.85 million ELLs were enrolled in United States schools. In United States history, there have never been more ELLs in the public school system than there are today, constituting 4.6 million young people or 9.4% of all students in the country (Castellon et al., 2015). It is projected that by 2030, ELLs will comprise 40% of the United States school population (Thomas & Collier, 2002). With the number of English learners on the rise, one matter that has raised wide concern is whether teachers have received the most current professional development to assist them in working with students with diverse needs that are second-language learners (Batt, 2008). With the past requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, which guaranteed the hiring of “high quality” teachers to ensure the improvement of schools and educational achievement of students, the question remained whether teachers were prepared to handle the pressures of meeting the needs of students who are ELLs (O’Neal et al., 2008). Although teacher requirements vary among states, it has been noted that teacher education programs are inadequately preparing future teachers to provide effective instruction to this population of students (Roblero, 2013).
Due to the need to reorganize classroom instruction to better address the learning contexts of ELLs, systematically restructuring solutions became a priority for improving ELL education (Batt, 2008). Batt’s (2008) study consisted of 161 participants from Idaho and Oregon. The study investigated ELL educators’ perceptions of the challenges, needs, and opportunities of ELL education. A key target for growth, according to novice and veteran teachers alike, was the availability of ongoing professional development regarding ELLs’ English language and content-learning strengths and needs. According to Batt (2008), many times, teachers’ professional development does not incorporate teaching methods that make connections with students’ cultures. Instead, professional development sessions that focus on culture provide an overview of how teachers should be sensitive toward various races and cultures. However, teachers still struggle with “how to include” sensitivity in the classroom. Reeves (2006) conducted a study with 279 subject-area high school teachers, examining the participants’ attitudes and perceptions of ELL inclusion. The participants were from four of the twelve high schools that had the largest ELL populations during the 2000–2001 school year (Reeves, 2006). Reeves (2006) administered a survey called “Secondary Teacher Attitudes Toward Including English Language Learners in Mainstream Classrooms” in which she explored four categories related to ELL instruction. These included ELL inclusion, coursework modification for ELLs, professional development for working with ELLs, and perceptions of language and language learning. More than 90% of the participants reported that they were provided with no professional development to work with ELL students. Although the respondents felt untrained to work with ELL students, only 53% of the teachers surveyed were interested in attending additional professional development
to benefit ELLs in the classroom (Reeves, 2006). Teachers’ perceptions of unpreparedness to work with ELL students are troubling in light of the rapidly increasing numbers of ELL students across the nation. Equally disturbing is that nearly half of the teachers surveyed demonstrated a lack of interest in receiving additional support to reach their ELL students. The author raised concerns that teachers had too often been overwhelmed with additional one-time sessions that failed to provide the support needed to create change. Reeves (2006) found that the participants demonstrated ambivalence toward professional development and felt that these sessions were conducted by experts outside the school arena who presented ideas in the form of a “sales pitch.” As a result of this tactic, the participants in the study had mixed feelings of what effective professional development truly resembled.

Furthermore, Batt (2008) found that filling language support positions had been an extremely arduous task due to English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual teacher shortages. With such a deficit of appropriate credentialed teachers, several more instructional aides were utilized to assist students who needed second-language support. It was reported that an average of 2.97 ESL and bilingual staff were employed, whereas an average of 4.40 were actually needed (Batt, 2008). Batt (2008) revealed that with the increased workload of bilingual educators, retention of these individuals had become difficult. Teachers reported that the additional demands of trying to teach mainstream students as well as meet the needs of students who speak a language other than English had become too tedious and time consuming for them. Additional duties that offered challenges included more workload, more translating, and additional lesson planning. A participant in Batt’s (2008) study further explained:
The problem in our school is that the mainstream teachers and administrators don’t understand LEP [limited English proficient] needs and how to teach them. We need some help here! The district’s ESL program just doesn’t have the staff resources, not to mention an adequate budget to do it alone. Everybody needs to own these kids. (p. 40–41)

With so many issues regarding the quality of English learners’ instruction, teachers’ perceptions about working with ELLs have become an additional obstacle. Since teachers have struggled with teaching English learners in a mainstream classroom, many have displayed feelings of ambivalence and negative attitudes (Reeves, 2006). In past studies, teachers were hesitant to have such students participate in a mainstream class because they were concerned that ELLs would take away instruction from other students. As Reeves (2006) stated, “In a climate of educator accountability for the learning of all students, the inclusion of ELLs can likely create a situation in which teacher attention is torn between meeting the needs of non-ESL and ESL students” (p. 137). There is a belief that students whose primary language is not English would slow down the rate and reduce the quality of instruction (Batt, 2008; Reeves, 2006). Reeves (2006) reported that some teachers expressed that ELLs did not need differentiated support.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to influence English learners’ academic success, instrumental factors in teachers’ learning, and essential factors in building a common understanding among teaching colleagues in order to promote a positive school culture for English learners.
Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to influence English learners’ academic success?
2. What was instrumental in teachers’ learning to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students?
3. What do teachers feel is essential for building a common understanding on a school campus to promote a positive culture of learning for English learners?

Individual interviews and a focus group were conducted to address these issues. Patterns and themes were identified and analyzed as they emerged from the data.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used throughout the study and are defined as follows:

**Bilingual Program**: An educational program in which English and one other language are used for teaching classes (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005).

**Designated English Language Development**: A protected time when skilled teachers utilize the California English Language Development (ELD) Standards as the core standards in ways that build into and from content instruction to establish the critical language English learners need for content learning in English (California Department of Education, n.d.).

**English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC)**: A mandated state test for determining English language proficiency (ELP). It must be given to students whose primary language is not English. California and federal law require that
local educational agencies administer a state test of ELP to eligible students in transitional kindergarten through grade twelve (Hill, 2018).

**English Language Development (ELD):** English language development is a specialized program of English language instruction appropriate for the English learner (EL) student’s identified level of language proficiency. The program implementation and design promote second-language acquisition of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (California Department of Education, n.d.).

**English Language Learners (ELLs):** “Students who are in the process of learning English as a new language” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005, p. 3). The term ELL is sometimes shortened to English learner (EL) to demonstrate improvement over the widely used limited English proficient (LEP). The term culturally and linguistically diverse has also been used to refer to the combination of ethnic and linguistic minority students (Wright, 2010).

**English as a Second Language (ESL):** Instruction that focuses on helping English language learners attain proficiency in English (Wright, 2010).

**Fluent English Proficient (FEP):** The official designation for former English language learner students who have attained sufficient proficiency to meet their state’s criteria for reclassification (Wright, 2010).

**Language Acquisition:** The process of second-language (L2) literacy development; certain L1 skills and abilities transfer to English literacy (Vogt, Echevarria, & Short, 2010).

**Limited English Proficient (LEP):** “Those who are beginners to intermediates in English” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005 p. 3). LEP is a legal term used in federal and state
legislation (Wright, 2010). Students identified in research literature as culturally and linguistically diverse, ELL, or emergent bilingual are terms that refer to LEP in older federal documents. Nonetheless, scholars in the field have shifted from utilizing the term, as “limited” suggests a deficit in the students themselves or gives the impression that their lack of proficiency in English is a permanent condition (Wright, 2010).

**Mainstream classroom:** A regular education class where ELL students are included with native-speaking peers (Samway & McKeon, 2007).

**Reclassification:** The process whereby a school district reclassifies a student from the English learner category to the fluent English proficient category. Local districts determine when the student has met the four criteria listed in the California *Education Code (EC)*, Section 313 (f). Reclassification procedures shall utilize multiple criteria in determining whether to reclassify a pupil as proficient in English, including, but not limited to, all of the following: an assessment of English proficiency, an evaluation of basic skills in English, a teacher evaluation of the student, and parental consultation (Hill, Weston, & Hayes, 2014).

**Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP):** Students who are initially classified as English learners but are exited out of that status once they demonstrate English proficiency and readiness (Santibanez & Umansky, 2019).

**Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE):** Another term for sheltered instruction. This term is preferred in California and other states because emphasis is placed on the fact that such instruction is academically rigorous but specifically designed to match the linguistic needs of the student (Wright, 2010).
Sheltered English Immersion Program (SEI): A program model for English language learners that combines ESL, sheltered content-area instruction, and primary language support. This model is also referred to as English immersion (Wright, 2010).

Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments: Annual computer-based tests that assess students’ progress toward meeting the rigorous academic standards adopted by California (Hill, 2018).

Submersion “sink or swim” Program: A program in which non-English-speaking students are placed in a “sink or swim” situation in the general school population with no alternative instruction provided (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005).

Significance of the Study

Based on issues regarding ELLs in the education system and the rapid growth of the ELL population, investments need to be made to ensure that students are receiving the best possible school experience. More than 20 years ago, Peregoy and Boyle (1997) stated that ELLs’ academic and social growth could be inhibited if teachers have negative beliefs about ELLs. Valenzuela (2005) maintained that even the most well-intentioned teachers believe that ELLs must not value education if growth is not made because of the teachers’ own beliefs that those students who want to learn, will. Others have found that teachers do not acknowledge that their own perceptions and beliefs or the structure of schools and educational policies can directly impact ELL students’ learning (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Tyler, Boykin, & Walton, 2006).

Key findings indicate that several factors create issues of uncertainty for teachers and have created unfavorable ELL teacher perceptions (Shim, 2014). Proper supports and resources must be put in place in teacher education programs and school districts to guide
teachers’ mindsets onto a positive path. To create the change that is needed to
differentiate instruction for students, structures need to be rethought and planned out in a
systematic way to ensure that teachers feel comfortable with the strategies needed to
make ELL instruction meaningful for both the teacher and the student (Reeves, 2006).

**Positionality**

Teachers will inevitably have the experience of teaching ELLs during their
teaching career. For that reason, it is essential that teachers be skilled in the area of
providing quality instruction while delivering effective instructional and curricular
strategies to this population. In my experience as a student who came from a family of
immigrants, my parents always placed value on higher education and the respect that was
deemed worthy to the educators who would help mold me into the person I have become.
Early on, my father would grind into me the notion, “Be a good girl and do your best. You have so many opportunities that will be given to you if you work hard and study.” With his words of wisdom always on my mind, I set off to do just that as early as I can remember.

In my reflection, I have had several amazing instructors come across my path who
have made a significant impact on how I see the world and make decisions. However,
there were also educators who left a negative mark on me, including one from when I
was seven years old that I will never forget. As early as second grade, I remember being
placed in a group with ELLs who were extremely limited in the English language. I was
much more proficient in terms of language ability, as I was designated RFEP
(Reclassified Fluent English Proficient) early on in kindergarten. However, one particular
teacher made a point to always place me in this group. I rarely spoke in this class because
the teacher always seemed to be extremely agitated when working with us. When students mispronounced words, her frustration was evident as she blared the word out loud and continually pointed to the word as if yelling was going to assist the students in being able to pronounce it more clearly. In actuality, all it did was frighten us even more and made us unwilling participants in a classroom that should have been our home away from home. To this day, I carry the resentment and trauma I felt at having to attend my own parent–teacher conference with this teacher. This teacher spoke to my father in a condescending tone and displayed distaste in having to deal with me translating for my parents. Although I received good grades and was what others would consider a bright student, her strong, lingering gaze told me otherwise. The entire time she spoke negatively of how quiet and shy I was in the classroom. She even informed my parents that I would not do well in school if I did not speak up more in class. The entire time, she never once mentioned a positive, uplifting comment about my skills or abilities to my parents.

This childhood experience is one that has left an empty feeling inside me all these years. I always look back at that time in my life and wonder why this teacher had such a negative attitude toward the few ELLs in her classroom. Why did she appear so heartless to the students who needed her most? Was it due to her personal beliefs about students who spoke a language other than English, or was it that she was frustrated because of her own lack of education in dealing with this population? Improvement in the quality of education for English learners is long overdue, and efforts need to be put in place to address the needs of these learners. I hope that my research will be able to contribute to this topic to challenge the obstacles that still exist today.
Summary

Prior research has indicated that teachers’ perceptions of ELLs affect ELLs’ access to quality schooling. As more teachers come into contact with ELLs, their attitudes toward ELLs become of critical importance (Batt, 2008). Chapter 1 discussed the background, purpose of the study, and the statement of the problem. Chapter 2 will contribute a literature review essential to this study and will focus on teachers’ perceptions of their teaching preparation, the challenges they encounter when instructing ELLs, and impacts on their instructional approach. Chapter 3 will define the research methodology and methods employed by the researcher to gather pertinent data for the study. Chapter 4 will introduce the findings assembled from the participants’ interviews. Chapter 5 will discuss the conclusions obtained from the participants’ responses, the implications of the study, recommendations for future research on this topic, and concluding statements.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Examining teachers’ attitudes toward English language learners (ELLs) continues to be critical as the population of this subgroup grows. This literature review begins with an overview of research on the current reality in the school systems and the influence of teachers’ attitudes and beliefs on ELLs. This review addresses nine topics: English language learners in the United States in public schools; the historical perspective of the evolution of language and educational policy; teachers’ perceptions of preparation and self-efficacy; culturally sustaining pedagogy; pre-service teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about diversity; addressing the inadequacy of pre-service training for working with ELLs; teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about ELLs in the classroom; attitudes and beliefs toward ELL professional development; and creating a positive culture for ELLs.

Current population trends in the United States reflect increasing diversity as the foreign-born population continues to grow. As non-native English-speaking students enroll in public schools, they are faced with the immense tasks of acquiring English proficiency and achieving academically. Of particular concern are the persistent achievement gaps between ELLs and native-English-speaking students (Mueller, Singer, & Carranza, 2006; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2013; Short, Fidelman, & Louguit, 2012; Wright, 2010). As public schools implement educational programs for ELLs, it is of the utmost importance that teachers are well-prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students.

The importance of studying teachers’ attitudes and beliefs in regard to working with ELLs is compelling. Teachers’ expectations are a large predictor of how successful students will be in the future (Youngs & Youngs, 2001). More than 30 years ago, Good
and Weinstein (1986) also indicated that teachers often make judgments about future student academic achievement based on classroom assignments and perceived student ability. Teachers’ perceptions and their expectations play a significant role in the education of students (Samway & McKeon, 2007). Shim (2014) stated that teachers’ judgments about ELL students are based on their own understanding of the social world as an English-speaking member of society. While this observation is true for any teacher working with any student, it is even more critical for teachers working with an underserved ELL population that must be provided with equitable educational opportunities. Schools are not aware of the magnitude of services needed by ELL students. All too often, this disparity continues until it is too late to provide services to assist these students, because they fail to invest in resources for ELL programs (Lee, 2012). Based on the lack of support and resources to assist ELLs, these students are not given equitable access to thrive (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018).

**English Language Learners in United States Public Schools**

The increased rate of ELL enrollment has grown exponentially in K–12 schools in the United States (Shin & Kominski, 2010). The ELL population increased by 84% between 1993 and 2003, and in 2000, ELLs accounted for 11 million out of the 58 million students enrolled in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade in the United States (Wright, 2010). With the overwhelming growth of this subgroup, significant issues that require attention are the need for additional resources and the demand for properly credentialed teachers. ELLs who have immigrated to the United States make up about 12% of the United States population (Wright, 2010). This increase in immigration has resulted in the growing numbers of ELLs who are now present in the classroom (Walker,
Wright (2010) stated that the number of immigrants coming to the United States is at an all-time high. The Urban Institute revealed that in 2000, more than 50% of elementary school–aged immigrants were from Mexico, other Latin American countries, and the Caribbean, with about 25% of immigrants coming from Asian countries (Wright, 2010). A common misconception is that many children who are immigrants are foreign-born; however, Wright (2010) clarified that according to the Urban Institute study, 75% of children of immigrants were born in the United States and are United States citizens. As a result of this rapid growth in the ELL population across the United States, serious consideration needs to be given to ensuring that future and current classroom teachers alike receive the professional development to provide effective language and content instruction to ELL students (Wright, 2010).

The pursuit of educational opportunity has historically been paramount among groups such as ELLs who are struggling with poverty, racism, and prejudice (Olsen, 2010). Educational risks for ELLs also can be traced to the systemic lack of preparedness of schools and teachers to provide equitable access to a well-prepared education (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). As a result, the civil rights law was established to protect the ELL population by listing promises of accountability (Olsen, 2010). Schools have a legal responsibility to provide equal educational access to all students, including culturally diverse children who are not yet proficient in the English language. ELLs are faced with the additional challenge of learning a new language while mastering the same academic content as their English-fluent peers. The courts have recognized that during the period when students are still learning English, academic deficits may occur if their core content
instruction is in English (Olsen, 2010). School districts are obligated to ensure that such deficits do not create an educational deterrent for ELLs while they are in the process of learning English.

Substantial investment has been made in school improvement initiatives to address educational gaps for language minority groups. However, the results for ELLs in achievement have not yielded the desired results. Factors that have contributed to ELLs’ lack of progress include not receiving language development programs during the academic school day; school curriculums that are not designed to meet ELLs’ proficiency levels; participation in poorly planned and implemented ELL programs; use of sporadic program models; and linguistic isolation and social segregation (Olsen, 2010). According to Olsen (2010), research on ELLs still focuses on a one-size-fits all reform, which has left behind another generation of ELLs who are over-assigned to intervention support classes.

Additional ELL student risks are related to multiple background factors, including parents’ level of income, education level, and proficiency in English, along with single-versus dual-parent household attributes (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1995). ELL dropout rates are much higher than those reported for non-ELL students (NCES, 1995). In several rural states, the trend demonstrates decreased ELL graduation rates, which are significantly attributed to the educational and social challenges that ELL students face (Walker, 2012). Because non-native, English-speaking students typically experience these risk factors with higher frequency than native English speakers, ELLs are at a much greater risk of academic failure (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008) and are more likely to be retained than native English speakers (Garcia & Cuellar, 2006).
Thus, the need for teachers to be adequately prepared for recognizing and affirming students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds and abilities is critical.

With increasing linguistic diversity, mainstream classroom teachers in public schools will likely teach ELL students at some point (Siwatu, 2007). Meeting the language and learning needs of these students is a struggle for many classroom teachers who come from middle-class, white backgrounds with little exposure to culturally diverse students and few experiences teaching non-native English speakers (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 2002). Li and Protacio (2010) indicated that changing demographics “have highlighted an ill-prepared teaching force that is struggling to deal with the cultural and linguistic diversity these new students bring to the schools” (p. 353). Furthermore, in many cases, it appears that classroom teachers “lack the necessary knowledge base for planning and implementing effective educational programming for ELLs” (Adams & Jones, 2006, p. 78).

**Historical Perspective of the Evolution of Language and Educational Policy**

Historical reluctance has occurred in many states to provide equitable educational opportunities to ELL and other minority students (Shim, 2014). Controversies over the use of languages other than English in public schools have sparked many lawsuits (Wright, 2010). The judgments of these lawsuits led to legislative changes that have shaped the current policy climate.

During the first half of the 20th century, a typical public school classroom in America would not have been representative of the American population. While education was the first step toward the “American Dream” for many students, some students were segregated or excluded due to race, nationality, or physical handicap.
During the early stages of the civil rights movements, however, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) set a reform of the public education system as one of its main targets (Smith & Kozleski, 2005). Finally, in 1954, the United States Supreme Court unanimously ruled that segregation in public schools was a violation of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. The Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* marked a pivotal moment in the NAACP’s decades-long campaign to combat school segregation. In declaring school segregation unconstitutional, the Court overturned the longstanding “separate but equal” doctrine established nearly 60 years earlier in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Although it took many years to implement fully, the impact of this case was far-reaching, as the doors to public schools were opened to all students regardless of race, creed, or disability. Sadly, additional lawsuits, litigation, and legislation were required to guarantee that all students received equal opportunity in education.

Before 1968, federal educational language policies did not exist for ELLs (Wright, 2010). History indicates that the needs of language minority students were often ignored, with the mindset that they learn a second language utilizing the submersion “sink or swim” model. Improvement for this subgroup began during the civil rights movement under President Lyndon B. Johnson’s tenure when Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). During the 1970s and 1980s, United States school policies aimed at serving linguistically and culturally diverse students by establishing separate school programs to address concerns regarding ELL proficiency and academic achievement, which appeared to be problematic (Mantero, 2008).
Unfortunately, the solution was to utilize ESL personnel to pull ELL students out of class for a specific period to be provided additional linguistic support, very similar to the way special education students were served (Crawford, 1999).

**Equal Educational Opportunities for ELLs**

Wright (2010) asserted that case law concerning the educational and linguistic needs of ELL students has not only influenced federal and state policy but has also impacted their families and communities. The first landmark case regarding the education of ELLs was *Lau v. Nichols*, in which the Supreme Court held that an equitable education is not synonymous with an identical education. This case eased the transition into education for students whose first language was not English. This ruling established that students could no longer be discriminated against due to their language and that schools offering identical education resources to ELLs were violating students’ rights. San Francisco Unified School District argued that they had done no wrong in offering Chinese American students treatment that was equal to that of students who were English-proficient. Despite the students’ lack of English proficiency, students were placed in a “sink or swim” model (Wright, 2010).

In 1974, Congress passed the Equal Educational Opportunity Act, which required that states ensure the rights to equal participation by helping ELLs overcome language barriers. The passage of these guidelines was directly influenced by the Supreme Court ruling in *Lau v. Nichols*. The guidelines are commonly referred to as the Lau Remedies (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). During this time, states were required to take appropriate action to help ELLs overcome the language barriers that prevented them from achieving in school. Congress and the court system did not determine, however, what constituted
appropriate action by the states. They merely indicated that states had to take affirmative actions to find a solution so that educational inequities for students did not exist (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). The Lau Remedies “established how school districts should assess and instruct English learners (ELs) and required schools to offer bilingual education to students who were proficient in English when it could be demonstrated that their civil rights had been violated” (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010, p. 25).

Yet, another federal court case, *Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981, upheld the *Lau v. Nichols* decision. In this case, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit upheld the *Lau* precedent. Garcia and Kleifgen (2018) stated that the *Lau* decision stipulated that schools must take appropriate action to educate language minority students that needed to be based on “sound educational theory; produce results; and provide adequate resources, including qualified teachers and appropriate materials, equipment, and facilities” (p. 38). Needless to say, although action items were put into motion due to *Castañeda v. Pickard*, the case did not mandate special programs for ELLs, such as bilingual education or ESL (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Consequently, *Castañeda v. Pickard* made it possible to legally confirm a violation based on the Lau Remedies. Although several court decisions have served as the driving force to propel bilingual initiatives, issues of language inclusion or exclusion masked by indifference have been noted (Ovando, 2003). Instrumental efforts have shaped and determined United States policies for education language minorities. The pursuit of equity for all students has continued to be of the utmost priority, as history demonstrates a lack of empowering linguistically marginalized populations (Ovando, 2003).
English-only Education

As time progressed, sensitivity began to emerge for the expanding language minority student population in the United States. As a result, a bill was passed to provide funding for school districts to support bilingual education programs. The bill was entered into federal law and is known as Title VII of ESEA (Wright, 2010), also known as the Bilingual Education Act. It was established as a federal goal of assisting students with limited English-speaking abilities (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Wright (2010) stated that this act was built out of recognition that schools were failing ELLs and not addressing the linguistic, cultural, and educational needs of these students.

The altering of second-language learners’ education began in 1981 with the commencing of the English-only movement. At this time, the United States Senate declared English as the official language of the United States and forbade federal government agencies from requiring any other language besides English. Bilingual education was reduced within a decade. The country’s political climate became increasingly charged around English learner education and immigration issues as a whole during this time. By 2000, more than 27 states had passed English-only laws. English-only was becoming popular, even though “there is no evidence that statewide English-only initiatives improve the learning outcomes of ELLs” (Squire, 2008, p. 3).

On February 11, 1991, the Ramírez report documented the educational validity of strongly promoting biliteracy as an effective means to overall educational achievement for language-minority students (Cummins, 1992). The Ramírez study (Ramírez, Pasta, Yuen, Ramey, & Billings, 1991) presented extensive data on English learners in three different language programs over an eight-year span. The programs listed in the report
included a structured English immersion program (majority of instruction is primarily English), an early-exit bilingual program (instruction is in the native language and English until third grade; students are exited into an all-English classroom), and a late-exit bilingual program model (instruction is in the native language and English until fifth grade). The report helped to highlight the implications of late-exit students having the potential to academically bypass their English-speaking peers by sixth grade. The findings revealed that ELLs who received quality instruction in their native language for a substantial amount of time achieved better academically than ELLs who were taught in English exclusively. That is, ELLs benefit from primary language support to acquire academic English and should not be placed in an all-English classroom (Cummins, 1992). Ramírez’ study demonstrated that with quality bilingual instruction, ELLs can succeed academically.

However, in the 1990s, bilingual education was under political siege with Proposition 227 and further crystalized the native language debate. Ron Unz, Silicon Valley software millionaire, led the attack against bilingual education. In California, policies for educating ELLs drastically changed with the implementation of Proposition 227. The intention behind Proposition 227 was to improve the learning outcomes for ELLs by either eliminating or reducing bilingual education programs. Proposition 227, also known as the “English for the Children Initiative,” was presented to voters in California in June 1998 (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). This initiative was aimed at eliminating a child’s home language to support learning in the classroom (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010). The mandate included English-only classroom instruction for a length of no more than a year. This led to emergent bilingual students being placed into
mainstream classrooms (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Parents were given the option to request a waiver out of the English immersion program only if the child was 10 years of age, had additional special needs that needed to be met, or was fluent in the English language (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). The proposition was made law after 61% of California voters voted in favor of the proposition. Supporters of these initiatives believed that instruction provided in languages other than English restricted the opportunities for academic success of ELLs and that full immersion in classrooms with native English speakers would benefit English acquisition and academic achievement. Others have countered that Proposition 227 resulted in reductive literacy programs for ELLs and elimination of their native languages in English immersion classrooms (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Asato, 2000). With the passing of this proposition, the number of credentialed bilingual teachers also declined.

After a full year of implementation in California, Unz took his English-only efforts to Arizona, where 63% of Arizona voters approved Proposition 203, banning bilingual education (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Proposition 203 abolished bilingual education laws, requiring that all classes be taught in English. Waivers were a challenge to obtain, making Arizona’s statute more restrictive than California’s (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Students who were identified as English learners were educated through sheltered English immersion programs. School services were limited to a one-year, English-only, structured immersion program that included ESL and content-based instruction solely in English (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). In 2006, Arizona passed House Bill 2064, creating the Arizona ELL Task Force, which was given the power to oversee the implementation of ELL instruction throughout the state, a power generally prescribed to the State Board
of Education. The Task Force further reduced districts’ flexibility in choosing models for ELL instruction by creating a formal, structured English immersion model that mandated separate four-hour blocks of English language development (ELD) for ELLs (Fetman, 2018). This English-only policy was based on beliefs that complete immersion leads to language acquisition (Fetman, 2018).

Massachusetts followed suit in 2002 with a similar proposition outlawing bilingual education, which passed with 68% of the vote (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). The law stipulated that all public school children must be taught English by being taught all subjects in English and being placed in English language classrooms. This ballot measure shifted the state’s main ELL program from transitional bilingual education to sheltered English immersion (SEI). According to Karp and Uriarte (2010), only 20% of emergent bilinguals in Massachusetts had achieved grade level proficiency after five years in the SEI program.

Since 1998, the only states that succeeded in defeating bilingual education legislation through voter referenda during the English-only movement were Massachusetts, California, and Arizona (Collier & Thomas, 2012). Collier and Thomas (2009) stated that in 1969, New Mexico, an official bilingual state, was the first to authorize instruction in languages other than English and in 2002 passed the most comprehensive state funding plan for developing enrichment bilingual/ESL programs based on effectiveness research in bilingual/ESL education. Texas has a law in effect that requires transitional bilingual education services for students from pre-K to fifth grade and passed legislation encouraging the expansion of dual-language education (an enrichment model) for all students to graduate as proficient bilinguals for the workforce
of the 21st century (Collier & Thomas, 2012). There are many forms of bilingual and ESL schooling for ELLs, and large differences among them in effectiveness.

An additional policy movement that steered away from bilingual education toward an English-only approach was the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in January 2002, which came into law under President George W. Bush (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). According to Garcia and Kleifgen (2018), NCLB mandated that by 2013–2014, all students would be able to accomplish the level of proficiency needed in the state testing arena. The stated purpose of NCLB was to improve educational outcomes for American students by improving teacher quality and demanding accountability for the educational success of all student groups, as measured by standardized tests (Darling-Hammond, 2004). NCLB policies emphasized proficiency in English rather than bilingual education and legislated yearly student assessments to gauge academic progress. NCLB did not mandate a particular method of instruction or strategies to be used; however, states were given the latitude to select the most appropriate form of instruction delivery to ELLs (Mantero, 2008). Mantero (2008) indicated that based on scientific research for English language acquisition, states were required to create English proficiency standards and to provide ELLs with quality instruction. The difficulty and challenge with this policy was that it held ELLs to the same standards as their native-English-speaking counterparts. Columbo, McMakin, Jacobs, and Shestok (2013) stated that if ELLs are to be accurately assessed in the arena of standardized testing, then these exams must measure the progress of ELLs utilizing the various levels of English language proficiency.
Despite these policy and evaluation initiatives in favor of an English-only movement, on November 8, 2016, Proposition 58, known as the California Multicultural Education Act of 2016, passed in California, repealing key provisions for Proposition 227. Proposition 58 removed the requirement that ELLs must be taught only in English. It allowed for a variety of programs, including bilingual instruction, where parents no longer had to sign a waiver to enroll their children in a dual immersion or bilingual program. Proposition 58 brought with it the opportunity for English learners to gain English proficiency through multiple avenues. While schools have the flexibility to design their own programs, the new proposition requires that districts discuss their ELL programs with community members and parents (Hernandez, 2017).

**Teachers’ Perceptions of Preparation and Self-Efficacy**

It is important to examine the relationships between perceptions of preparation and self-efficacy, because teachers’ sense of preparedness has been associated with teacher efficacy. It has been noted that teachers who feel more prepared are more likely to believe in their ability to help all students achieve academically, to relate and work positively with students, and to deal with challenging situations in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, Eiler, & Marcus, 2002b). Teachers’ perceptions of their preparation have been linked to beliefs that they are able to provide instruction for all students, to support increased academic achievement, and to influence students’ lives (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002a). While teacher preparation programs make efforts to develop teachers’ knowledge, psychologists, scholars, and researchers have suggested that an individual’s beliefs are much stronger and more influential in determining their behaviors than is learned behavior (Pappamihiel, 2007).
A teacher’s self-efficacy has been defined as “a judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated” (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 783). Bandura (1997) indicated that successful performances by individuals are affected by many factors, including the “knowledge, skills, and strategies they have at their command rather than solely on how much they can excel themselves” (p. 126). Examining the perceptions of teachers’ preparation for teaching linguistically diverse students is supported by researchers who conclude that after novice teachers’ sense of self-efficacy is developed, it is difficult to change (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Because a teacher’s sense of self-efficacy has a powerful influence on students’ motivation and the classroom environment, it is critical to acknowledge the impact of teacher preparation on teaching self-efficacy. Researchers have demonstrated that an individual’s self-efficacy relates significantly to performance in the workplace, even when confronted with tasks that are difficult (Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010). Other findings suggest that even after controlling for several factors, such as years of teaching experience, students’ grade levels, and area of certification, teachers’ perceptions of their preparation were the strongest predictor of self-efficacy (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002a).

**Theoretical Framework**

Historically, schools have seen the home cultures of students of color and ELLs as deficits to be overcome or resources to be treated as a bridge to preferable, dominant practices. Current pedagogies take an asset-based approach, viewing students’ home and
community cultural practices as resources “to honor, explore, and extend” (Paris, 2012, p. 94). Lopez (2018) stated that asset-based pedagogy served as a connection between dominant school culture and students’ homes while recognizing the home culture and acknowledging that a majority of classrooms include learners who represent not only diverse backgrounds but also diverse perspectives and ways of learning. The achievements of asset-based pedagogy include that teachers who display critical awareness are better equipped to build upon cultural knowledge and validate marginalized students’ experiences into their classroom instruction (Lopez, 2018). An asset-based perspective builds on the home language of students, recognizes this as a fundamental strength, and views diversity in thought, culture, and traits as positive assets (Scanlan, 2007). One such asset-based approach is culturally sustaining pedagogy, which affirms and respects the key components of the asset-based pedagogies that preceded it while taking them to the next level. The theoretical framework of this research will analyze the literature to explore culturally sustaining pedagogy in order to fully examine this asset-based approach in further detail.

**Cultural Sustaining Pedagogy**

practices from multiple sociocultural contexts (Kinlock, 2017). Ladson-Billings (1995) recognized the need for reforms within teacher education to better prepare teachers for socially just and equitable teaching. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy is a student-centered approach to teaching that includes cultural references and recognizes the importance and value of students’ cultural backgrounds and experiences in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It encourages teachers to maintain high expectations for students and to recognize the realities and causes of social inequities (Kinlock, 2017). Culturally relevant pedagogy not only ignited countless studies but has also assumed a central role in teacher education, inspiring a myriad of teachers to enter the classroom with a renewed dedication to affirming students’ racial, cultural, and ethnic identities.

Paris (2012) questioned whether the terms “relevant” and “responsive” were descriptive of the teaching and research founded upon them and speculated if the terms were relevant in their orientation to the languages, literacy, and other cultural practices of communities that are marginalized by systemic inequalities. Paris (2012) argued that the terms relevant and responsive do not adequately address the needs of a pluralistic society. These terms refer to how a student’s culture is used to teach the dominant culture. Paris proposed culturally sustaining pedagogy as an alternative. Culturally sustaining pedagogy aims to perpetuate and encourage cultural plurality. This pedagogical stance is strongly supportive of students’ cultures rather than merely responsive or relevant (Paris, 2012). It seeks to sustain culture in a simultaneously traditional and evolving way according to students’ lived experiences by “supporting young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to
dominant cultural competence” (Paris, 2012, p. 95).

Instead of comparing students of color to white, middle-class norms, Paris argued that being multicultural and multilingual should be seen as a path toward power in a diverse society. For Paris and Alim (2017), the recognition of linguistic plurality in educational settings is a crucial component of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Paris introduced the term and stance of culturally sustaining pedagogy as a means for future research and advocacy in the pursuit of educational justice.

Paris and Alim’s (2017) collection of scholarship articles on culturally sustaining pedagogies broadened the discussion to include a variety of critical perspectives. In their examination of asset pedagogies, Paris and Alim (2017) called for a radical departure from neoliberal approaches to educational equity. They emphasized the need for a stance where students’ “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) are recognized and valued. According to Paris and Alim (2017), “By proposing schooling as a site for sustaining the cultural ways of being of communities of color rather than eradicating them, culturally sustaining pedagogy is responding to the many ways that schools continue to function as part of the colonial project” (p. 2).

Irizarry (2017) contended that culturally sustaining pedagogy fills necessary gaps by “underscoring the multidimensional nature of culture but emphasizing the potential of young people to challenge and change the systems of oppression in which they are embedded” (p. 83). Bucholtz, Casillas, and Lee (2017) further discussed the assaults on language, agency, culture, and identity. They asserted that “one of the most important yet most devalued resources available to youth of color is their language” (p. 44). According to Bucholtz et al. (2017), the premise behind cultural sustaining pedagogy is that culture
should be sustained. Culture is fundamental to how all learning takes place (Gay, 2010) and is primarily composed through language, contributing a sense of identity and social belonging. The central role of language and culture is to preserve selfhood, thus creating a “vital need for pedagogical practices that sustain students’ language and culture in classrooms and other learning contexts” (Bucholtz et al., 2017, p. 45).

Importantly, with culturally sustaining pedagogy, the concept of culture is not limited to traditional or heritage-based cultural practices that students participate in as members of their communities and families (Bucholtz et al., 2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogy not only sustains family, community, and peer-based cultural practices but also aims to ensure that students gain full access to the practices associated with larger institutional and structural power as well as the tools to critique the processes of power. A pedagogy that sustains culture is one that sustains cultural practices too often excluded from classroom learning and leverages these resources for achieving institutional access as well as for challenging structural inequality (Bucholtz et al., 2017). This allows cultural sustaining pedagogy to cultivate the full range of young people’s expertise, where it creates the potential to transform schooling into a force for social justice (Bucholtz et al., 2017). Paris and Alim (2014) pushed teachers to see rich and complex linguistic and cultural practices instead of using “pedagogies that are not filtered through a lens of contempt and pity” (p. 86).

**Pre-Service Teachers’ Attitudes and Beliefs about Diversity**

In a study conducted by Capella-Santana (2003), observation was given to the multicultural attitudes and beliefs of 52 teacher candidates in an undergraduate elementary education program. The results were based on the completion of teacher pre
and post questionnaires and interviews after completing a multicultural education course. The results suggested that novice teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about diversity and multiculturalism changed positively while in the teacher preparation program. Much of this was due to the fact that instructors permitted the teacher candidates to discuss prevalent issues at their urban school sites. This is critical, as research has indicated that teachers who are enrolled in teacher preparation programs are not comfortable engaging in discussions about race (Krummel, 2013). Providing ongoing professional development, support, and feedback is essential to improving teachers’ awareness and equipping them to instruct culturally diverse students. Being given the opportunity to work in a school setting with diverse learners while taking a multicultural course that was relevant to their learning assisted novice teachers in changing their mindsets so they were more inclined to desire working in a diverse school setting (Capella-Santana, 2003).

Duarte and Reed (2004) discovered similar results in their study of 20 white, female teacher candidates’ cultural responsiveness. The novice teachers in this study were administered a survey before and after a three-hour field-based experience in a public school setting. The purpose of the study was to examine their attitudes and beliefs about multicultural education. After completing a survey, teacher candidates volunteered to have their field experience in either an urban school setting (experimental group) or in a rural school setting (control group). Those teachers who volunteered to experience an urban school setting had to attend and participate in two workshops focused on diversity. The teachers who participated in a rural school setting were not given an additional support.

The study revealed that all of the teacher candidates in both groups maintained
stereotypical attitudes regarding minority children and minority neighborhoods prior to their field placement and had very few strategies for addressing the needs of diverse learners (Duarte & Reed, 2004). At the end of the field-based experience, the experimental group was more reflective in terms of how to make learning experiences more meaningful; accommodated a variety of student learning styles in the classrooms; and presented resources that utilized multicultural literature to focus on issues that supported the minority experience and facilitated learning that accounted for students’ cultural background (Duarte & Reed, 2004). The control group, who received no additional professional development, maintained deficit attitudes about diversity. As a result, Duarte and Reed (2004) recommended that teacher education programs restructure their field experiences to include specific strategies for working in diverse school settings.

Addressing the Inadequacy of Pre-Service Training for Working with ELLs

Although the number of culturally and linguistically diverse students continues to increase rapidly in the United States, pre-service teacher candidates continue to be more representative of white, middle-class English teachers (Jones, 2002). United States demographic and pedagogical trends indicate that the classrooms in which teachers currently teach differ considerably from the ones that they experienced as students (Harrison & Lakin, 2018). Teacher preparation is essential for both teaching effectiveness and student academic achievement (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009).

According to Ladson-Billings (2005), the real issues facing pre-service teacher candidates are the disconnections between and among students, families, communities,
and teachers. Although 88% of teachers instruct ELLs, mainstream teachers lack foundational knowledge related to current ELL issues (Karabenick & Noda, 2004). It is important to provide professional development to pre-service teachers so that they can adequately instruct diverse learners (Brown, 2005). With the growing population, it is urgent that teachers realize that other cultural norms and practices exist within the classroom setting (Yuan, 2017).

O’Neal et al. (2008) collected survey data and conducted focus group interviews with 21 elementary classroom teachers from one rural school in their study of teachers’ perceptions of their preparation for instructing ELLs. According to the findings, 75% of the participants responded that they felt they were not prepared for teaching ELLs. Villegas (2008) indicated that due to the highly diverse population of the United States, public schools are expected to function as a major role in bringing about the unification of the nation by providing a “common education” to students from diverse groups, offering everyone “the knowledge and skills they need for successful integration into American society, regardless of differences in backgrounds” (p. 551).

Brown (2004) suggested that state agencies should intervene and mandate credentialing programs to require pre-service teachers to take courses in ELL methods and diversity, rather than solely focusing on general education theory and content-specific instruction. Meskill (2005) indicated that new teachers feel equally as unprepared as veteran teachers when dealing with culturally diverse students. Schorr (2013) suggested that a misconnection between teacher training and practice does exist. Typically, teacher preparation programs and education schools put much of their attention and energy into theory instead of preparing teachers for the daily realities of the
classroom (Schorr, 2013). This should be considered evidence that teacher education programs are not successfully equipping pre-service teachers. To continue building systems of support for excellent teaching and learning, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 included the reauthorization of Title II-A, the Supportive Effective Instruction State Grants Program. This grant program served as a critical federal supplement to state and school district efforts to ensure that educators have access to high-quality professional development; to promote leadership, coaching, and mentoring to meet student needs; and to implement support for effective instructional materials and innovative technologies (Ludwig, Boyle, & Lindsay, 2017.)

According to de Jong, Harper, and Coady (2013), placing ELLs in mainstream classes raises concerns about mainstream teachers’ preparation to work with ELLs. It is essential for teachers to learn about ELLs’ personal linguistic histories and cultural experiences both within and beyond the school setting. Although teachers are not necessarily well-versed on the individual backgrounds of all of their students, teachers gain a vast amount of information by learning about students’ prior knowledge as it relates to their lives at home and within their communities (de Jong et al., 2013). Mantero (2008) stated that teacher–student interactions can assert students’ linguistic, cultural, and personal identities in order to establish conditions in the classroom for optimal identity in the learning process. According to Cummins (2001), ELLs are reluctant in pursuing an investment in their own identity through the learning process if they firmly believe that teachers do not respect them, do not like them, and do not display appreciation for their experiences as linguistic and diverse learners. Teachers filter through their mandated curriculum and content according to their own perspectives and experiences and will
teach in the same manner that they themselves were taught, which usually results in a huge discrepancy between the ethnic profiles of students and the teachers themselves (Mantero, 2008).

Just as teachers must be educated to recognize cultural and linguistic differences, they must also be taught about best practices when working with language learners. According to Meskill (2005), teachers must learn that a strong bond exists between language and culture and should understand the theories behind language acquisition, the impact of culture in the learning process, effective strategies for communicating with parents of ELLs, and the additional responsibilities that come with working and teaching ELL students. Solomon, Lalas, and Franklin (2006), who focused on the pedagogy of working with ELLs, added additional themes of importance for new teachers working with ELLs, which included instructional strategies, effective modifications, and assessment practices. Watson, Miller, Driver, Rutledge, and McAllister (2005) investigated frequently used college teacher textbooks in an effort to determine how pre-service teachers are introduced to the various facets of working with ELLs. Problems have been identified with the textbooks used in college classes, as they lack development of cultural competency and the ability to understand the unique needs of students who are learning a new language (Watson et al., 2005). According to Watson et al. (2005), although issues of diversity are addressed in the curriculum at the university level, the instruction often lacks a discussion of practical issues that pertain to instructing ELLs in the classroom.

Webster’s and Valeo’s (2011) study explored teachers’ preparation practices from the perspectives of teacher candidates. The findings showed that there was a disconnect
between teacher candidates’ preparation and their self-efficacy in meeting the needs of ELLs. The participants stated that they needed additional schooling on linguistic knowledge as well as instruction on the language acquisition process (Webster & Valeo, 2011). These findings revealed that pre-service teachers indicated that there were no mandatory classes geared toward ELL students. Content regarding ELLs was embedded within mandatory courses, and the strategies shared in courses appeared to categorize ELL learners as a homogeneous group rather than one in need of differentiated instruction due to their linguistic needs (Webster & Valeo, 2011). Instilling content into mandatory courses is not enough to educate pre-service teachers to adequately address the needs of ELLs in the classroom (Webster & Valeo, 2011). Complex components of English language learning can be compressed into an extremely basic form of information. When crucial ELL preparation information is condensed so minimalistically, many teachers falsely feel at ease, believing that they will be able to learn what they need to with minimal groundwork (Wright, 2010).

Blanchett, Mumford, and Beachum (2005) cited findings from their qualitative study of urban school stakeholders in which a common complaint was that teachers were not given the opportunity to develop cultural competency in their teacher education programs. In an effort to confront this problem, Jones (2002) admitted that many programs had begun to require at least one course in multiculturalism. According to Lucas and Grinberg (2008), issues of bilingualism in education have to be understood, not just by bilingual and ESL teachers but also by mainstream teachers. Garcia and Kleifgen (2018) pointed out that all language teachers must have some expertise in content areas, as content teachers should have expertise in language. Teacher education
programs are slowly beginning to adopt required coursework centered around ELLs for undergraduate pre-service teacher education programs (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018).

Over 20 years ago, Ryan (1998) emphasized that it was necessary to encourage teachers to be sensitive to the needs of culture within the classroom setting and to establish cultural competency within the learning environment. It was argued by Ryan (1998) that when working with ELLs, language and culture are inseparable. Learning how to recognize cultural differences while respecting the specific needs of individual students based upon those cultural differences is crucial for teachers working with linguistically diverse learners. However, as new teachers continue to voice their concerns about being unprepared, it is obvious and apparent that more instruction must be offered to provide teachers with the resources they need to reach ELL students (Yuan, 2017).

**Teachers’ Attitudes and Beliefs About ELLs in the Classroom**

Existing research indicates that English learners’ experiences will develop over time based upon the attitudes and beliefs of the teachers they have encountered over their academic careers. As reported by Pettit (2011), “The beliefs and attitudes of teachers, perhaps as much as qualifications, can affect what children learn in the classroom” (p. 4). Teachers’ expectations and attitudes toward their students have been shown to be deeply connected to students’ academic success (Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Mainstream teachers’ attitudes toward ELLs can greatly influence the type of instruction that students receive. As of yet, little research has focused on mainstream teacher attitudes and how teachers view their roles in regard to ELLs in their classrooms (Yoon, 2008). The study conducted by Walker et al. (2004) analyzed existing teacher programs in their entirety. A majority of respondents to this survey held negative attitudes toward having ELLs in the
classroom due to a lack of time and the additional demands these students place on teachers to meet their academic needs. With these views toward ELLs, mainstream teachers may find it difficult to create a welcoming environment for ELL students, which can negatively affect student learning.

The experiences ELLs have in school are partly dependent upon the beliefs of the teachers they encounter. Sleeter (2005) stated that ideological beliefs can be drawn upon by one’s prior life experiences and what they learned while growing up. In order for these students to become academically successful, teachers must hold positive beliefs and high expectations for them (Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010). According to Durgunoglu and Hughes (2010), teachers who felt that they were better prepared for teaching ELLs had a positive attitude, while teachers who had lower perceptions of their preparation for working with ELLs held more negative beliefs. As McSwain (2001) stated, “Teachers’ self-perceptions of cultural and linguistic competency as they relate to helping children achieve academic and social potential play a powerful and intricate role in the type of educational services provided to culturally and linguistically diverse children” (p. 54). As a result, these beliefs and attitudes can affect what children learn in the classroom.

Unfortunately, many mainstream teachers hold deficit beliefs toward the ELLs in their classrooms (Walker et al., 2004). Valencia (1997) defined deficit thinking as a pseudoscience where research is flawed by negative biases. Sadly, when teachers view linguistically diverse students and their families through the lens of the mainstream population, they tend to notice deficits in their students’ abilities rather than their strengths (Arauja, 2009).

Examinations of teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about language minority students
play a critical role in determining the academic outcomes for this population (Valdes, 2001). There has not been a tremendous amount of research focused on mainstream teacher attitudes and beliefs. Yet, what is known today is that there are several facets to the inclusion of ELL students in mainstream classrooms that impact teachers’ attitudes and beliefs. The inclusion of ELLs can bring forth both positive and negative attitudes from teachers. Many teachers feel unprepared to work with this student population, which may lead to resentment when working with this subgroup (Mellom, Straubhaar, Balderas, Ariail, & Portes, 2018). Teachers’ attitudes and beliefs have an impact on the quality of instruction of ELLs, who substantially underachieve academically compared to their native-English-speaking peers. Teachers who harbor ethnocentric, negative, or racist attitudes about ELLs are often unsuccessful in working with ELLs and fail to meet the social and academic needs of these students (Tse, 2001; Valdes, 2001; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Teachers’ attitudes and beliefs play an instrumental role in student performance, as they are formed by the values they maintain (Freeman & Freeman, 1994). It has been demonstrated that if teachers have unexamined negative beliefs toward ELLs, then even the most well-intentioned teachers might discriminate without even realizing it (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997). However, teachers who hold high expectations for ELLs are able to make a positive impact on the school experiences of these students.

There may also be an assumption among teachers that if ELLs are in the mainstream classroom, they must be proficient with the English language. This is often not the case, which can be very misleading to the teacher, thus adding to negative attitudes toward this population. Through the modification of professional development that focuses on the needs of ELLs, additional professional development in working with
ELLs can positively influence teachers’ attitudes (Walker et al., 2004). If ELLs are to succeed in the K–12 setting, opportunities to participate in a challenging curriculum must be made available to them. These opportunities allow ELL students to comprehend the lesson content and to reach their fullest potential.

Over 30 years ago, Good and Brophy (1986) collected data for several years regarding the effect of teachers’ attitudes and expectations on student learning. Their research indicated that if students are aware that their teachers do not believe in them, the students lose motivation to keep trying to perform better. The findings suggested that teachers were not aware of their own beliefs and expectations, which contributed to their self-fulfilling prophecies of the students they served (Good & Brophy, 1986). More often than not, teachers do not maintain high expectations of ELL students (Jones, 2002). Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane (2004) reported that teachers hold lower expectations much more frequently with economically challenged minority students. The findings from their qualitative study of teachers’ expectations revealed that some teachers were more apt to believe that minority students’ backgrounds prevented them from being able to succeed.

Over 20 years ago, Byrnes, Kiger, and Manning (1997) examined teacher attitudes using the Language Attitudes of Teachers Scale. The purpose of their study was to understand the factors that influence teachers’ language attitudes in order to improve the learning opportunities for language minority students. The results revealed the following:

1. A high number of recent immigrant students were not found in high concentrations in public schools;
2. Very few public school teachers had the professional development needed to formally teach English as a second language; and
3. Teachers’ lack of understanding of students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds could engender negative feelings that might influence academic expectations for English language learners.

It was also noted that elementary teachers maintained positive mindsets when it came to language attitudes in comparison to secondary teachers. Secondary teachers’ content expertise resulted in frustration about the perceived lack of progress made by ELL students (Byrnes et al., 1997). However, the findings indicating that elementary teachers were more positive toward ELL students than secondary teachers were not supported by research nine years later. Reeves (2006) reported that secondary, subject-area teachers displayed a neutral to slightly positive attitude toward the inclusion of ELLs in their mainstream classrooms. Further analysis of teachers’ attitudes toward specific aspects of inclusion suggested that this self-reported, welcoming attitude may mask or accompany a reluctance to work with particular ELLs, especially those who demonstrate limited English proficiency (Reeves, 2006).

Research by Karabenick and Noda (2004) identified how teacher attitudes influence and impact academic performance. Their study first examined the ELL practices, beliefs, and attitudes of 729 teachers districtwide and then examined whether there was a distinction between teachers who were more or less accepting of ELLs in their classrooms. The study was conducted in a midwestern suburban district that had recently received an influx of immigrants and refugee ELLs. The findings indicated that ELLs, for the most part, were not viewed as problematic by staff, teachers, and
administrators but that it was essential that mainstream teachers understood the process of
second-language acquisition.

Teachers’ actions in the classroom also reflect their beliefs. Macnab and Payne
(2003) pointed out, “The beliefs and attitudes of teachers—cultural, ideological and
personal—are significant determinants of the way they view their role as educators” (p.
55). Teachers’ beliefs influence how they make choices about their subject matter and
determine their purpose in teaching (Richardson, 1996). This is easily demonstrated as
teachers make decisions about lessons or units to teach, which is also influenced by their
beliefs. Teachers’ beliefs influence their instruction, and as a result, their practices
influence student outcomes (Desimone, 2009; Schickendanz, 2003). For example,
teachers will emphasize different aspects of the curriculum based on their perceptions of
which students deserve and/or can master rigor in instruction (Nieto, 2018).

Compelling implications can be made based on teachers’ attitudes and beliefs
about ELLs in the classroom. For example, over 24 years ago, Rueda and Garcia (1996)
discovered that teachers’ beliefs about second-language learning and teaching guide their
perceptions and judgments, which in turn affected students’ behavior in the classroom.
Similarly, 10 years later, teachers’ attitudes toward ELLs affected the interactions
between students and the teacher in the classroom, impacting student achievement
(Mantero & McVicker, 2006). In particular, teachers’ beliefs about their ability to meet
the needs of ELLs accounted for high student motivation and performance (Karabenick &
Noda, 2004).

Teachers’ attitudes and sensitivity toward other cultures, especially those of their
students, is necessary (Gay, 2002; MacPherson, 2010). Although it does not seem likely
that attitudes can be changed merely by learning new knowledge, it is knowledge that affects the way one views the world. Gaining more knowledge about ethnically diverse students’ histories builds more sensitivity toward the experiences of their ethnic students, and teachers of ELLs must have a true awareness of the students they teach (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Having access to this knowledge assists teachers in linking new language and content learning with students’ experiences and prior knowledge (Cummins et al., 2005). ELL students may possess a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. As a result of the various classroom backgrounds of diverse learners, teachers need to learn about their students’ home and community history to identify the funds of knowledge that they already bring to an assigned learning task (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Herrera, 2010).

A connection between culturally competent educators and positive outcomes for students has been developed in an attempt to inspire equitable excellence, give voice to those who are never heard, and ensure that no child is made invisible (Samuels, 2018). Educators must be ready and armed with the tools to establish and facilitate environments that embrace cultural responsiveness (Samuels, 2018). In a study conducted by Samuels (2018), participants expressed the benefits of implementing cultural responsiveness in the classroom, which included relationship building, instilling cross-cultural understanding and inclusiveness, and providing diverse perspectives of the world. The participants spoke extensively as to how the approach allowed students to be connected and valued while empowering students to help themselves understand and positively view themselves and others (Samuels, 2018). These feelings inspired the participants to maintain cultural identity and integrity. Teachers must be able to engage and take risks in a space where they feel safe to explore their own anxieties and vulnerability, as well as
their biases, for the benefit of their students and to provide an inclusive classroom (Samuels, 2018).

**Deficit Thinking Beliefs**

“Deficit thinking” refers to the labeling of socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students and their families as at-risk and uninvolved (Johnson, 1994). Deficit thinking blames academic failure on the students’ lack of readiness to learn in the classroom, the parents’ lack of interest in their education, and the families’ overall lifestyle (Walker, 2011). The most devastating impact of deficit thinking is when differences, particularly sociocultural differences, are perceived as inferior, dysfunctional, or deviant. Additionally, deficit thinking has a profound negative influence on students’ confidence and self-efficacy (Weiner, 2006). Stereotypes and negative beliefs about certain groups of people, such as people of color and people living in poverty, are well-documented in United States history (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Deficit beliefs manifest through beliefs about limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation, and immoral behavior (Valencia, 1997). Lopez (2018) further explained that deficiency models in the arena of education reflect the notion that assimilation leads to success, where marginalized students often abandon their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. According to Nelson and Guerra (2014), reliance on educators’ personal beliefs over professional knowledge is problematic, especially in light of the research on beliefs related to educating diverse learners.

Deficit thinking emerged from the ethnocentric notion that “the beliefs and standards of the dominant group were inherently correct, and students who do not adhere to the beliefs or standards were genetically inferior, culturally void, or socially depraved”
(Nelson & Guerra, 2014, p. 71). Through this lens, educators were cautious to take responsibility for students’ low achievement and failure. Deficit thinking created a disincentive for educators to engage in school reform efforts, even when they were mandated, because they believed that students and their families were the root of the problem (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Garcia and Guerra (2004) held that educators do not view themselves as part of the problem and have little willingness to look for solutions within the educational system itself.

Weiner (2006) contended that public school educators who operate within the deficit thinking paradigm believe that unless students of color change background factors such as their culture, values, and family structures, they will encounter minimal or no opportunities to be successful in school. Teachers who accept this paradigm also resist modifying their own instructional practices. When children receive negative messages regarding their performance or behaviors, they begin a downward spiral in confidence and self-efficacy. When blame for academic failure is placed on students and families, the systemic realities that inform schooling outcomes are not held responsible for their contributions (Anderson, 2013). As these educators continue to utilize deficit thinking, the students must then adapt to the resources and programs in place or run the risk of failure (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Teachers have the greatest impact on students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2007), and in this interaction, teachers must overcome their preconceived notions of deficit thinking. Fortunately, this is not true of all educators; deficit thinking by teachers is “the exception” in some schools and “the rule” in others. Garcia and Guerra (2004) contended that deficit thinking permeates society, and as a result, schools and teachers mirror these beliefs in many settings rather than holding high
expectations and a belief in students’ assets.

**Perceptions of the Second-Language Acquisition Process**

As the linguistic minority population increases, teacher education programs must prioritize including courses aimed at diversity and ELL strategies for all teachers (Batt, 2008). Teachers face obstacles when trying to meet the needs of ELLs who are themselves facing greater challenges in mastering academic content in a second language. According to Batt (2008), teachers not only require knowing how to teach content knowledge but should also be required to know how to utilize language-teaching skills.

Knowledge of second-language acquisition theory is necessary for teachers of ELL students in order to promote an encouraging educational environment for ELLs. Providing professional development to teachers on second-language acquisition is an area that must be addressed. Twenty years ago, Short and Echevarria (2004–2005), identified that many students were receiving instruction from teachers who lack adequate preparation to work with ELLs effectively. Unfortunately, this problem persists (Yuan, 2017). Educators who work with ELLs might benefit from knowledge of second-language acquisition to help ELLs navigate successfully through academic content (Christian, 1999). Teachers need to fully comprehend how language fits into academic learning; however, too many teacher preparation programs do not adequately provide this instruction for all teacher candidates (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000). According to Cho, Rios, Trent, and Mayfield (2012), teacher candidates must prepare for the language diversity that they will encounter in the classroom, as it is essential that language acquisition strategies be explicit components of a teacher preparation education to better prepare future teachers.
Learning a second language is not a linear process and not an easy task. Second-language acquisition research argues that there are several individual differences in attaining a second language. The reasons for these differences are not completely understood by researchers. Having a knowledge base regarding how a learner acquires a second language and then applying it toward their academic courses is essential for teachers (Ren Dong, 2004). Recognizing the importance of students’ first language in learning a second language is also a component of the background knowledge teachers should be aware of. Awareness of second-language acquisition can help to minimize negative attitudes toward ELL students (Ren Dong, 2004). Valuing the importance of students’ first language helps educators understand how students can acquire a second language while making academic progress (Ren Dong, 2004).

Mace-Matluck, Alexander-Kasparik, and Queen (1998) indicated three areas that affect language learning: (a) fluency in the first language, (b) the model of second-language learning that is available, and (c) the interpersonal and social characteristics of the student. In high school, acquiring a second language is complex, given the short amount of time a student has to learn the English language. Language acquisition is a development process, and the stages are flexible and not mutually exclusive. Subsequently, knowledge of second-language acquisition theory is necessary to promote an encouraging educational environment for ELLs (Cho et al., 2012; Christian, 1999; Ren Dong, 2004; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000).

The Role of Language and Communication in School

Communication is key in the field of education, and the role it plays in students’ education is critical to their success. Barriers can be created if communication between
teachers and students does not exist. If teachers are not able to communicate with their students, or if teachers are not able to understand how their students communicate to them, an obstacle to learning exists for the student and the teacher. If teachers are placed in an unfamiliar, linguistically diverse setting where various languages are involved, communication becomes much more difficult between the learner and the teacher. As a result, teachers should be well-versed in students’ communication abilities and their diverse language backgrounds (Cho et al., 2012).

Classroom language instruction is another crucial component teachers need to be aware of (de Jong, 2013). ELLs may have a limited English language vocabulary base compared to their native-English-speaking peers. As ELLs progress into higher grades, academic language becomes much more difficult to understand. For ELLs to be successful in an academic setting, they must be instructed in English grammar and language as well as how academic English is utilized across all content classes (Short, 2000). According to Short et al. (2018), ELLs must do double the work when learning academic English while studying core content areas, which is difficult to do when they are not given ample time to develop their English skills.

Age-appropriate knowledge of the English language may be a prerequisite for students to be able to attain content standards (Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006). The work of Jim Cummins influenced K–12 educators’ understanding of language development and ELL literacy development (Wright, 2010). Students learn vocabulary to support basic interpersonal communication skills (social language) and for cognitive academic language proficiency (academic language). These two constructs provide an understanding of the components needed for ELLs to successfully navigate their
educational experiences (Roy-Campbell, 2013). Once vocabulary is associated with academic courses, they are made comprehensible. Students can then gain comprehension, which increases knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. Teachers should not assume that English is being taught in another class (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Teachers should also not have the mindset that it is not their responsibility to teach this vocabulary due to a lack of professional development. Learning comprehension for ELLs does not occur by simply disseminating facts and information. Learning occurs when opportunities are provided for meaningful communication in the target language with members of the classroom community (Walqui, 2000). All staff members working at a school site should be trained on how to interact with the ELL population (Walker et al., 2004).

Recognizing and gaining knowledge about multilingual students’ language and communication involves the ability to deeply decipher the codes of students. Gay (2002) revealed that being able to accurately assess a student’s knowledge and ability is linked to how well a teacher communicates with that student, and the intellectual thoughts of minority students are communicated in ways that are influenced by their own cultural socialization. This skill requires the teacher’s ability to not only have knowledge of students’ communication styles, intonation and body movements, discourse features, contextual factors, delivery, speaker–listener relationships, vocabulary use, and gestures but to also have knowledge about how students from all the ethnic groups in the class use these communication features (Gay, 2002).

When teachers are challenged by students’ culturally expressive behavior, it is important that they are able to recognize, understand, accept, and respond to it accordingly. There is also a varying degree of communication knowledge to gain in
regard to multilingual students. An example might be knowing how to pronounce students’ names (Edwards, 1998). One can recognize differences, have an awareness of, and respect that minority students are different, but research suggests going beyond this basic level of knowledge (Gay, 2002); however, building on students’ prior linguistic knowledge (Edwards, 1998; Schmidt & Lazar, 2011) will require a much deeper level of understanding of students’ language backgrounds and language experiences.

Teachers should also be well-versed in general language knowledge. Buxton, Lee, and Santau (2008) stated that teachers’ limitations in the area of language knowledge are a barrier to learning for ELL students. Buxton et al. (2008) revealed that science instruction was highly relevant for understanding how language and content work together in teaching practice for the benefit of ELL students; however, it was discovered that teachers hindered ELLs’ academic success as a result of their limited language knowledge. Wong-Fillmore and Snow (2000) stated that teachers must have enough knowledge about the structure of language to be able to understand their students.

Teachers also need to be mindful of the importance of language when working with ELLs so that they can use their professional judgment as to whether language issues will resolve themselves on their own or whether modification of language is in order (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Modification is needed with linguistic and diverse learners to make complex content-area academic language understandable (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Teachers continually make judgments based on language behaviors that may have monumental consequences on the lives of students. According to Wong-Fillmore and Snow (2000), educators may mistake language development issues or language differences for cognitive deficiencies, which causes many ELL students to be
inappropriately placed in special education programs.

Classrooms that service ELL students are considered language environments, where language is at the forefront of teaching and learning. Linguistically diverse students would benefit greatly if teachers viewed language as an essential element in the subject areas they teach and acknowledged the contributions ELL students make in the classroom (Bailey, Burkett, & Freeman, 2008). Educators who work with ELLs might benefit from knowledge of second-language acquisition to help ELLs navigate successfully through academic content (Christian, 1999). According to Ziegenfuss, Odhiambo, and Keyes (2014), recognizing the level of language understanding is an essential element of language instruction in content area. All teachers should understand how language is acquired, because all teachers teach students who are learning the English language. Teachers need to understand how language fits into academic learning (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000).

De Jong et al. (2013) stated that teachers must be cognizant of the critical roles that culture and language play within a school setting. Teachers who educate ELLs should have knowledge about the process of language acquisition and the importance of the classroom environment in this process. Teachers of ELL students need to understand the relationship between students’ native language (L1) and their second language (L2) (de Jong et al., 2013).

**Multiculturalism in the Classroom Setting**

Multicultural education has become imperative in the 21st century. Multicultural education is an expansive concept, a reform movement, a process, and incorporates the idea that all students regardless of racial and ethnic group, socioeconomic status,
linguistic background, disability, or sexual orientation have equal opportunity to receive a high-quality education (Banks & Banks, 2005; Janks, 2010; Nieto, 2002). According to Sleeter (2005), working through the lens of multiple perspectives and multiple frames of reference is an integral component of multicultural curriculum design. All too often, multicultural curriculum is nothing more than a repetition of mainstream knowledge with a few glimpses of diversity added in (Sleeter, 2005).

The United States has evolved from a nation that has been characterized as predominantly white to a country where many residents come from non-European, non-white, and non-English-speaking groups (D’Andrea & Daniels, 2001; Pennock-Roman, 2002). It is no surprise that with such drastic changes in the nation’s demographics, teacher education programs are not preparing monolingual educators to work effectively with students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (O’Neal et al., 2008). Individuals who know the world from only their cultural viewpoints deny themselves parts of the human experience (Banks, 2019). Banks (2019) stated that helping individuals gain a greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures is key to multicultural education. Affirming the diversity of students begins with the process of questioning and confronting the biases that exist within the teaching profession (Nieto, 2000). With a homogeneous teaching force and the increased numbers of linguistic and diverse students, a sense of urgency is needed to improve the effectiveness of multicultural education.

As stated by O’Neal et al. (2008), teacher preparation programs have now added multiculturalism and diversity to the curriculum of teacher preparation programs, but it seems as though these topics have only touched the surface of the real implications in
terms of how these concepts impact teachers and students. The focus of multiculturalism
and diversity has been addressed in textbooks in regard to how students view themselves.
As stated by O’Neal et al. (2008), “Teacher preparation programs missed the mark by not
preparing teachers to directly teach these students and instead just teach about these
students” (p. 5). According to Nieto (2000), although teacher preparation programs have
made attempts, negative assumptions have been made toward teaching diverse
populations based on deficit beliefs, which maintain the perspective that students from
non-dominant groups bring little value to their education. Placing blame on students and
their families has continued to perpetuate academic failure for students who are not
characterized as reflecting the majority (Nieto, 2018). Nieto (2018) revealed that this
practice shifts the blame to the student instead of examining the policies and practices
within teacher preparation programs. Trueba and Bartolomé (2000) suggested that before
teachers can work with culturally and linguistically diverse populations, ideological
clarity must be developed such that teachers must fully comprehend their personal
beliefs, the origin of their beliefs, and the impact they will have on the students they
teach.

Parekh (2000) stated that monolingual education causes individuals to judge other
societies and cultures from their own perspective, which can lead them to believe that
they are insignificant. According to Darling-Hammond (2004), one way to make
permanent changes to how teacher candidates are prepared to work with diverse and
linguistic students is to create coherent programs where teacher educators build a shared
vision of good teaching, use common standards of practice that guide and assess
coursework and clinical work, and demonstrate shared knowledge and common beliefs
about teaching and learning. Nieto (2018) asserted that teachers should make efforts to learn about their students, so teachers can also benefit from learning from their students. In other words, creating a coherent multicultural teacher education program requires faculty members to strive for and identify a central focus for teacher learning, to be collectively responsible, and to have the opportunity to influence policies and practices.

**Teachers’ Attitudes and Beliefs Toward ELL Professional Development**

The professional development of mainstream teachers should result in an understanding of and knowledge that pertains to the instruction of English learners. Effective professional development includes components that researchers (Desimone, 2009; Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013; National Staff Development Council, 2011; Stewart, 2014) agree must be present so that learning is sustainable, which will most likely aid in the implementation in practice. Essential components include content that is relevant to the teachers’ daily practice and a topic in which participants share an interest and can actively participate in discussing. Professional development should allow the participants time to internalize the content and implement the professional development in a supportive learning environment. The mindsets or belief systems of the teachers must also shift in order for their behavior toward students to change successfully in the classroom (National Staff Development Council, 2011; Sailor & Price, 2010).

For teachers to truly feel effective in their craft, they need to take an active role in learning about their ELL students’ backgrounds (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). If teachers are expected to become knowledgeable in various arenas, then teachers must continuously strive to become lifelong learners. Teacher change as it relates to professional development becomes a pronounced topic because of the controversy
surrounding its effectiveness (Macias, 2017). Macias (2017) indicated that the current trend in professional growth opportunities occurs when teachers are led through a bottom-up structure. By utilizing a bottom-up structure, the assumption is made that topics are relevant to the teaching profession, since teachers had a say in the professional development. Top-down, in the realm of professional development, refers to mandated training decided by those at the district or government level. A bottom-up model implies that teachers are in charge of making professional development selections and designed these workshops based on teacher needs (Macias, 2017). Top-down structured professional development can create resistance among teachers, who may feel that their current practices are under attack. Teacher professional development should be geared toward giving teachers development tools that encourage their commitment to their profession (Mann, 2005). More meaning is given to teachers when they have the opportunity to gain further ideas that benefit students’ learning goals. According to Mann (2005), the efforts of effective teacher change and development should be put into the hands of teachers themselves.

If teachers are supplied with ideas that will assist them to pursue new information, then mandated professional development sessions are not necessarily the only resource for teachers. Teachers can make the change and take charge of their own learning. Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, and Driscoll (2005) conducted a study in which 5,300 educators responded to an online or paper survey. More than half (approximately 58%) of the sampled kindergarten to sixth grade teachers reported teaching their ELL students in mainstream settings, with about 15% teaching in structured English immersion. Focus group teachers at the elementary and secondary levels indicated that they would like to
see collaboration as a central part of their professional development. The teachers expressed a strong desire and need to observe successful teachers, collaborate and plan with their colleagues, and establish coaching relationships in an ongoing manner rather than a one-shot professional development course (Gándara et al., 2005). Mann (2005) stressed that without bottom-up teacher professional development, which is crucial for the teaching profession, top-down professional development would never be able contribute its full effect and would continue to receive the criticism it is known for.

With the increased enrollment of ELL populations, the need for professional development for teachers has become a priority for many districts (Reeves, 2006). Although teachers have received professional development in working with the ELL population, teachers still believe that they lack the necessary skills to work with ELLs. Valdes (2001) explained that for subject-area teachers, the mentality has been that bilingual teachers or ESL teachers are solely responsible for providing ELL instruction. Reeves (2006) stated that in order for ELLs to have equitable access to the core curriculum, all subject-area teachers must also be actively engaged in ELL students’ education, allowing students to equitably access the curriculum.

Teachers’ uncertainty about ELL professional development has also been a contributing factor to the disconcerting feelings of teachers in regard to professional development geared toward diverse learners. Teachers have reported that their frustration lies within the barrage of inconsistent professional development programs that have continually failed to provide the support they need to create educational change (Reeves, 2006). Teachers have expressed that much of their experience with professional development pertaining to ELLs has not been consistent or meaningful (Reeves, 2006).
One-size-fits-all professional development models should be avoided, as support needs to be tailored to meet the needs of each school and staff (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008). Menken and Antunez (2001) and Montgomery, Roberts, and Growe (2003) discovered these types of in-service workshops to be short-lived, sharing superficial ELL-related concepts that did not provide in-depth knowledge or connections that would have a lasting impact on teaching practices.

Hasslen and Bacharach (2007) and McGregor and Vogelsberg (1998) cited the impact of effectively supporting teachers on feelings of teacher competence. Teacher professional development is a highly contested topic because some teachers feel upset by being told what to do to improve their teaching. When professional development is mandated, teachers may feel they are under scrutiny and that they are being judged. If this occurs, then change is not effectively encouraged (August & Hakuta, 1997).

Professional development, to be effective, must dispel inaccuracies and misconceptions and instead provide teachers with research-based data on similarities and differences in learning displayed by ELLs and their English-speaking peers (Walker et al., 2004).

If it is possible to change beliefs through effective professional development, then it is critical for mainstream teachers of ELLs to receive it. Walker et al. (2004) discovered that “even a little appropriate training can go a long way in preventing and improving negative teacher attitudes” toward ELLs (p. 142). According to Clair and Temple (1999), the professional development of teachers with respect to ELLs needs to be designed with teacher input using principles of adult learning. Possible structures include university–school partnerships, teacher networks, and teacher study groups. It is important for pre-service teachers of ELLs to understand “basic constructs of
bilingualism and second-language development, the nature of language proficiency, and the role of the first language and culture in learning” (Clair & Temple, 1999, p. 3). In order for professional development to be successful, it needs to be supported by district and school policies and be given adequate time and resources (Reeves, 2006).

Couch (2010) indicated in a study on teachers’ professional development that teachers require more knowledge about culturally responsive teaching. Incorporating students’ cultures into instruction would increase ELLs’ learning, and teachers’ failure to integrate culture might cause students’ low academic achievement (Santamaria, 2009). As a result, there is a strong desire for mainstream classroom teachers to receive more coaching in cultural responsiveness. Wright (2010) pointed out that educators who work with ELLs must be aware of the linguistic diversity in their communities and in their schools. Teachers should have a better understanding of their students’ ethnicities and cultural orientation, as this becomes a necessity when trying to provide ELLs with effective instruction. Knowing in-depth information about their students allows teachers to provide the fundamental support needed to provide successful academic instruction.

Amid the frequent changes in instructional models and the growing diversity of student populations, many teachers still participate in professional development opportunities that are better aligned with the needs of the past (Walker et al., 2004).

**Creating a Positive Culture for ELLs**

School culture is a crucial component of school processes and helps to define how schools are organized, how academic standards and social skills are developed within the organization, and how the school’s vision is supported (McCollum & Yoder, 2011). School culture is one of the strongest frameworks for student achievement and is
essential to establishing a learning environment that produces students who are successful. It influences every facet of a school, including how individuals interact within the school (McCollum & Yoder, 2011). Administrators and teachers must know about their diverse students and their cultures and, through the spirit of empathy, recognize that they are valuable learners. Ensuring the success of ELL students requires the commitment of everyone in a school community (Stepanek & Raphael, 2010). Part of building a positive school culture lays in creating a strong foundation based on a clearly stated mission and vision for the school and its stakeholders. Cultures are not created instantly. Jerald (2006) stated that culture is born from an organization’s vision, beliefs, values, and mission. From that, culture develops and grows through “an accumulation of actions, traditions, symbols, ceremonies, and rituals that are closely aligned to the vision” (Fisher, Frey, & Pumpian 2012, p. 6).

According Fisher et al. (2012), school culture should not be underground and assumed. It should be uncovered, openly and purposely discussed, assessed, and developed. School culture cannot be hidden and implicit; rather, it must be as explicit as the approach to teaching and learning (Fisher et al., 2012). An effective school culture provides students with a respectful experience through which they examine, affirm, or modify their understanding of the world (Fisher et al., 2012).

A critical factor in the success of a school’s education programs is the principal’s support in creating a culture in which all students are encouraged to reach for academic success. According to Jerald (2006), administrators are the guardians of time. By utilizing this time to encourage meetings on an ongoing basis, teachers realize the importance of student outcomes and the need for shared decision making. The goal is to foster a sense
of collegiality, which leads to authentic collaboration in which teachers recognize the success of working together to raise student achievement. In a school with a positive school culture, collaboration is the norm. Teachers seek each other’s expertise and share ideas. Through collaboration, teachers can better their practice by sharing specific techniques for teaching ELLs and developing academic language.

To maintain a strong culture, relational trust grows over time through exchanges where the expectations held for others are validated in action (Byrk & Schneider, 2002). Deal and Peterson (1999) asserted that a strong, positive culture is indicative of including the following: fostering effort and productivity, improving collegial and collaborative activities, supporting successful change and improvement efforts, building commitment and helping students and teachers identify with the school, and focusing attention and daily behavior on what is important and valued. Effective collaboration provides opportunities for teachers to dialogue, share, acquire knowledge, and enhance their teaching (Musanti & Pence, 2010). A school culture that supports equitable and excellent educational opportunities for ELLs includes schoolwide beliefs about the potential of ELLs, interest in and appreciation for ELLs’ culture, and the desire to foster positive relationships with the families of ELLs. Creating a positive school culture begins at the individual level where common goals are shared, stakeholders are involved in the process, and collaboration occurs to ensure that ELL success is at the forefront.

**Summary**

This dissertation contributes to the field of study concerned with teachers’ attitudes and beliefs by examining teachers’ perceptions of preparation and self-efficacy. Through an examination of culturally sustaining pedagogy, teachers can gain an
understanding of and appreciation for minority culture while developing a commitment to educational equity and cultural, racial, and social justice (Irizarry, 2017). Teachers can then develop an understanding of the language acquisition process so that ELLs’ instructional needs are met (Walker et al., 2004). By looking deeply at all of the factors that can make a difference in the attitudes and beliefs of teachers, a great contribution can be made to the linguistic and academic growth of ELLs. Chapter 3 will present the methodology of this study.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

According to Quintero and Hansen (2017), ELLs are the most rapid-growing subgroup in public schools across the United States, with an increase of 60% in the last decade. The rapid growth in the ELL population has not been met with sufficient growth in teachers’ understanding of the best methods to educate this subgroup (Samson & Collins, 2012). Meeting the language and learning needs of these students is a struggle for many classroom teachers with little exposure to culturally diverse students and few experiences teaching non-native English speakers (AACTE, 2002). Samson and Collins (2012) indicated that the nation’s teachers will increasingly be exposed to a diverse group of students, and meeting the needs of these students will require teachers to have sufficient support.

To make drastic progress in improving the educational outcomes of ELLs, changes need to be made to ensure that teachers are prepared and supported to appropriately serve this population (Batt, 2008). The impact of teacher perceptions on ELLs is evident. As more teachers come in contact with ELLs, their attitudes toward ELLs become critical (Walker et al., 2004). The current condition of general education classrooms with diverse populations requires all educators to become aware of the need to improve teaching practices (Samson & Collins, 2012). The achievement gap continues to widen between students in general education classrooms and students identified as ELLs, and this gap could be exacerbated by teachers who may not know how to support ELLs (Samson & Collins, 2012). Examining the perceptions of teachers in the classroom and the impact of these perceptions on instruction can improve the general understanding of how teachers’ capacity to serve a diverse population of students can be strengthened.
Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to influence English learners’ academic success?

2. What was instrumental in teachers’ learning to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students?

3. What do teachers feel is essential for building a common understanding on a school campus to promote a positive culture of learning for English learners?

Rationale for Selection of the Method

The choice of research design was mainly based on the research questions (Yin, 2014). To answer the qualitative research questions related to teachers’ perceptions of ELLs, a qualitative case study was conducted. According to Stake (2010), qualitative research is “empathic, working to understand individual perceptions” (p. 15). Qualitative research is interested in how people interpret their experiences, how these individuals construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher asked participating teachers to think deeply as they practiced reflection, evaluation, and analysis while describing their experiences in providing instruction to ELLs. Because qualitative research examines the intersections of narratives and actions, this approach was particularly applicable to the research questions devoted to examining how teachers’ perceptions of preparation shaped their classroom practices (Glesne, 2011).

To conduct this investigation, a case study methodology was selected. Case studies allow researchers “to probe the meanings of situations and to report to readers the
complexity of personal performance” (Stake, 2010, p. 65). According to Yin (2014), the case study method helps the researcher make a direct observation and collect data in its natural setting. Thirteen teachers were selected from one school site to participate in the study. The researcher implemented this case study to explore the dimensions of teachers’ perceptions of their preparation in teaching ELLs, to determine how teachers’ perceptions of their students shaped the instructional practices of the ELL students in the classroom, and to identify instrumental practices and recommendations. Pseudonyms were used for the setting and research participants to ensure confidentiality.

**Research Setting**

Pseudonyms were used for the name of the school, district, and participants. The selection of the district and school was based on the following four criteria. First, the school must have a 40% or higher composition of ELL students. Second, at least 90% of students at the school must be socioeconomically disadvantaged. Third, the school must demonstrate ELL growth as defined by meeting and or/exceeding the district’s annual 10% reclassification rate a minimum of three consecutive years. This study was conducted at Flores Unified School District, a Southern California urban school district with a population of more than 23,000 students. Flores Unified School District serves 25 elementary schools, one charter school, five K–8 schools, three middle schools, three academies grades 7–12, and six high schools. ELLs comprise 30% of students in the district, and 86.3% of students receive free or discounted lunch. The ethnic demographic profile of the school district’s students is as follows: 3.6% White; 85.7% Hispanic or Latino; 1.1% two or more races; 4.5% Black or African American; and 3.4% Asian. One of the goals of implementing purposeful district selection relates to choosing particular
settings that encompass the heterogeneity of the population (Maxwell, 2005). The demographics of the city in which Flores Unified School District is located is as follows: 73.6% Hispanic; 9.8% White; 9.2% Asian; 5.4% Black; 1.6% two or more races; 0.09% American Indian; 0.09% Pacific Islander; and 0.4% other race.

**School Context**

Allegra Elementary School serves 832 students in grades PreK–6. The ethnic make-up of the students at this school is as follows: 90.4% Hispanic; 3.8% African American; 2.8% Asian; 1.7% White; 0.7% American Indian; 0.2% Filipino; 0.1% Pacific Islander; and 0.1% two or more races (CA School Dashboard, 2019). Allegra Elementary School met the criteria of the study with a total ELL population of 45.1% and with a socioeconomically disadvantaged student population of 95.1% (CA School Dashboard, 2019). The school also demonstrated ELL growth as defined by meeting and/or exceeding the district’s annual 10% reclassification rate a minimum of three consecutive years, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Annual Reclassification RFEP Counts and Rates Comparison*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allegra Elementary</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flores Unified</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Adapted from the California Department of Education.

The district’s reclassification criteria are as follows: a summative ELPAC score of 4; district reclassification writing sample with a rubric score of 3 or 4 or a score of 3 on English Language Arts Claim 2 from current California Assessment of Student
Performance and Progress (CAASPP) data; for students in grades 1–5, 60% standard mastery on English Language Arts Benchmark 1, English Language Arts Benchmark 2, or English Language Arts Benchmark 3; and for grades 6–11, 60% standard mastery on ELA Benchmark 1 or ELA Benchmark 2. The 2019 Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments revealed that 37.7% of the ELL population made progress toward English language proficiency (CA School Dashboard, 2019).

Protection of Study Participants

The researcher obtained Institutional Review Board approval to conduct research and to ensure the protection of the human subjects. Permission to conduct the study in the school district was obtained from the superintendent of the school district. To ensure the confidentiality of the study participants, all data obtained from the participants were secured in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher had access. All identifiable information was removed from all documents, and pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants. After three years, the researcher will destroy all documents, including audio recordings.

Data Sources

According to Creswell (2012), the participants in a qualitative study should be purposefully selected and be the best resources available. A purposeful sampling technique was used in this study. Purposeful sampling is an intentional practice wherein the researcher chooses participants and sites based on pre-determined characteristics that are known to give rich information about the topic of study (Creswell, 2012). Purposeful sampling is a technique that is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources.
This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

A total of 13 teachers, varying in grades from kindergarten to sixth grade, participated in an interview process as demonstrated in Table 2. The criteria for selection of the participants included participation in instruction of the school site’s English Language Development (ELD)–designated rotations, where their role was to provide ELD instruction to students who were not proficient in English. The participants selected for this study included male and female teachers. The participants had five or more years of teaching experience.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>K–3 Teachers</th>
<th>4–6 Teachers</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13 teacher interviews in total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>One elementary teacher focus group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A semi-structured focus group was also conducted. The criteria for selection of the teachers and focus group included having a minimum of five years of teaching experience at this site and sustained participation in ELL professional development. The teachers taught kindergarten to sixth grade. The focus group participants consisted of six teachers who also had experience working with ELL students and who were a cadre of leaders at the site who receive yearly English language professional development. Five years of teaching experience was a criterion for the individual interviews and for the focus group participants. According to Kini and Podolsky (2016), teachers make the steepest gains in effectiveness during their first few years in the classroom, and studies
have confirmed that teachers are more effective with some experience. As a result, five years of teaching experience was designated as a minimum for participants to ensure that the teachers were experienced with the teaching profession and with working with ELLs.

**Data Collection**

Multiple forms of data from the individual and focus group interviews were collected and analyzed. As stated by Stake (2010), utilizing varied data sources facilitates quality and confidence in the evidence collected for the study. Moreover, processes of triangulation and data analysis serve to validate case study research (Stake, 2010). Triangulation of data enables a “process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Stake, 2010, p. 454). In this study, the researcher interpreted the meaning of the teachers’ experiences.

**Interviews**

The researcher collected one-on-one interview data with 13 multiple-subject, credentialed elementary teachers from the same school with the intent of having the teachers share their approach to serving their English learner population. The interviews lasted 40–50 minutes. The interview questions were based on the literature review to target the data using a systematic method (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Each participant was asked the same interview questions (see Appendix A), but the participants could have different probing follow-up questions to clarify or expand upon their responses. The participants were interviewed using a protocol that included two 40–50-minute interviews over three months, using semi-structured questions developed by the researcher to address the research questions. After the initial interview and follow-up responses, the interviews were transcribed. The transcriptions provided data that were
then analyzed, compiled, and organized for easy retrieval. The level of interpretation was extended to the presentation of categories and themes (Merriam, 2009). Content analysis was utilized to qualitatively analyze for themes and recurring patterns of meaning from the interview transcripts. All transcripts were member-checked by the participants for accuracy.

The initial interview with the teachers was semi-structured because it was the basis for establishing trust. The interview addressed the first research question, regarding teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to influence English learners’ academic success. A second interview at the site was the basis for the second research question, regarding their instrumental learning in working with linguistically and culturally diverse students as well as to ask additional clarifying questions.

**Focus Group**

A focus group was interviewed with guiding questions (see Appendix B) as a method of qualitative research data that lasted 60 minutes. The focus group interview explored essential factors that build a common understanding on a school campus to promote the improvement of ELL practice. The researcher served as the focus group moderator and used a semi-structured interview guide to facilitate the focus group discussion. The questions were designed to gather data based on factors identified in the literature review. According to Creswell (1998), focus groups rely on words spoken by the participants, and researchers must use specific methods to analyze patterns in spoken language. Creswell (2012) stated that focus groups are an advantage to gaining insight on a topic, especially when the participants hold similar views and cooperate with each other. The researcher recorded and transcribed the responses of all the participants. The
researcher attempted to gather multiple perspectives regarding instruction for ELLs and examine the participation of teachers with diverse backgrounds and experiences in their school context.

**Data Analysis**

During and after the interviews and document collection, the researcher reviewed the interview transcripts with the intent to begin creating codes that emerged from the interviews to see if themes/patterns emerged for data interpretation. Braun and Clark (2006) asserted that once researchers familiarize themselves with the data, they begin to have ideas about what is in the data and what they find interesting about the themes they have discovered. During the next phase, codes were produced from the data, allowing the researcher to revisit the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). A consistent approach was needed to begin coding the data. Creswell (2014) described this process as analyzing statements from the data collected and categorizing them by themes to represent the phenomenon of interest. Transcriptions of the interviews were then coded and organized into themes pertaining to each of the research questions. Each coded quote was organized with identifying information. Eight themes were identified: preparation to teach English language learners; professional development; affirmation of students’ language, culture, and experience; teachers’ expectations for student success; multicultural teaching and curriculum; building a bridge to families; time investment; and collaborative leadership. Once the themes were identified, they were organized by the research question they pertained to, as demonstrated in Table 3.

Amid this data gathering process, the researcher utilized a journal to record reflections immediately following each interview to assist in monitoring or clarifying any
research bias or personal bias. The researcher wrote analytic memos to document reflections on the coding process (Saldana, 2013). After each individual interview and focus group interview, the researcher reviewed and provided additional reflections.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Themes with Quote Statistics</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Quotes</th>
<th>Percent of Overall Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question One</td>
<td>Preparation to Teach English Language Learners</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Two</td>
<td>Affirmation of Students’ Language, Culture, and Experience</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Expectations for Student Success</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multicultural Teaching and Curriculum</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Three</td>
<td>Building a Bridge to Families</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time Investment</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative Leadership</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Provisions of Trustworthiness

As qualitative research continues to be well received, there is a need for additional disclosures and more practical tools to facilitate researchers in conducting trustworthy qualitative research (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Qualitative researchers must demonstrate that the data analysis has been organized in a precise, logical, and in-
depth manner through recording, systematizing, and acknowledging the methods of analysis with sufficient detail to allow the reader to determine if the process is credible (Nowell et al., 2017).

The researcher communicated with the participants through a series of interviews to establish trust by building positive interactions with the participants. Clear communication occurred with the participants so that transparency was demonstrated throughout each interview session. The participants were informed and reassured that all transcripts, recordings, and journal notes would be locked and stored in the researcher’s locked file cabinet. After each interview, the participants were given the opportunity to member check the transcripts for accuracy. Member checking allows the researcher to establish the views of the participant and the researcher’s representation of them (Tobin & Begley, 2004). The participants were also provided a consent form attached to the letter requesting that they participate in the study. The participants signed the consent form prior to the first interview and were informed of the purpose of the study, how the information would be utilized by the researcher, how the responses would be handled, and the risks and/or the benefits of participating in the study (Patton, 2002). To protect their identities, the participants were given pseudonyms. The school district and school site were given a pseudonym to protect the location and reassure confidentiality of the information provided by the participants. An audit trail of all the data gathered will be kept confidential by the researcher (Koch, 1994).

Role of the Researcher

Creswell (2014) explained that the role of the researcher is as a primary data collection instrument that requires the identification of personal values, biases, and
assumptions within the study. It is essential for the researcher to clarify any bias that they may have when conducting the study (Creswell, 2014). Self-reflection is a key element in creating a narrative that will connect with readers. It is critical that researchers explicitly identify their biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status, which might influence their perceptions during the study (Creswell, 2014). Researchers have a responsibility to address their own biases and to describe the impact of those biases on the study design, data collection, and findings.

**Limitations**

The scope of this study was limited to one school site in one school district, which may reduce its generalization to other school districts. The participants in this study were limited to a small sample of general education kindergarten to sixth grade teachers. The study was limited to teachers in a single state that has a large influx of immigrants and growing ELL student populations. The findings may not be generalized to other states with different immigration patterns. Also, it is important to note that the number of ELLs in each classroom varies each year. Some of the participants might have been inclined to answer the interview questions based on their ideals rather than their actual feelings when working with a certain number of ELL students.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to identify teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to influence English learners’ academic success, instrumental factors in teachers’ learning, and essential factors in building a common understanding among teaching colleagues in order to promote a positive school culture for English learners. The researcher implemented a qualitative case study consisting of 13 teachers who
participated in two interview sessions and six teachers who participated in a focus group. The researcher analyzed and coded the interview transcripts to observe trends in the data. Triangulation of the data sources afforded the researcher opportunities to check inferences, validate assertions, and illuminate patterns of interest. Implementing multiple methods of data collection facilitated depth of descriptions and findings while ensuring trustworthiness of the data. Chapter 4 will present the findings from the interviews and the themes derived from direct quotes from the participants.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This qualitative case study identified teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to influence English learners’ academic success, instrumental factors in teachers’ learning, and essential factors in building a common understanding among teaching colleagues in order to promote a positive school culture for English learners. This chapter describes the findings, addressing these research questions:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to influence English learners’ academic success?

2. What was instrumental in teachers’ learning to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students?

3. What do teachers feel is essential for building a common understanding on a school campus to promote a positive culture of learning for English learners?

The researcher was able to gather broad information about teachers’ perceptions, insights related to teachers’ classroom practices for ELLs, and conceptualizations of valued elements necessary for linguistically diverse students. In this chapter, the researcher presents a description of the sample and how the data addressed the research questions with a thorough summary of the findings. These results presented valuable information across the entire spectrum of this study.

Two themes emerged for Research Question 1: Preparation to Teach English Language Learners (Fieldwork Experiences, Preparation in Language Acquisition, Research-Based Instructional Strategies, and Teacher Self-Efficacy) and Professional Development. Three themes emerged for Research Question 2: Affirmation of Students’ Language, Culture, and Experience (Importance of Language as Culture and Students’
Background Experiences), Teachers’ Expectations for Student Success (Assets-Based Approach and Fostering Positive Attitudes and Beliefs), and Multicultural Teaching and Curriculum. Three themes emerged for Research Question 3: Building a Bridge to Families, Time Investment, and Collaborative Leadership.

**Description of the Sample**

The data were derived from in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with 13 kindergarten to sixth grade teachers who were interviewed twice over a three-month period. Six teachers were also part of a semi-structured focus group. The participants were very willing to share their perspectives and provided meaningful insights. The researcher analyzed the data thematically throughout the data collection process to clarify meaning. The participants’ real names have been replaced by pseudonyms to protect their identities. Table 4 describes the participants’ demographic information. All participants met the minimum requirement of five years of teaching experience, with 12 of the participants possessing 17 years or more of teaching experience. The participants were also ethnically diverse, with one teacher being Asian, two being White, and 10 being Hispanic. The selection criteria did not address the teachers’ ethnicities or whether the teachers had been an ELL, but it was noted that seven of the participants had been an ELL when they were students.
Table 4

Participants’ Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>English Learner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karina</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabrina</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alina</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariana</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melinda</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 1

What are teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to influence English learners’ academic success?

Two main themes emerged in response to the first research question: Preparation to Teach English Language Learners and Professional Development.

Preparation to Teach English Language Learners

The growing presence of ELLs in classrooms has led many teacher preparation programs to adapt mainstream practices to prepare all teachers to teach ELLs (Lucas,
Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Although gaps persist, teacher education programs have made improvements in the past 20 years to respond to changing demographics in the K–12 student population (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015).

According to the participants, there was a mixture of feelings regarding their teacher preparation, especially as it pertained to the instruction of ELLs. Sabrina stated, “I don’t think it prepared me as much as I would have liked. That’s when we had 20:1 and back in 1998 or when I first started out being a brand new teacher. I don’t think I was prepped enough for sure.” Rachel explained, “The program did not necessarily prepare me, but I think it was my own experiences that helped me. I just think that I was able to put those two together.” Alina added:

I got all the academics when it comes to learning about ELD, some of the strategies that I could use, but it didn’t necessarily prepare you for when you were actually in the classroom, just some of the things that I would encounter in the classroom with general education students.

As far as feeling prepared to teach culturally diverse children, Beatrice shared that she did not feel prepared to teach students who were second-language learners. She explained:

I just felt like I wasn’t prepared. All I believe I took was Chicana/o studies classes. I also took some type of bilingual classroom course for the teacher, but that was about it. Everything else, you pretty much learned just through practice. I had to learn on my own.

However, there were participants who felt strongly that their preparation experience prepared them with the knowledge and training needed to work with students
who needed second-language support. Melinda, an experienced teacher, stated that she felt that her coursework was appropriate for her future profession and that she felt comfortable with the knowledge that she was provided by her institution. She explained:

When we had the bilingual program at the time, I felt pretty good and comfortable doing so. My program made me more sensitive or aware of diverse children’s needs in general. For children who are second-language learners, there was a great emphasis on addressing children with various needs. Because of the courses that I took, it was all geared toward second-language learners, as well as addressed the need of students with various backgrounds and languages.

**Fieldwork experiences.** The majority of the participants reported that they did not work with ELLs during their college fieldwork experiences or during student teaching. The participants explained that they learned strategies in some of their courses but that the actual experience of working with second-language learners was not what they had expected. The lack of a physical experience with ELL students created feelings of frustration and a sense of not knowing how to reach the ELL students. When considering the preparation of teachers for serving non-native-English-speaking students, teachers in the current study emphasized the value of fieldwork placements in classroom contexts with linguistically diverse students and opportunities for classroom observations, additional experiences with ELLs in classrooms, and “hands on experiences” with ELLs on a more frequent basis. Catherine stated:

I think coming right out of college, I wasn’t prepared to do much. It’s different than what you’re prepared for until you’re actually in the classroom living it. I would have liked to have more supervised instruction in the classroom working
with English language learners. I would have loved to have more student teaching opportunities where they observe you and they give you immediate feedback.

Field experiences for teacher pre-service candidates serve various purposes, which can include observing teachers and students to learn about classroom curriculum, content, instructional strategies, and to develop an understanding of the school as a community (Silva & Kucer, 2016). Ariana shared:

I think they could have prepared me better for that. Possibly even Spanish courses would have helped, but in terms of using the SDAIE [Specific Design Academic Instruction in Education] strategy, I mean, they can still use that today. They are just basic strategies that you can transfer. But I did not have as much experience with English learners in the classroom setting before taking the position. And so, I think it was crucial that I, at least, learned some basic things so that I would understand when it was happening in the classroom.

**Preparation in language acquisition.** Most of the participants did not perceive their preparatory methods courses as beneficial for teaching students who are learning English as a second language. As stated by Samson and Collins (2012), teachers must have a working knowledge and understanding of language as a system and of the role of the components of language and speech, specifically sounds, grammar, meaning, coherence, communicative strategies, and social conventions. Most of the participants responded that they did receive some information regarding strategies to teach ELLs; however, they felt that it was not enough to fully understand how to further reach ELL students. Kathy stated:

I was asked, How was I going to teach second-language learners? I thought to
myself, I suppose I will start out with letters and sounds. The teaching staff at the university informed me that I had to do it their way. Honestly, I was thinking to myself that I really did not know how to teach ELLs. So, to be quite honest with you, I was just thrown in.

In their interview responses, few participants responded affirmatively to the question that asked if the methods courses they took as part of their teacher education programs were helpful in preparing them for teaching ELLs. One participant shared that once beginning her journey as a teacher, there was no consistency in how to instruct and work with ELLs. Karina responded:

When I first started 17 years ago, I felt I was a little bit thrown into it. There wasn’t really a program per se. It was just what I thought I should do. And it was very based on just grammar and rules. I feel over the years it’s shifted more to maybe the content learning. Learning it with the meaning, not just grammar. The focus of methods and how to learn the language was not as strong as it could have been years ago.

Teachers must be able to draw explicit attention to the type of language and its use in classroom settings, which is essential to first and second-language learning. Ariana shared:

Students make easy letter mistakes, but those types of things would have been critical for me to learn and understand before I started going into the classroom. It would have been nice to see the differences in cultures and language processes to get a better understanding of pronunciations. I think it would have been beneficial to have received more instruction on how to teach students and how language
works for students with different languages. That would have been really helpful.

**Research-based instructional practices.** The goal of school improvement is to establish instructional practices that allow all students to gain knowledge and achieve academically at the highest levels. For that goal to be realized, the best practices must be made available to achieve the endeavor of providing opportunities for all students to be successful and to provide equitable access to a quality education (Hansel & Cavell, 2002). To achieve this goal, educators must implement educational strategies and models that have been proven to be effective.

The participants expressed the value of utilizing a variety of instructional strategies or methods for classroom instruction. While the participants indicated that their teacher education programs might not have addressed ELLs specifically, some of the instructional strategies they learned provided guidance for working with ELLs. Sabrina shared:

> I remember using some of the strategies from my classes, but a lot of it I just learned through experience in the classroom. I am very hands-on. I remember being taught to use realia, use pictures, and focus on vocabulary. Academic vocabulary is a big one. Other than that, I can’t say that there was too much more than that from my classes.

Alina shared that although she did remember some of the strategies that were taught, there were not many options. She stated:

> Providing scaffolding and sentence frames were really good strategies for the students. That’s what I remember. But it was not a whole lot of training, really. I have just learned through experience to strategically pair my students with other
students, pairing them with English-proficient students and having them have the opportunity to practice that language. I enjoy having my students be the expert and me the teacher. I can learn from them as well as the other students in the classroom. We can all learn from each other. I did not get that from any coursework. It was just what I have valued over the years working with my students.

The participants felt that some of the strategies taught could have applied to struggling students in general but not specifically to ELL students, which would have been beneficial. Kathy emphasized:

I have been in the profession a long time. It would have been nice if I had learned more strategies in my teacher education program. I learned a lot from my experience and through the different programs we used over the years. So, you basically take a little here and a little somewhere else to see which one works for students. It would have been very valuable to learn additional ways to help our ELLs. Just because they are ELLs did not mean that they were struggling students.

**Teacher self-efficacy.** Teachers’ personal values drive their behaviors and their goals at school. Throughout the interviews, the participants stated that the lack of training at their pre-service institutions affected how they provided instruction to their students because of how they perceived their ability levels. The reality of being in an actual classroom with ELLs was vastly different than the knowledge they were provided with in their coursework. Sabrina shared, “When I first initially had an experience with ELL students, I was like, ‘Oh, my goodness, I don’t know if I’m doing a good job here?’”
Building a teacher’s sense of cultural and self-efficacy is important, as many teachers face intercultural challenges in working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Gibbs, 2003). Beatrice recounted:

I did not even know enough about that language to go into a bilingual classroom. I did not have the knowledge in place to be able to teach the content properly. I mean, that was such a disservice to the child. Looking back now, I think there were many of us in my position of not having the academic language or knowing enough about teaching language to ELLs that was even needed to teach reading and for instruction. It was such a disservice to the students. I had no one to really guide me or tell me if I was on the right track. I felt like I was at a loss. I wanted my students to do better and be better, but when I first started out, I did not know how that was going to happen.

The participants expressed that what aided them greatly in their ability to increase their knowledge was working with other teachers who had similar experiences. It was shared that it was a very big shift for them to move past the idea that they did not know how to work with the students, not because they did not want to but because they felt inadequate in their skills as teachers. It was stated that the lack of hands-on experience was detrimental to their first experiences when working with ELL students. Teachers’ beliefs have an impact on students’ learning, and as a result, the participants strongly felt that learning on the job was critical.

Professional Development

Professional development can be offered in a variety of ways, such as mentoring, observation, peer planning, and workshops (Kose & Lim, 2011). Holm and Kajander
(2015) described professional development as a means of assisting teachers to gain new knowledge and support to increase teacher competencies. Although professional development may vary from school to school and district to district because of the demographics, age of the students, and instructional needs, professional development can still be an integral factor in strengthening teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017).

Allegra Elementary School receives consistent professional development on ELL instruction several times during the year, with a focus on constructing meaning by providing explicit instruction. The professional development is provided by an outside publisher who partners with the school district to assist educators in providing a capacity-building model for educators to address the gap in the ELL process while trying to ensure that ELLs meet the needs of the Common Core State Standards. The participants expressed mixed feelings toward the professional development that is provided by the outside publisher. Some participants were very excited about the professional development that was implemented at the school site in its second year of implementation. Catherine explained:

I think the last two years has been a turning point for our students. The professional development that we have received has provided me with the resources that I need to work with my students. The program that we are using actually has district personnel that you can reach out to that can better assist you if you need guidance with the program.

Allegra Elementary School has participated in a districtwide effort to establish a set curriculum for ELLs. Allegra Elementary School has been provided support to refine
their practices through ELL professional development institutes that focus on practical tools for educators to use that emphasize the complex language of abstract and higher-order thinking. The participants displayed concern that the current professional development was being utilized to teach the program that was purchased versus providing instruction on how to reach all ELLs across the content areas. Beatrice further explained:

Well, we’ve had a lot of professional development, but I don’t think it’s preparing us to teach English language students. The program that we’re using, I don’t think that’s what we need. I think that there are . . . How could I say? Teaching the children out of this program when it doesn’t go with the language arts program just does not mix well. And so, it’s not supporting what you’re doing in other content areas. It’s something totally different. It is almost like how they were teaching us to speak Spanish in the Spanish classes. It is too staged. It’s too scripted.

Although Allegra Elementary School has been provided a multitude of professional development opportunities for a districtwide ELD curriculum, it appears that the participants value the strategies that are shared to implement with their students but are concerned that the professional development is geared toward the strategies within the particular district-approved program versus having a holistic approach to teaching academic English to ELLs. Rachel shared:

We do have district trainings. So, it could be at this site or at the conference center. But I don’t know. Some of the professional development trainings have been valuable, while others have not. I think I have grown as a teacher by experience with the students, by collaborating with my peers. I think that’s
helped. I would not just give all the credit to the professional development that we have received. It just varies, really.

**Research Question 2**

**What was instrumental in teachers’ learning to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students?**

Three main themes emerged as instrumental in Allegra Elementary School’s teachers’ learning to work with linguistically culturally diverse students: **Affirmation of Students’ Language, Culture, and Experience**, **Teachers’ Expectations for Students’ Success**, and **Multicultural Teaching and Curriculum.**

**Affirmation of Students’ Language, Culture, and Experience**

Nieto (2018) stated that although students’ cultures are integral to themselves and their family personally, these factors are rarely valued or acknowledged by schools. Recent literature on educating culturally diverse students is assisting to provide an entirely different ideal that challenges the equation that education equals assimilation (Trueba, 1989). Overwhelmingly, all 13 participants made it clear that they celebrated the languages and cultures that students brought into the classroom. Alina explained her thoughts:

It really upsets me, in all honestly. It upsets me to remember seeing when teachers did not take teaching ELLs seriously. I saw the need and how it was not fully being addressed. Many times, it just seemed that it was not that important to some of the teachers when working with the ELLs. I just feel that when working with ELL students, and I think that when you work with students, any students, it
needs to be a passion. Our ELL students have so much to offer. You have to recognize who they are so you know how to reach them.

The participants were adamant that students’ culture and experience were part of the learning process and that affirming the students’ language and culture would benefit students by being well-adjusted learners when learning is linked to what they already know.

**Importance of language as culture.** Language is linked to culture, which primarily means that people express their cultural values through the lens by which they see the world (Nieto & Bode, 2018). Ensuring that language and culture are connected to teaching and learning appeared to be a priority for all the participants. Ariana shared, “Yes, of course we encourage them to use the English language. Their language is welcome as well. I mean, it’s their language.” She made it clear that having ELL students express themselves in their primary language was critical. Her concern was that students may lose their primary language skills as they progress academically and lose the connection with their families. Ariana explained, “That worries me because then I worry that they are going to lose communication with their parents. This causes a gulf that is increasing as they get older and older which occurs between the parents and the children.” The fear that the participants shared was exemplified in Sabrina’s recollection. She stated:

> When I started to learn English, my dad told me that I was taught Spanish as a child but that I was not fluent. But when I went to first grade, I had a difficult time transitioning into the English language. So, my parents stopped speaking to me in Spanish and only spoke to me in English. I, at least, benefited from having some
Spanish background as a child. Yet, with my brother, they completely just cut him off from the Spanish language so he would not have the same trouble when he started school.

Catherine was also adamant to share her love for ELL students by insisting, “I think engaging with the students and talking to them is important. They are really smart in their foundation in their home language, and it should not be seen as an obstacle.”

All the participants stressed that they valued and appreciated all those who walked through their classroom doors and that they provided sensitivity to the students to ease their fears of not being proficient in the English language. Karina responded:

I know in my class, I always tell them that it’s okay. You’re going to learn two languages, so continue talking to your parents in Spanish or the language they speak officially as their primary language. Sometimes parents have shared with me that their child doesn’t want to talk in class because of their primary language. They are scared because they don’t have the skills in place. But I tell them it’s important. They need to know both.

Antonio shared his own experiences as an ELL. He stated that his past experiences helped guide him when working with his students. Antonio stated:

When we are doing a lesson, I talk about what I see in this unit or topic. When they respond, I always try to encourage them to speak a little, and every day I listen for a new word from them to celebrate it. I don’t judge them. Speaking up allows them a sense of risk. I want my students to take little risks. It gives them more encouragement to keep on learning. There is no rejection here. I think
students now know that it is good to have two languages, and we need to display that to them so they are able to feel proud about themselves.

Melissa was adamant in stating that her own experiences of immigrating to the United States provided her with the lens that she needed to guide and instruct her students. She spoke passionately about her story as an immigrant and how her experience shaped her views on teaching culturally diverse students. Melissa shared:

As an educator, I became more aware of their needs, my English learners, and we cannot separate the language from their culture, from their family. We just cannot see a student’s language as one part of the student that is not connected to any other parts. That part, the language and culture, are an important part of who a child is as a person. If you work with the whole person of the student, then their self-esteem, their pride of knowing their families will, of course, gives you much more positive students who are eager to learn and who are motivated to continue learning to be successful.

As an English learner herself, Chelsea shared:

When I was faced with teaching English learners, they had the same primary language as me, so my connection was pretty quick with them because of the language, because I could relate to their experiences. It was a cultural experience that we shared here. Their home language is always valued.

Culturally sustaining teachers realize the need for students to engage with cultural groups and encourage their students to explore other affiliations. This practice allows students and teachers to understand the importance of students’ language in a meaningful way. Beatrice shared:
I really appreciate the language. A lot of the children would come in with high Spanish vocabulary, and when they would converse amongst themselves, I used to love listening to them talk to each other. I was like, oh goodness, how wonderful. They are so smart, and I loved seeing the interaction. Validating their language and telling them that it is fine to respond in that language is important.

**Students’ background experiences.** All the participants expressed strong belief systems about discovering value in their students’ cultural experiences at home. The participants shared that they often try to connect in the lives of their students to share what that experience would look like so that students find significance in their cultural experiences within the classroom setting. The participants described the validation that is brought in by students sharing their experiences from home and bridging them with others. Sabrina elaborated:

I know what they are experiencing growing up. I was an English learner, and I grew up eating those types of food, celebrating the pan dulce [sweet bread] with them, eating tamales with them. I mean, I understand where they are coming from. But a person, a teacher, who has not had that type of experience, they really need to be exposed to see what it is like.

Karina also explained that she places value on her students’ experiences and the stories that they want to share in her classroom. Karina stated:

I mean, everybody comes with their own backgrounds and experiences. If I am Hispanic and if they are Hispanic, then we may have similar backgrounds. That is great, because we have similar experiences. But if we have different experiences, then that just means that they have different stories to share with me. I can then
compare my stories to their experiences and be like, “Oh, I’ve never done that before.” Or, I would say, “Oh, I did not know your culture does that.” So definitely, we all come with our own experiences.

Antonio stated that although there are not as many ELL students enrolled at the school as there were several years back, his door is always open to receive children from all over the world. His philosophy is to make them feel welcome in the classroom and to ensure that they are given as much support as they need. Antonio stated:

I have a little boy that came from Guatemala three months ago. He had very little understanding of the English language or anything at all. So, you know, I have to speak with him using similar experiences to help him comprehend how to connect to his learning in my classroom. It’s even the small things like having them greet you. Like saying “hello” or “good morning.” It helps bridge both languages together.

Having been a culturally diverse student herself, Rachel felt a strong bond with all of her ELLs over the course of her teaching career. Rachel shared, “I really was more aware of the culture of my students and where they were coming from. I think that I was able to relate to them more because I had a similar experience in school as a young student myself.”

**Teachers’ Expectations for Student Success**

High expectations for ELLs is an insufficient entity on its own. It goes hand in hand with creating an optimal learning environment that generates an atmosphere of trust. The classroom setting that teachers provide is equally as important as the physical environment. By prioritizing the need to know their students on a different level, the
participants were able to share in their students’ experiences, struggles, and strengths.

Teachers must focus on building strong relationships with their students to develop trust and to hold students to high expectations so they can have the opportunity to have deep engagement with the course content (Hammond, 2014). Once educators are able to realize the benefits of speaking more than one language and experiencing multiple cultures, the expectations for ELLs are elevated. Destiny revealed:

I am aiming for the same expectations for my ELLs as with my mainstream students. Whatever the standard is, whether or not my student’s able to achieve to that level of the general education or mainstream students, is really going to depend on the individual readiness of each child. My kids may have challenges, whether it was due to language or another disability. However, my expectation would still be the same, and that is to work toward teaching my ELLs grade-level content standards in my classroom.

Catherine stated that lowering expectations for ELLs was never an option. She feels that they are just as capable as English-proficient students of producing high-quality work. Catherine stated:

I believe that all students, including our English learners, should be expected to do the same work and the same standards as any of the other students in their grade level. My expectations are not lowered at all. However, what I do think they may need is different resources to help them along the way. For example, there might be an assignment that needs someone to translate it in his or her own language. Realistically, if I have a Spanish speaker only in my classroom, I understand that they may not write three paragraphs all in English, but I will make
sure that we build on their skills to get them there. I have a student in my classroom that speaks Spanish. He’s learning English, and he will write his essay in Spanish. He then works with a partner, and he Google translates everything he wrote in English. He does that automatically on his own. My expectations are the same, but he uses different resources, and he takes a different path to get to the same place.

**Asset-based approach.** All the participants discussed the notion that all ELL students are valued and that nurturing the assets that students bring with them affirms their cultural practices. The participants shared a critical awareness of defining students in terms of what they can contribute and not what they lack (Nieto & Bode, 2018). As stated by Nieto and Bode (2018), assets-based pedagogy rejects deficit perspectives and asserts that differences are not deficiencies. Antonio expressed:

> Our kids have so much to give, and they have so much value in the wealth that they have in their language. I kept telling them that they can speak two languages and how great that was. I tell them they can travel to places and communicate with others when others can’t. My message to my students is that speaking another language is useful. I stress that to all of my students, even those that don’t have another language in place. Then, you will be amazed how my students that only speak one language look up to my bilingual kids and say, “Oh, I wish I could learn another language like you.”

**Fostering positive attitudes and beliefs.** Teachers who enter the profession have usually done so due to a sincere belief in making a difference in the lives of students. Nieto (2018) stated that the attitudes and practices of schools very much control the
opportunities for success among various populations of students, which could negatively impact the quality of education they receive. At Allegra Elementary School, teachers display an attitude where the value of engagement with learning and providing motivation to their ELL students is necessary so that students are aware that their teachers are there to solve issues that may arise due to cultural misunderstanding. Melissa shared:

When we are in the classroom, I tell my students that everybody makes mistakes. I tell them that we can practice together. I try really hard to make learning fun. I want my students to remain positive at all times. I want my ELL students to feel comfortable in my classroom, and I want them to start using what they know, because they probably know more than they are showing. So, it is up to us as teachers to make them feel welcome and to encourage them at all times.

The participants explained that students may sometimes get discouraged to speak out loud in front of others due to mispronouncing words. Catherine shared:

I think that they need to know that they’re not going to be criticized for making a mistake in the classroom. When they trust you and they know it’s a safe learning environment for them, they are more willing to participate. Right or wrong, they want to share, and they want to participate, but it is easier to have that happen when you create that positive environment. So, my goal is to always be upbeat and speak to them positively. I have that growth mindset with our students, so I aspire for them to have the same growth mindset as well, because if we believe in them, they’re going to believe in themselves.
Multicultural Teaching and Curriculum

A multicultural perspective embodies those individuals who embrace the characteristics of those who value diversity, those who are learners of their own students, and those who examine their own biases and privileges (Nieto, 2002). The teachers at Allegro Elementary School encompass the content of multiculturalism. Sabrina explained:

I think to myself, because of my background, I can relate to them. I value what they share and what they bring from home. The children talk about so many different things from their culture, whether it is their religion or celebrations, like catechism or their first communions. That is part of their culture, and I want to celebrate that and have those topics shared in my classroom.

Empowering students in the classroom was a general point of discussion with the participants. Multicultural education is a way of looking at the world that can be pervasive (Nieto & Bode, 2018). As stated by Banks (1996), multicultural literacy consists of the skills and abilities to identify the creators of knowledge and their interests and to reveal the assumptions of knowledge while accessing knowledge from various perspectives to guide action that will create a humane and just world. Destiny shared, “Our English learners come in with so much valuable information. So, I think making sure you are aware of who your students are is necessary, and knowing their background and bringing it into the classroom is critical.” Sabrina stated, “We have students from different cultural backgrounds, and we all have different backgrounds, but it is essential to know your audience and include their traditions and customs in the classroom.” Efforts are made to value ELL students’ backgrounds and experiences. The participants
expressed that they try to implement curriculum that broadens the perspectives of all their learners, not just the ELL students. Melinda stated:

There are some literature books that we read to the students that include different ethnic backgrounds with different cultural perspectives. We do use our literature books, and we supplement with other materials to build a relationship between students’ home and our school environment.

With the new English Language Arts adoption, Antonio shared:

The program has different parts that lend itself to helping multiculturalism be brought to the attention of others. We, as teachers, have so many more resources than we ever had before in years past. We have many programs that have many articles and stories for our students to access. But there is more to culture than just in our school curriculum. I bring in folklore and poetry. Culture can be extended throughout all parts of our day. I try to incorporate the differences in people’s cultures, their religion, and their ways of life. I try my very best to recount events from different sides and share that with our students. I think that it is our responsibility to connect with our students beyond simply knowing where they are from. I think that we need to incorporate cultural traditions into our lessons and activities. I don’t think we have a multicultural curriculum per se, but it is embedded in portions of our language arts adoption. However, many teachers bring their own literature to expose our students to different sides of every story. The adopted textbooks do not always give you all sides to every story, but that is where we, as teachers, come in to play. We have to try our best to give our students a different perspective of the story.
Research Question 3

What do teachers feel is essential for building a common understanding on a school campus to promote a positive culture of learning for English learners?

Three main themes emerged as essential to building a common understanding among teaching colleagues: Building a Bridge to Families, Time Investment, and Collaborative Leadership.

Building a Bridge to Families

According to the participants, building relationships with the families of ELL learners is a fundamental reason that the culture connection at the school site embraces culturally diverse students and their families. Connections made between parents and schools have demonstrated improvement in learning, especially with students who speak English as a second language (Ziegenfuss et al., 2014). The participants noted that they understand that it is difficult for the parents if they do not speak English. However, they encourage the parents to do what they are able to do at home to help their child. All the participants spoke fondly of the fact that they are dedicated to the success of English learners and strive to provide opportunities for their ELL students to thrive and grow. They shared that they strive to provide primary language support translators at Allegra Elementary School because a direct contact between parents and teachers is critical, as families play a vital role in the lives of students. Ariana shared:

We try everything to provide as much support to our parents as possible. It’s difficult because we want to avoid having the parents struggle even with something as simple as a parent–teacher conference. We make every effort to provide translators at our parent–teacher conferences because we want parents to
have a good understanding of what our messaging is. We want communication. It used to be heartbreaking to have the students translate for their parents because somehow, the message was lost in translation. We want our students to be successful, and we want our parents to feel comfortable that we are working together for one goal, which is helping their child to be successful academically. We want our parents to know that we are connected in a partnership to help their child be the best they can be.

Sabrina shared, “I have families that can’t help at home, and I tell them, ‘Yes, you can. Read at home with your child, or have them read to you. That counts, and that matters.’”

The focus group stressed the value of family support and explained that the culture that is created in school is family-oriented and promotes ELL achievement. The participants spoke about how they work diligently every year to increase their annual reclassification success rate. They emphasized that parents are also made aware of student progress in parent-led meetings, and they are informed of the areas of success and the areas of opportunity for ELLs. The participants stated that the parent-led meetings are transparent with school data and work with parents to make efforts to provide the best education possible for their children. Allegra Elementary School’s parents provide recommendations to further assist ELLs in their academic success, and their input is important. Beatrice stated:

We give our ELL students many opportunities to help them academically. We provide after-school tutoring, and we also have Saturday school as well. Our Teacher Learning Connection program also does a good job of providing our ELLs with several activities weekly to either build up their language skills and to
provide them with the academic support they need. Our resource teacher helps out tremendously as well. It is a team that makes it happen.

The participants of the focus group shared the importance of trust between the school community and parents. Cementing a relationship between the two is crucial to establishing a lifelong partnership that builds upon a foundation of learning for ELL students.

**Time Investment**

An area of urgency shared by all the participants was the need for adequate time for reflective practices. Concerns were raised that there was not enough time to differentiate all of the lessons for the various-leveled students in the class. Rachel stated, “It is more time-consuming when preparing lessons to our ELL students. The workload is more because of the prep work that is required for their lessons.” Beatrice felt that time was a factor when providing instruction for ELL students. She shared, “I need time, time, way more time. The reason being is that you need to be conscious of the content of the lessons you are providing.” Melissa also stated that lesson planning for ELLs is tedious, not because the workload is any different but because she wants to prepare appropriately for all of her students so that they comprehend her instruction. She indicated that more time was needed to be reflective of her teaching practices. Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) stated that reflective practice provides individuals with the opportunity to raise questions, problem solve, and analyze data. Melissa shared, “Time, time, way more time is what I need. I want to be conscious of adopting and connecting content in a way that reaches all of my learners.” Deep thought and reflection is needed to instruct and present content to ELL students. Sabrina explained:
It would be great to have more time. Time to teach and reteach for those that can benefit from the learning of the day, to differentiate. Some days, they may need more time to learn new concepts, and it’s like, “Oh, we have to move on to the next thing.” It’s like we are on a limited time schedule. It makes it difficult for us sometimes because we want to ensure that we are maximizing every second.

The participants indicated that more time is required to fully develop a quality understanding of the academic language needed to perform in school. They maintained that although they are spending more time translating items or waiting for someone to translate a document, it is for the best interest of their ELL students, and all of the participants’ highlighted that ELLs require accommodation, understanding, and empathizing on the teacher’s part.

**Collaborative Leadership**

Allegra Elementary School has reclassified a minimum of 10% of students for six consecutive years. With the change in the state’s required test from the California English Language Development Test to the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC), Allegra Elementary School has still maintained the percentage required by the district to demonstrate sufficient growth. The focus group participants shared that as a staff, they are always examining their district, school, and individual teacher data. According to Sudsberry and Kandel-Cisco (2013), a principal’s leadership leaves an imprint on the success of student learning. The participants in this study addressed the level of support when instructing ELLs in the mainstream classroom. Chelsea stated:
Our principal is very supportive. He provides us with the resources we need. We are provided time during the year to meet and plan to find ways to push our students to make growth. If we need materials to best help our ELLs, we are provided with those items.

The participants stated that they are provided with many resources to instruct ELLs. They displayed enthusiasm in stating that they strive for their ELLs to achieve more at the end of the year than when they first entered the classroom. Sabrina shared how relentless teachers are in assuring that ELLs receive as much support as can be offered to them instructionally. She indicated:

It’s not easy. We work hard, and we work with our students, especially in the area of writing. They need help with this. We use vocabulary frames and teach academic vocabulary at all times to get them ready. We give them the tools they need to do well on their writing prompts. But we start early working with them. We want our kids to do well on the state exam as well as meet all components for reclassification. Some students might not meet the criteria, but we keep helping them any way that we can. But it is not all about that. We want them to succeed in all of their endeavors and aspirations. We want them to do well in life.

The participants stressed that information about ELL progress monitoring is transparent at all staff meetings. Sabrina further explained:

We are informed every year by our principal about the growth our school makes in all assessments. Our administrator plays a big role in that. The moment he started here with us, he listened and wanted to help our ELLs move forward. He meets with the staff and reviews our data, whether it is CAASPP data, Benchmark
data, or the new ELPAC data. When we make decisions, we look at the data. That tells us where we need to go. We work together, and all that impacts our instruction. It shows. Look at our reclassification data.

The participants indicated that the most effective professional development for them was when they collaborated with their peers and were not just recipients of information during professional development opportunities. Ariana stated:

Our professional development days that are site-planned are meaningful to us because they are planned with our input, as teachers, for our students. Staff members give input on what we should be trained on based on our site and student needs. We are able to work together and have meaningful conversations around instructional practices and the strategies we can use that will make an impact on student learning. Our principal works with us. He asks for our feedback, and we come up with a plan that best meets the needs of our learners. The professional development that is from an outside publisher is not always the best because the presenters are basically selling a program. The presenters tell us how to use their cards, their scripts.

The participants shared that past practice was different several years back, when some teachers were not as accepting of new ideas and of culturally diverse students. However, that has changed drastically at the site. Antonio elaborated:

I think in the past, teachers felt that teaching English learners was a challenge. Teachers used to think that if you were an English learner, then you needed to be held back a year because they would assume you weren’t where you needed to be. The mentality used to be that ELLs were an obstacle in your classroom because
they felt they had to work harder than with English-only students. And the extra paperwork one had to fill out for the English learners made it a negative to have them in the classroom.

It was revealed by the participants that times have changed over the last few years. Teachers in the past maintained a deficit approach when instructing ELL students, and their belief system toward culturally diverse students was typically negative. The participants adamantly shared that positive changes have occurred at the school site in recent years and stated that teachers’ mindsets had changed for the better when working with English learners. They indicated that much of that transformative change has to do with the school leadership. Beatrice revealed:

> When we first started as teachers, the comments that were made were not so positive from some teachers. Back when I started, teachers were not so open to working with English learners. It was a disruption to get “those kids.” Maybe it was because they thought it was too much work having English learners in their class. It seemed an inconvenience of sorts for some. Yet, now our way of thinking is different. We have come a long way. The way we teach our ELLs has improved over the years. There are a lot more new teachers in our district. With new teachers, one is able to get good ideas, new perspectives, new strategies, and as a result, the older teachers have gone through the years. You now have new ideas coming in. Our focus has shifted. As a school, with our leadership, supporting each other, holding each other accountable, with the buy-in of the whole school, we are all receptive to our children who are second-language learners. How could we not?
Summary

For Research Question One, the themes of Preparation to Teach English Language Learners (Fieldwork Experiences, Preparation in Language Acquisition, Researched-Based Instructional Practices, and Teacher Self-Efficacy) and Professional Development emerged. For Research Question Two, the themes of Affirmation of Students’ Language, Culture, and Experience (Importance of Language as Culture and Students’ Background Experiences), Teachers’ Expectations for Student Success (Assets-Based Approach and Fostering Positive Attitudes and Beliefs), and Multicultural Teaching and Curriculum emerged. For Research Question Three, the themes of Building a Bridge to Families, Time Investment, and Collaborative Leadership emerged. Chapter 5 provides conclusions, discussions, implications, and recommendations for future research, as well as a final reflection based on the data presented in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 will begin with a brief overview of the purpose statement and research questions. Then the conclusions, discussion, implications, recommendations for further study, and concluding remarks will be provided. The purpose of this study was to identify teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to influence English learners’ academic success, instrumental factors in teachers’ learning, and essential factors in building a common understanding among teaching colleagues to promote a positive school culture for English learners using the culturally sustaining pedagogy framework. Participant data collection occurred via semi-structured, individual interviews and a focus group interview. The individual interviews yielded the most information and served as the primary data sources for this study. This design allowed the voices of the teachers to be heard and for their practices to be explored. Several themes surfaced during the analysis of this case study. The following research questions guided this research:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to influence English learners’ academic success?
2. What was instrumental in teachers’ learning to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students?
3. What do teachers feel is essential for building a common understanding on a school campus to promote a positive culture of learning for English learners?

Conclusions

Based on the interview data, four conclusions emerged in response to the research questions. The first conclusion is that collaborative leadership was a fundamental factor in creating a positive school culture where all stakeholders at the school site take
accountability for ELL progress and learning. Principals serve as advocates for ELLs and inspire and sustain a comprehensive commitment to the education of these students. Ensuring the success of ELL students requires the commitment of everyone in the school community. Leaders communicate a clear and specific message about the shared responsibility for ensuring success for all students, including ELLs. The participants stated that having an administrator who focused on student impact created and facilitated a school culture in which all students were encouraged to reach for academic success. The elements of school culture that the participants felt described their school site were time, culture, collaboration, and site-based professional development. The principal provided structured teacher planning time for insightful dialogues among teachers and used data to guide their actions. When the leadership in a school is collaborative, there is shared responsibility and decision making for student learning. The teachers’ opinions mattered when it came to schoolwide academic decision making. The participants felt that having a collaborative leader created a school culture where the staff had a shared purpose and vision to improve academic outcomes for ELL students by reflecting on classroom practices. The participants felt that this collaborative culture stemmed from the collaborative leadership that was established at Allegra Elementary School, where instructional practices were a priority and where school leaders focused on creating an academic environment that supported effective teaching and successful ELL student outcomes.

The second conclusion was that there is a need to reexamine teacher education programs to emphasize specific preparation for teaching ELLs. The participants stated that a lack of coursework and field experiences with ELLs during their teacher
preparation programs affected their sense of preparedness when teaching ELLs. At Allegra Elementary School, the participants had different levels of knowledge and skill in regard to teaching ELL students. Feelings of inadequacy were expressed, as the majority of participants lacked coursework in language acquisition for ELLs, leading to perceptions of low preparation for teaching these students.

The third conclusion was that professional development played a vital role in these teachers’ learning to work with culturally diverse students. It is generally recognized that professional development is an essential component of ensuring student success. The participants’ reflections indicated that there was some value in their professional development opportunities, as they learned new instructional strategies geared toward ELL instruction that provided guidance in academic content knowledge acquisition. However, the current professional development provided by an outside publisher was not seen as valuable by the participants, due to the sessions focusing heavily on program implementation versus contributing to teachers’ sense of professional direction and efficacy. Professional development that included additional time for teacher collaboration and reflection was cited as highly instrumental.

The final conclusion is that high expectations for ELLs were crucial in ensuring that they continuously acquired challenging content in the classroom. The participants recognized that an assets-based perspective with the expectation that all ELLs have access to meaningful and rigorous content is imperative. The participants revealed that it was critical and necessary for their ELL students to receive the same opportunities that fluent or proficient English speakers were given in accessing core curriculum. The participants held steadfast to the belief that they could deliver instruction at high levels as
long as they provided the necessary scaffolds and supports to their ELL students. The belief system of the participants in this study affirmed that instruction from a strength-based approach ensured that their ELL students’ assets provided a central focus of instruction, where every student built on their cultural and linguistic assets to excel with academic learning.

**Discussion**

Allegra Elementary School is the largest elementary school in Flores Unified School District. It was described by the study participants as a school where dedicated teachers ensure that all students master the English language and succeed in academic content knowledge. For the past six years, Allegra Elementary School has demonstrated accomplishment in having met or exceeded the district’s goal of reclassifying 10% of ELLs each school year. For five out of those six years, Allegra Elementary School has surpassed the district’s yearly average. Their belief is that the results are indicative of the equitable investments and supports that are put into place at Allegra Elementary School. They firmly believe that regardless of home language, all students are capable of achieving academic success.

**Leadership in a Diverse School**

Collaborative leadership is defined as “a leadership style in an organization where the formal leadership emphasizes working with the faculty, teachers and staff in an empowering, and participatory fashion” (Russell, 2008, p. 85). This type of leadership is a mechanism to promote teamwork, shared responsibility, and proprietorship. Dodd (2002) asserted, “Collaboration is the means by which leaders use their relationships with others to influence them to work toward a shared goal” (p. 79).
There is a need to provide leadership that is both effective and allows teachers to engage in positive collaborative experiences that ultimately improve student achievement. The participants expressed that their administrator had a hands-on approach with teachers and students. According to Ohlson (2009), administrators who leave their offices and become involved with teachers may offer strategies and professional development opportunities to help improve teachers’ skills. Collaborative leadership is focused on schoolwide, strategic actions that promote student learning and are shared among administrators, teachers, and others in the school (Heck & Hallinger, 2010). In this style of leadership, the emphasis is on structures that govern, procedures that promote shared commitment to school improvement, collaborative decision making, and accountability for student learning that is shared by all (Heck & Hallinger, 2010). The participants emphasized the belief that staff members held each other accountable for student success and learning. Collaborative leadership focuses on collaboration, values the ideas of teachers, seeks input, and engages staff in decision making. The participants celebrated their administration for involving them in the process of strengthening services and instruction for ELLs and stated that their administrator asks for their feedback as professionals and allows decisions to be based on their perspectives and experiences. Building trust between administrators and teachers is a key resource for reform (Byrk & Schneider, 2002; Gumuseli & Eryilmaz, 2011). This reciprocal relationship is mutually reinforced and positively impacts student learning. The participants valued how they all worked together as a staff and that decision making was never from a top-down approach. Collaborative leadership requires all stakeholders to work collaboratively and independently to make instructional decisions (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Collaborative
leadership for ELLs means that combined knowledge and expertise in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and leadership allow students to prosper (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

The relationship between collaborative leadership and school improvement is one that has shared effects in a school’s structural capacity to increase student achievement and instructional approaches (Goodard & Miller, 2010; Heck & Hallinger, 2010). The effect that school culture has on student achievement is a reflection of its importance to an organization (Karadag, Kilicoglu & Yilmaz, 2014). Change initiatives are most powerful when there is a shared vision and a sense of urgency (Kotter, 2012). The participants stated that making conversations a priority and using staff meetings as a vehicle for teacher collaboration allows this powerful shift to occur (Calderon et al., 2020). In looking at their reclassification data trends over the past few years, Chelsea shared:

Our students are doing well in our school because we all care that our students achieve to the best of their abilities. We are dedicated. It is not easy, but we look at the data, and we create plans to guide us on the right path. We are given release days to work with our colleagues. That is valuable time to reflect on our practices and base our instructional decisions to create positive outcomes. We are proud of what we do for all of our students.

Principals’ work has a positive and significant association with student achievement (Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, 2005). Every school should make a commitment to meeting the needs of ELLs, valuing their presence, viewing them as fully competent learners, creating a learning environment that is culturally sustaining and
linguistically responsive, and building on the strengths that students bring with them from their home culture. Further, it was stated by the study participants that Allegra Elementary School provided high-quality ELL instruction across the curriculum, such that they were given roles as instructional leaders so they could advocate successfully for ELLs and their families.

**Rethinking Teacher Preparation**

Researchers found that several teachers enter the profession ill-equipped to effectively educate ELLs and in need of extensive experience as pre-service teachers (Johnson & Wells, 2017). Milner’s (2005) work demonstrated that course content in teacher preparatory courses could benefit pre-service teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and instructional decision making with students in culturally diverse classrooms. Participants in the study perceived the need for improved preparation for teaching ELLs, coursework specifically related to teaching linguistically diverse students, strategies for ELL instruction included in coursework, and fieldwork placements in diverse classrooms. A majority of the participants stated that they had not been well-prepared for teaching ELLs through their own coursework and emphasized the need for a specific course in teaching ELLs. The participants recognized a need to improve teacher preparation for meeting the needs of ELL students, as shared by Sabrina, who asserted, “The program could have done a better job at training me. I really had no idea what I was doing. I just did the best I could with what the information that I had.” Limited training and understanding of how to work with diverse cultures shapes teachers’ attitudes and perceptions and becomes problematic for teachers entering the profession. This limited training creates negative perceptions toward addressing the instructional and academic needs of ELLs. It is
imperative to align fieldwork and classroom experiences to allow teachers time for critical reflection on these experiences and how they relate to their own perceptions and beliefs. This may be uncomfortable for pre-service teachers who are learning about their own biases as they begin to enter the teaching profession while applying lessons learned into their own practice. Pre-service teachers need to be given ongoing guidance as they reflect on their own experiences when working in diverse schools. The participants shared that they exhibited feelings of inadequacy when they first entered the teaching profession because the coursework they were provided was vague in terms of strategies, and they felt that some of the strategies provided by their teacher preparation programs were good resources for students who were fluent in the English language but that they needed more specific instruction about how to work with ELL students. Without specific required coursework relating to the unique learning needs of ELLs, teachers will not be able to teach these students adequately (Samson & Collins, 2012). The more teachers receive proper training, the more ELLs will receive appropriate instruction in the classroom.

Several researchers recommend that teacher education programs offer fieldwork experiences as a component of preparation for pre-service teachers (Ballantyne et al., 2008). The need to increase opportunities related to fieldwork experiences is critical so that teachers feel adequately prepared to teach ELL students. Fieldwork experiences should provide a wide variety of classroom experiences, including individual, small-group, and whole-group instruction. Through these learning opportunities, pre-service teachers would be able to develop the skills needed to create learning environments that are culturally and linguistically responsive and to address the needs of all students. Above
all, pre-service teachers would be given the opportunity to experience real-life situations with students of diverse cultures and backgrounds. The participants in the study also believed that they should have received additional one-on-one field experiences to further develop their instructional skills in teaching ELLs. Fewer than half of the participants had fieldwork experiences that included non-native-English-speaking students. Destiny, who had five years of teaching experience, shared:

I would say that the college prep courses embedded teaching English learners. Each class touched upon it a little. I don’t feel like every course emphasized it as much as they should have. My experience with fieldwork did include the exposure with English learners, but I felt that I had just the basic knowledge of what to do.

Due to the variances in teaching experience among the participants, the recommendation of additional fieldwork may not reflect current practice. Destiny, the most recent graduate of a teacher education program, was able to share and indicate value in her ELL fieldwork experiences in comparison to participants who had 17 years or more of teaching experience. Nonetheless, the participants in this study recommended that coursework related to teaching ELLs and fieldwork experiences including students learning English as a second language would have better facilitated their preparation for teaching ELL students.

Researchers maintain that teachers need content knowledge specific to learning English as a second language (Ballantyne et al., 2008; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Harper and de Jong (2004) contended that ELL teachers should develop an understanding of the processes of first- and second-language acquisition. Other scholars recommend that
teachers of ELLs need to build knowledge of first- and second-language development, to value students’ cultural diversity, and to build skills for teaching academic language (Samson & Collins, 2012). The participants felt that they lacked proper training in curriculum, specific ELL teaching practices, and resources. Classroom teachers must be prepared to teach ELLs and have an understanding of the linguistic demands of academic tasks and skills to address the role of academic language in their instruction. More than half of the participants did not take coursework in teaching linguistically diverse students or in second-language acquisition during their teacher education programs. As a result, the participants struggled to help ELL students access the core content.

The participants felt that teacher preparation programs did not have an impact on their initial interactions with ELL students. Beatrice stated, “I just had no idea how to approach the students at that time. I really was lost, but that was because I did not know how to help them.” The participants agreed that while it is important to articulate standards and skills for ELLs, teachers need to know how to actually work with English learners, since it is inevitable that they will have an ELL student in their classroom. System-level changes must be made to establish evidence-based practices among general education teachers of ELLs. For teacher effectiveness to improve, a specific aim is to identify essential knowledge and skills that can be purposefully integrated into teacher development programs and initiatives.

**Shift in Professional Development**

It is essential that school districts build teacher capacity by addressing the professional development needs of all teachers who work with ELL students (Gebhard & Willett, 2008). Hill (2009) stated, “The professional development system for teachers is,
by all accounts, broken” (p. 470). The content of professional development is most often not what teachers want or need (Nieto, 2018). Effective professional development is often seen as vital to school success and teacher satisfaction. However, in contrast to the literature, professional development also has been criticized for its cost, often-vague goals and objectives, and the lack of data reporting teacher and school improvement efforts (Young, 2013).

More than half of the participants stated that the professional development they have participated in lacked the essential components to ensure student success for culturally diverse students. They explained that the school site currently receives professional development from an outside consultant as well as from district personnel. However, the participants stressed that the professional development did not build upon students’ foundation of skills and did not provide opportunities to measure changes in student performance. The participants explained that although the professional development programs they are offered have good intentions, they do not necessarily focus on how to improve classroom instruction using data. The participants shared that these programs geared toward ELL student instruction focus on a particular curriculum that has been purchased specifically for ELLs in the school district. Concern was stated that the strategies shared at the sessions are utilized for only that specific program, and the participants stated that it would be beneficial to share strategies that extend across the curriculum. Chelsea explained, “Well, the sessions we have with consultants focuses heavily on their process of learning using their materials, their program. There are some good strategies you can use, but that is about it.” The participants stated that these sessions would add value to their knowledge if cultural awareness was a topic shared
before they started training for the curriculum. They expressed that sharing and appreciating students’ cultural backgrounds would have been a nice transition before being thrown into another program for ELL instruction.

The professional development that the participants valued focused on examining their own data to improve upon their instruction. Critical reflection is at the core of improving instruction for ELLs. Calderon et al. (2020) emphasized that professional development should not be considered a silo or a one-time event. It should build upon data-driven practices and improve ELL instruction by examining student work (Calderon et al., 2020). Ongoing professional development allows teachers to engage in reflective dialogues. This allows them time to share their ideas and concerns and to provide support to one another in finding ways to work effectively with ELLs. Improving instruction through professional development should be relevant and job-embedded to create ELL knowledge that will strengthen each teacher’s ability to reach every student they teach.

Common obstacles to professional development should be anticipated and planned for during the design and implementation phases of professional development. Implementing professional development well also requires responsiveness to the needs of educators and learners and to the contexts in which teaching and learning will take place. In the end, well-designed and well-implemented professional development should be considered an essential component of a comprehensive system of teaching and learning that supports students to develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to thrive (Calderon et al., 2020). To ensure a coherent system that supports teachers across the entire professional continuum, professional development should create a systemwide
reform that requires ongoing, appropriate, and long-term professional development for all teachers to effectively work with ELLs.

**Educators’ Mindsets Toward English Learners**

To excel with rigorous academic content, ELLs need equal access to rigorous academic learning experiences (Calderon et al., 2020). Across the nation, ELLs are given simplified texts and low-level tasks rather than accelerated content and language learning (Gándara & Orfield, 2010). As a consequence, ELLs experience a “watered-down curriculum” (Calderon et al., 2020). Rueda and Garcia (1996) argued that teacher beliefs are the primary value system that teachers use to base their judgments of their students, and those teacher judgments are perceived by students and affect their behavior. Teacher beliefs have been shown to have an effect on their expectations, both of their students and of themselves. Mantero and McVicker (2006) stated that perceived teacher judgments shape not only student behavior but also student achievement. It is highly recommended that teachers operate from an assets-based perspective and set high expectations for ELLs (Calderon et al., 2020). Educators of ELL students must recognize that they are teachers of language as well as content (Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017).

The narrative must shift so that educators do not fall into deficit thinking and instead focus on students’ strengths and abilities (Calderon et al., 2020). Maintaining low expectations and deficit thinking about ELLs can lead to instruction that remediates rather than accelerates curriculum and language learning (Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017; Walqui, 2011). The participants stated that by highlighting students’ assets, whether they be language, experiences, or culture, all are considered strengths. Alina stated:
My expectations for my English learners are no different. My job is to help them in any way that I can. You have to be positive with the children. You have the power to make a difference with the students and to build on what they bring into your classroom. Your students then really shine because you are acknowledging what they already know and what they share with you about who they are and where they come from.

The participants emphasized that linking students’ prior knowledge and differentiating lessons based on students’ strengths and needs were detrimental strategies to students’ success. All of the participants were adamant that content should not be lowered for students who are still developing English language skills. The participants firmly held to the belief that in order to help students comprehend key material, they had to be creative in how that content was delivered so that ELL students could demonstrate what they knew in ways that matched their language proficiency levels. Providing ELLs with alternative ways of accessing key content (such as charts, books written in their first language, and at-level texts) allowed them to learn the same material as other students as they continued to develop their English language skills. The participants highly praised the idea that a teacher’s mindset was a necessary support structure for teachers working with ELLs, and they were adamant that students’ multilingualism was viewed as an asset in a global world and a strength that can be built upon daily as they learn content as well as a new language. These beliefs positively impacted their implementation of effective instructional approaches.

**Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

The theoretical framework, culturally sustaining pedagogy, was the lens that was
used to analyze the data. Culturally sustaining pedagogy was used as a structure to
develop the research questions, which served as a guide for the literature review as well
as to analyze the qualitative data. Cultural sustainability is a term that is applied to
pedagogy and to classroom and school environments (Paris, 2012). Culturally sustaining
pedagogy builds on asset pedagogies, which resist and counter deficit views of students
of color, who often live in poverty. Asset pedagogies are based on the assumption that
learning is the lifelong compilation of overlying cultural practices, where all students’
cultural practices are tools for learning academic content (Nasir, Rosebery, Warren, &
Lee, 2006). The belief of sustainability goes beyond the idea of cultural relevance or
responsiveness by “not merely accepting linguistic and cultural differences but by
insisting upon the preservation and maintenance of the multiple languages and cultures of
minoritized students” (Calderon et al., 2020, p. 167).

Within the framework of culturally sustaining pedagogy, the researcher was able
to analyze the case study data. The sentiment of education sustains the value of
communities who have been and continue to be damaged through schooling. Culturally
sustaining pedagogy explicitly calls for schooling to be a site for sustaining rather than
eradicating the cultural ways of being of communities of color (Paris & Alim, 2017).
This case study promotes teaching students to be resilient and to persevere in order to
empower youth to accept and honor their cultural backgrounds. All the participants were
advocates for a student-centered approach to teaching ELLs. The participants claimed
that a teacher’s positive state of mind adds value to a student’s cultural place in the
world. They all asserted that their role as educators is to nurture students’ assets, such as
their personal challenges from learned experiences.
The participants stressed the value of not only acknowledging their perspectives but also affirming cultural practices and linguistic abilities within the classroom setting. Sabrina shared, “I want my students to be aware that they don’t have to lose their first language to learn another. I want them to find value and strength in what they bring to the table. I don’t want them to lose their language or their culture.”

Sabrina was insistent that she did not want her students to lose their sense of self or their cultural identity. The participants shared that ELLs in their classrooms were always made to feel welcome and not feel in any way stigmatized by fluent English speakers. Antonio stated, “We try to make sure that our students know that we are building upon the skills that they already have. We don’t want to replace anything.” Olsen (2010) articulated that the home language practices of ELLs are often seen as appropriate when used outside of the school but not acceptable at school. This practice can create divisions between home and school that erode bilingual language skills across generations (Valdes, 2015).

The participants maintained that students’ cultural practices were central to the learning process of the ELLs in their classrooms. Antonio shared how he makes efforts to integrate an approach where students seek out, evaluate, and synthesize various diverse perspectives. Antonio stated:

I make an effort to do my part so my students can research topics. I want them to value and recognize issues that can affect their school and community. This method of teaching my students helped me understand the possibilities in having students explore viewpoints that differ from their own.
Antonio was clear in his position that he continues to strive to build capacity in himself as well as to remain open-minded at all times with his students.

At the elementary level, deepened conversations regarding commitment to educational equity and cultural, racial, and social justice are difficult to engage in without the proper training and resources. The participants may not have all of the characteristics that encompass culturally sustaining pedagogy. However, the participants did make efforts to provide literature that encompasses a range of diverse texts; their classroom walls reflected the identities and backgrounds of their students; a safe learning environment that valued the voices of several perspectives was established; opportunities were established to learn with, from, and about each other; and the participants demonstrated high expectations and encouraged a growth mindset for all learners. Although more time and training may be needed for the participants to incorporate all the components of culturally sustaining pedagogy, the participants stood by the belief that “to preserve culture is to preserve the existence of those that live it and subsequently, to undervalue the emphasis of culture is to undervalue the existence of those that live it” (Bucholtz et al., 2017, p. 55).

**Implications**

This section includes recommendations for changes in educational practices based on the case study’s findings. These findings have implications for school districts, schools, and policymakers:

- Teacher preparation programs must deepen teacher competency to develop a foundational understanding of language development and strategies for teaching English learners. In addition, pre-service teachers should learn about approaches
to language learning that can build bridges between students’ primary language knowledge and their evolving acquisition of a new language in an academic context.

- Teacher preparation programs should place emphasis on providing fieldwork experiences populated with ELL students, which will allow teacher candidates opportunities to engage, observe, and instruct culturally diverse students.

- Schools, with the support of the district, should create policies that view diversity as an asset, where a shared vision exists to set relevant learning goals. Schools must adopt a philosophy of inclusion that supports teachers through professional development and students through academic growth and success. Policies and programming must reflect an inclusive practice of equalizing educational opportunities for ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

- Professional development opportunities need to be constructed to build the knowledge, strategies, and skills of all teachers of ELLs to integrate language development scaffolds for students at varying levels of English proficiency within a classroom.

- Policymakers and administrators must evaluate and redesign the use of time and school schedules to increase opportunities for professional learning and collaboration, including participation in professional development opportunities, across classrooms and collaborative planning.

- Principals play a crucial role in schools and should lead efforts centered on teacher practices and creating effective systems of support for positive ELL student outcomes. Administrator preparation programs should further strengthen
administrator competencies by preparing principals to be leaders of academic success for ELLs.

- States, districts, and schools should regularly conduct needs assessments using data from staff surveys to identify the areas of professional development most needed and desired by its stakeholders. Data collected from these sources can help ensure that professional learning is not disconnected from practice and supports the areas of knowledge and skill that educators want to develop.

- School leaders should listen to the voices of teachers who have firsthand experience as ELL students. Teachers who are representative of the culture of their students have a distinct advantage when creating instruction based on their shared culture, which allows them to utilize culture as a curricular source. Cultural awareness training should be provided for teachers by school districts to create connections between what students learn in the classroom and the life students know outside the classroom, where cultivating an appreciation of diversity reflects the lives of the students and their lived experiences.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

One recommendation for future research is to expand the study to include teacher voices from all levels of education rather than just elementary education. If multiple voices were highlighted, the study could identify whether the concerns presented vary across grade levels within a district. Additionally, a recommendation for future research could be to expand the study to include administrators’ perspectives of teachers’ perceptions of support structures and barriers and the impact they have on ELL student achievement. Furthermore, future research could examine current teacher preparation...
programs to determine whether teachers indicate changes in regard to fieldwork experiences when working with ELLs during their coursework. A final recommendation for future research could be to implement a qualitative study to examine ELL students’ perceptions and beliefs about their experiences in a mainstream classroom. A greater understanding of the counternarratives of ELLs can provide an opportunity for these individuals to share personal stories, lived experiences, and perceptions. This would offer a sense of understanding for practitioners as they seek to provide equity-based instruction for ELLs.

**Concluding Statements**

“Everybody needs to feel like they belong. Everybody is important.” These words resonated deeply as one of the participants expressed her final thoughts on her personal experiences working with ELLs. How wonderful it would be if students were welcomed in every classroom with the expectation that their presence, home language, and cultural experiences were valued.

The historical background of bias against ELL students created a system that will continue to perpetuate academic gaps unless ELLs are made a priority. The stakes are high for ELLs, and all members of the educational community have a responsibility to learn from past practices. While it is important to establish comprehensive education systems that are well-aligned for ELL students, that alone would not ensure sufficient opportunity for academic success among all ELL students. There must also be an explicit effort to make certain that all teachers and other school professionals who teach ELLs are equipped with appropriate skills and knowledge. The would not only ensure that ELLs
learn and understand English but would also encourage them to be courageous in
breaking down any barriers that may hinder their access to learning core content.

The intent of this study was to provide teachers with a voice so that all educators
can be prepared to learn how to reach ELLs and to cultivate a deeper understanding of the
invaluable experiences that culturally diverse students bring to the classroom. This study
explored the support structures and barriers perceived by teachers and how they affected
their ability to meet the needs of second-language learners. Teacher preparation programs
and professional development are areas where barriers may need to be reshaped to
provide teachers with the right combination of tools, knowledge, and support that will
make academic content more accessible. The participants perceived maintaining teachers’
high expectations for students and a collaborative leadership approach as support
structures that would continue to develop teacher capacity to meet the instructional needs
of ELL students. A connection between language, content, and culture is key to
equalizing educational opportunities and advancement for ELLs. By prioritizing these
connections and assuring a long-standing commitment to improving the education of
ELLs, society will be building upon an instrumental investment in the education of
culturally and linguistically diverse youth.
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APPENDIX A

Teacher Interview One-on-One Questions

Research Question: What are teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to influence English learners’ academic success?

1. Is English your primary language?
2. Do you speak a second language?
3. How do the perceptions of teachers impact students?
4. Do you feel that sufficient ELL professional development is offered?
5. Would you participate in professional development regarding English language learners if offered?
6. In your teacher preparation program, were you required to take a course in teaching students with culturally diverse backgrounds?
7. Do you feel prepared to teach English language learners in your classroom?
8. Are you accepting of ELL students speaking their primary language at school?

Research Question: What was instrumental in your learning to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students?

1. Did you work with ELL students or with students from other cultures during your student teaching experience?
2. Did this experience assist you in preparing to teach ELL students?
3. How do teachers in a diverse school engage English language learners?
4. Do you feel that newly arrived ELL students should be taught in a separate classroom?
5. How do you build connections with families that do not speak English as their primary language?

6. Does the current district curriculum address the needs of ELL students?

7. In your teacher preparation program, did you receive explicit instruction in language acquisition through a dedicated course?

8. Are there challenges that you feel prevent you from reaching your English language learner population?

9. Are your English learners at grade level, or do you believe they struggle academically?

10. What would make you more effective to reach your English language learner students?

11. How do you develop positive classroom relationships with ELLs in your classroom?

12. Do you see those languages as a barrier or an asset? Please explain.
APPENDIX B

Focus Group Questions

Research Question: What do teachers feel is essential for building a common understanding on a school campus to promote a positive culture of learning for English learners?

1. What is the current attitude toward ELLs’ native languages in your school?

2. Is a student’s use of his/her native language encouraged or discouraged in the classroom?

3. Do parents know where to get information in their language? How do teachers approach this issue?

4. How has your site built connections with families of ELL students?

5. How do staff members feel about the changing demographics? How do they feel about working with ELL students?

6. How has your school site maintained current professional development specifically in regard to teaching ELL students?

7. What do you attribute to the success of your school’s reclassification rates in the past years?