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Secondary and Postsecondary Teachers' Perceptions of ESL Students' Barriers to College Graduation

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

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by

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MAT, Trevecca Nazarene University, 2010

BBA, Cumberland University 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Majority of English as second language (ESL) students attending primary and secondary schools in the United States are not considered college ready despite mandated educational strategies aimed at improving language acquisition and academic performance. ESL students are more likely to drop out within the first 2 years of college than their English-speaking peers. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore educators' perspectives regarding high postsecondary attrition rates of ESL students in Middle Tennessee. Tinto's retention theory provided the framework for the study. Data collection included semistructured interviews with 6 Middle Tennessee public high school teachers and 6 Middle Tennessee college professors from 2- and 4-year public colleges. Interview data were coded and analyzed using the thematic analysis method. Findings revealed 4 major themes: language acquisition, barriers to college graduation, adverse circumstances, and academic achievement. Participants reported a desire for alignment between primary, secondary, and postsecondary education. Findings were used to develop a professional development training curriculum for secondary and postsecondary educators. The project included effective strategies to use in the classroom to increase ESL students' college readiness and college graduation rates. If implemented correctly, this project will positively impact ESL students' language acquisition and academic achievement, but it will also develop a significant professional partnership between K-12 public schools and colleges.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my husband, David Griffin, and our sons, Michael and Christopher. Your patience, love, encouragement, and support helped me throughout this educational journey. David, without you this achievement would not have been possible, and I thank you for believing in me and supporting me. My heart, my sons, thank you for being proud of me and telling how smart I was! I hope that you both will value education and invest your time and minds in lifelong learning. To my mother, thank you for always believing in me when nobody else did. I wish you were still with us to see my accomplishments. I hope I made you proud and that you rejoice in Heaven knowing that I fulfilled my dream. To my father, I am forever grateful for your example of courage, your fight against communism and for what is right, and your stubbornness that brought me to the United States and never allowed me to quit. To my mother-in-law, thank you for taking such a good care of my sons, and for your deep love, sacrifice, and willingness to help. I am the first to complete a terminal degree in my family. To my brothers and extended family, I was told I was too stupid to complete a trade school, yet I completed more in a third language than those who insulted me. I did it to show our children and my students that nobody and nothing can stop us from reaching our fullest potential! I love you all more than you know! Thank you!

Acknowledgments

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: The Problem

Between 2011 and 2012, the number of international students registered at U.S.

colleges and universities increased by 5.7% to 764,000 (de Kleine & Lawton, 2015). The

population of kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) English as second language (ESL)

students continues to increase across the United States; in 2013 nearly 1 in 10 U.S. public

school students were classified as English language learners (ELLs) (Zinth, 2013). A

significant increase in the percentage of ELL students was noted in 28 states from 2009-

10 to 2010-11, and the 3% growth in Nevada in 2010-2011 was the largest of any state

(Zinth, 2013).

The State of Tennessee has the fastest growing ESL subgroup, but only one third

of high school graduates finish high school college ready and able to comprehend

college-level courses (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013; Watkins, 2015). Although low

rates of college graduates are a nationwide problem and less than 60% of students

attending 4-year colleges graduate within 6 years, many ESL students accepted into 2- or

4-year colleges nationwide are underprepared for the rigor of a postsecondary program

and are forced to take remedial courses (Bettinger et al., 2013). Only 37% of Hispanic

students in Tennessee applying to college graduate, which appears to align with their

Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program standardized tests scores in K-12

showing 32% scored below basic, 44% scored basic, 22% scored proficient, and only 1%

scored advanced (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2013).

According to the national statistics, by 2060 the percentage of projected foreign-

born individuals will increase to 96.66% for 16 years old and over, 95.84% for 18 years

old and over, and 33.35% for people between 15 and 44 years (Colby, & Ortman, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). With more refugees arriving from war-torn Middle East and North Africa regions seeking asylum in the United States, the number of underprepared students will increase dramatically (Harris, Sanger, & Herszenhorn, 2015).

The Local Problem

In response to a surge of ESL students in both K-12 and colleges between 2000 and 2016, research has been conducted on ESL students' academic performance, language acquisition, and developmental strategies in K-12 settings that offer meaningful and culturally appropriate teaching strategies ("WIDA Standards Framework," n.d.). However, research from the perspectives of educators is limited regarding factors other than language acquisition and ESL students' barriers to college graduation. In the case of college success of ESL students, research studies addressed techniques and strategies that focus on remediation, differentiation, and academic support needs (Bettinger et al., 2013). However, there may be additional types of barriers impacting college attrition among ESL learners, such as a lack of one or all five social and emotional learning core competencies ("Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning," 2016). The five competencies focus on addressing personal and psychological abilities of ESL students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students having limited education in their native language, students from countries devastated by wars or crime, or students dealing with family-related tragedies. There is a lack of evidence in the literature related to why ESL students are not as successful as their non-ESL counterparts, and there is also a lack of evidence regarding what teaching practices affect

positive outcomes in ESL students. Strategies to improve college retention and graduation rates among ESL students, as reported by high school and college educators who spend a significant amount of time with ESL students throughout the year, are limited.

There was a problem identified in Tennessee concerning ESL students' high college attrition rates. In 2013-2014, the percentage of English language learners in U.S. public schools was 9.3%, and the percentage of ELL students in public schools in Tennessee was 3.5% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015, 2016). In 2014, 6,229 ESL students were enrolled in some type of postsecondary education program in Tennessee, but only 1,371 (22%) graduated with a degree or certification (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). In the 2012-2013 school year, public K-12 institutions in Tennessee served over 32,000 ESL students from over 50 different countries (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

According to the Tennessee Department of Education (2014), the population of the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools is diverse in national origin and socioeconomic status where 1 in 4 students is an ELL. Additionally, more than 140 different languages are spoken across the district's public schools (Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, n.d.). As the K-12 ESL population grows, the population of college applicants who are not college ready also grows, where 20% of freshmen at 4-year colleges and universities and 52% of freshmen enrolled at 2-year colleges need some sort of remedial coursework (Bettinger et al., 2013). Out of the 2.6 million students who attend community colleges in California, approximately 25% are English language

learners (Bettinger et al., 2013). These students are entering local 2-year community colleges, and many hope to transfer to 4-year institutions nationwide (Bettinger et al., 2013). However, there are many challenges that ESL students face, such as limited academic English proficiency, resulting in a high need for developmental courses in both language and mathematics (Bettinger et al., 2013).

The State of Tennessee is anticipating an increased number of ESL students applying for the Tennessee Promise scholarship for both 2- and 4-year colleges (Haslam, 2014; Tennessee Higher Education Commission, n.d.). Based on the recent initiative sponsored by Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam, the Tennessee class of 2015 was the first to apply for the Tennessee Promise scholarship, which provides a 2-year tuition-free education at either public or private Tennessee-based community colleges, 4-year colleges, or technical schools (Haslam, 2014; Tennessee Higher Education Commission, n.d.). The Tennessee Promise scholarship not only increased students' persistence to graduate, but it also ignited a surge of underperforming applicants who need for academic language proficiency remediation and who may be less likely to obtain a higher education degree (Kim, 2011). Remediation courses limit college credit accumulation in ELL students' first and second years, negatively impacting their chance of completing an associate degree within 3 years (Hodara, 2014). This situation mostly affects the first generation of foreign-born and foreign-educated ESL students (Hodara, 2014).

With a significant increase of ESL students entering local colleges and universities, interventions to decrease college attrition by focusing on English language proficiency are crucial. As the diverse ESL population residing in Tennessee take

advantage of the Tennessee Promise scholarship and apply for admission to in-state

colleges and universities, they face some of the largest challenges in persistence to

graduation (Hodara, 2014). As secondary schools focus on improving their ESL students'

academic language proficiency, local 2- and 4-year colleges and universities are focused

on ESL college students who need assistance to meet requirements for academic

language proficiency and college readiness (Chavez, 2014). These institutions of higher

education increased the number of remedial courses or offered specific academic

language-based programs (Nashville State Community College, n.d.). I sought to explore

the perceptions of high school and college educators who taught ESL students regarding

the reasons for high college attrition rates among this population of learners.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

According to the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, ESL students currently

attending K-12 schools make up 24% of the student population. This is an increase of

approximately 6% from 2011-2012 (National Clearinghouse for English Language

Learners, 2015). Between 2004-2005 and 2011-2012, the number of K-12 ESL students

in Tennessee increased by over 200% (National Clearinghouse for English Language

Learners, 2015). Therefore, it was important to gather educators' perspectives regarding

the reasons for ESL students' college attrition so that interventions could be implemented

to positively affect student outcomes.

Currently, K-12 schools in Middle Tennessee implement ESL pullout programs,

push-in programs, inclusion models, structured immersion grades or classes, or scheduled

ESL class periods, also referred to as sheltered classroom models, to assist ESL students

with English acquisition (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2017). However,

postsecondary institutions shifted the paradigm from teaching to learning and began

implementing learning communities (Nadelson, Pluska, Moorcroft, Jeffrey, & Woodard,

2014). Short, Fidelman, and Louguit (2012) conducted quasi-experimental research

showing that the sheltered instruction observation protocol model improved the quality of

instruction to secondary ESL students and improved their English language proficiency

and academic achievement. Sheltered instruction incorporates instructional methods that

include the knowledge of skilled ESL teachers and good teaching strategies intended to

meet the education and linguistic needs of ESL students (Short et al., 2012). The purpose

of this qualitative case study was to explore the reasons for the high college attrition

levels among ESL students in Middle Tennessee from educators' perspectives.

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

ESL students are the fastest growing subgroup in adult education programs, and

most of these students attend public or nonprofit institutions (Yang, as cited in Matthews-

Aydinli, 2008; Straubhaar, 2013). Approximately 9% of young adults in the Midwest and

14% in the South are reported to be foreign-born, an increase from 3% and 4%

respectively since 1980 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Additionally, 1 in 4 (17.9 million)

young adults speak a foreign language at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

The ESL population comprises students who arrived in the United States before

kindergarten and students born in the United States to immigrants (Francis, Rivera,

Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2012). The fastest growing subgroup of U.S. immigrants is

Spanish-speaking students whose primary career path starts at community college (Chavez, 2014). The population of ELL students will continue to increase, requiring community colleges to become more culturally aware and offer culturally diverse educational programs that focus on resources dedicated to this student population (Chavez, 2014). As the ESL population continues to grow, K-12 institutions struggle to accommodate students and their educational needs, causing ESL students to either drop out of high school or attend college without adequate educational preparation (Crumpler, 2014). Primary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions across the United States need knowledgeable educators with specific language teaching skills to help ESL students' master academic content to become college ready (Crumpler, 2014).

Hodara (2014) conducted a 10-year longitudinal study on community college students in urban settings and used a difference-in-differences approach to determine the impact of ESL on developmental writing. These students were generation 1.5 or second generation and spoke a language other than English. In most of the cases, the students' writing samples reflected interference and literacy issues. According to the faculty members of that community college, issues related to the 1.5 generation of ESL students compared to non-ESL students were not as divided as they used to be (Hodara, 2014; Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith, 2014). According to Hodara (2014), more immigrants decide to attend 2-year colleges or forprofit institutions than 4-year colleges. Even though first- and second-generation ESL students acquired some type of language proficiency in more than one language, they still experienced difficulties and challenges that may have prevented them from obtaining higher education diplomas (Hodara, 2014).

ESL non-English speaking students and international students currently attending colleges in the United States are linguistically diverse, and students use a variety of English dialects that differ from mainstream college-level English (de Kleine & Lawton, 2015).

Every year, approximately 30,000 refugee children arrive in the United States (Refugee Processing Center, 2013; Hirano, 2014). As of February 2016, 85,000 refugees were admitted to the United States; the highest number of refugees were from Africa, the Near East, and South Asia, and many of them were school-age children (Refugee Processing Center, 2016). Linguistically diverse populations of ESL students make up a significant percentage of college-level students, with many of these students representing a majority of the student body at urban community colleges (de Kleine & Lawton, 2015). Knowing that such tendencies occur, it is imperative for colleges to allocate funds for English language acquisition classes and additional staffing (de Kleine & Lawton, 2015). The intent of this qualitative case study was to identify the reasons for the high college attrition levels among ESL students in Middle Tennessee from educators' perspectives.

Definition of Terms

The following words and definitions were used to inform this study:

English as a second language (ESL): Educational and instructional programs or courses intended to advance the English language proficiency of students who cannot communicate fluently or learn effectively (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013).

English learner (EL): Primary, secondary, or adult learners who do not understand, speak, read, or write English and who often come from non-English speaking backgrounds (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2016).

ESL pull-out programs: Programs designed to educate immigrant children by using their native language to make teaching more significant (Lass, 2016).

Generation 1.5: Nonnative English-speaking students who were either born in the United States or brought to the United States at a young age. These students prefer to speak in English but are bilingual (Thonus, 2014).

Hispanic: A person who lives in the United States and speaks Spanish and who is of a Latin American descent. The term has been used by the U.S. Census Bureau since 1980 to help Americans identify themselves as Hispanic (Fisher, 2014).

Immersion: A method used to teach ESL students in a regular classroom by using modified assignments to help with language acquisition (Lass, 2016).

Latino: People who came from Latin America (Fisher, 2014).

Sheltered instruction observation protocol model: A method designed to teach content by making it more accessible and easier to understand for English language learners (Short et al., 2012).

WIDA: World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment Consortium, a company that develops and implements strategies and assessments designed for language learners to improve their academic language (WIDA Consortium, n.d.).

WIDA access: Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners, an English language proficiency assessment given to Kindergarten through 12th grade ELL students (WIDA Access Test, n.d.).

Significance of the Study

This study informs secondary and postsecondary administrators regarding the barriers ELLs face to achieving success in postsecondary educational programs. Maintaining ESL students' motivation and self-efficacy is imperative to their academic success (Hsiang-Ann et al., 2012). Gathering teachers' perceptions regarding ESL students' barriers to graduation is crucial to implementing interventions and programs that are aimed at decreasing ELL students' attrition levels and optimizing their learning outcomes (Hsiang-Ann et al., 2012; Tran, 2015). Most interventions for ELL students focus on improving language proficiency that are labeled as *promising* rather than *effective* (Haberler & Levin, 2014). The results from this study may provide effective ways to improve students' academic language proficiency, and may inform other areas of support for this population of learners.

Findings from this study may be instrumental in developing vertically aligned ESL programs between K-12 and postsecondary educational institutions. Both high school and college level educators' perceptions are similar and focus mainly on English limited language proficiency, lack of motivation, and external circumstances such as the need for supporting families (Hsiao-ping, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Seeking a deeper understanding of the process of second language acquisition with connection to new or modified models of instruction is highly recommended. The results of this study may

affect positive social change for ESL students through measures put in place to vertically align primary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions. Results of this study may be used to establish an ongoing partnership between K-12 administrators and college administrators focusing on the creation and implementation of effective strategies in the primary, secondary, and postsecondary classrooms for aligning expectations and requirements between K-12 and institutions of higher education. Positive social change may occur during vertically aligned professional development sessions for K-12 teachers and college professors designed to increase ESL students' college readiness and decrease college attrition.

Research Questions

To examine educators' perceptions of ESL students' college attrition, two questions drove this study:

1. What are the perceptions of high school educators concerning the reasons for the high postsecondary education attrition levels of ELLs?

2. What are the perceptions of college educators concerning the reasons for the high postsecondary education attrition levels of ELLs?

In the United States, community colleges are more appealing and more accessible to African American, Hispanic or Latino American, Native American, and Asian American students because they are more affordable (Talbert, 2012). Middle Tennessee's K-12 school districts, community colleges, and state universities experienced an influx of ESL students who are classified as non-English speakers, Generation 1, and Generation 1.5. Although Generation 1 and Generation 1.5 are more advanced in English language

acquisition than newly arrived ESL students, they still experience the same or similar difficulties in completing higher education programs (Atherton, 2014).

Although extensive research was conducted on K-12 ESL students nationwide prior to 2013, there was a limited amount of research on the academic performance of linguistically diverse ESL students at the college level in Tennessee (Cromley, Kanno, & Cromley, n.d). Since 2016, more research on high school graduates and college attrition and graduation of ESL students has been conducted. Current research shows that more than 20% of students in primary and secondary schools are ELL students (Callahan & Humphries, 2016). Students who were identified as ELL and placed in ESL classes exhibited significantly lower academic achievement than their English-speaking peers (Callahan & Humphries, 2016; Callahan, Wilkinson, & Muller, 2010; Umansky, 2014). ELL students experience even more difficulties while in high school as course placement depends on the state's graduation and college admission requirements (Callahan & Humphries, 2016). Recent changes to Tennessee standardized tests in primary and secondary schools require all students, including ELLs, to take a new linguistically complex test that asks them to "decipher, interpret, and then craft an argument from a long passage or multiple documents" (Miller, 2017, p. 2). Since the ELL population is rapidly growing, U.S. school districts and institutions of higher education will continue to serve a linguistically challenged population (Miller, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocation and Adult Learning, 2011).

Review of the Literature

The literature review contains information relevant to ESL students and was limited to publications from 2012 to the present, with older references used if no current information was found or if the reference was a seminal work. The examination of literature included information from Walden University's library, peer-reviewed journals, books, online and research databases, the State of Tennessee and Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools' websites, U.S. government websites, and professional network websites. Topics included ESL college attrition, ESL barriers to academic success in high school and college, inadequate ESL teacher training and lack of educational equity, and students' perceptions of the academic, professional, and social challenges they had to overcome as college freshmen.

Scholarly articles and the information presented in the literature review were derived from searching electronic databases such as Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest, Academic Search Complete, and Education Research Complete. I also used the Google Scholar search engine. Key search terms included *English as Second Language (ESL) college attrition*, *number of ESL adult college students*, *ESL students' college retention*, *ESLs persistence to graduation*, *perspectives of college professors*, *perspectives of college ESL students*, *number of ESL students in Tennessee*, *nationwide ESLs*, *English Language Learners (ELL) in secondary schools in TN*, *ELL students in secondary schools nationwide*, *perspectives from Latina/o college students*, *ESL high school and college graduation*, and *ESL population estimates and projections*.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Tinto's retention theory. According to Tinto (1993), there are three major reasons why students leave college: academic difficulties, inability to integrate academic and professional/occupational goals, and failure to merge academic and social life. The model of institutional departure suggests that to persist to graduation, students need to be integrated into a formal academic curriculum, establish informal interactions with faculty and staff, actively participate in extracurricular activities, and establish informal peer-tutoring interactions (Tinto, 1993). For students to meet their academic goals, they must be motivated because motivation is the foundation of college persistence (Tinto, 2010). While students develop inner motivation, they also develop self-efficacy, a crucial element of their ability to persist to graduation (Tinto, 2010).

Retention begins at the recruitment level where all students are informed about what a particular institution of higher education can offer, and where students must be presented with clearly stated guidelines for persistence to graduate (Tinto, 2004). One of the most important and critical college persistence steps is making the transition to college easy and unified (Tinto, 2010). Such guidelines can be presented and are often discussed through appropriate advising and counseling programs, which can promote self-efficacy among students (Tinto, 2004). Additionally, students should be offered support in such areas as academic progress and personal and social interactions. Successful persistence to graduation depends not only on the support that is offered to them, but also on the ability to motivate and support students academically and socially

(Tinto, 2004). Such support should continue beyond the freshman year and should be offered to all students (Tinto, 1993).

High school grades and standardized test scores are strong predictors of college readiness and college persistence of first-year students (Stewart, Doo Hun, & JoHyun, 2015). There is a substantial correlation between college persistence and academic performance, where grades obtained in college are one of the most reliable forecasters of students' persistence to graduation (Stewart, Doo Hun, et al., 2015). Students' grades mirror their critical thinking skills and levels of deeper understanding (Laird, Seifert, Pascarella, Mayhew, & Blaich, 2014). However, persistence in college is unlikely for students who are not motivated, as performance depends on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels as well as effort (Tinto, 2016). Motivation can increase or decrease depending on college experiences, which can either positively influence students' persistence to graduation or cause their abrupt departure (Tinto, 2016).

Success depends on how students interact with other students and educators, how students set goals and boost their self-efficacy, the degree to which they develop a sense of belonging, and whether they view the curriculum to be relevant and worth their effort (Tinto, 2016). The overall success of first-generation college students is influenced by their parents' education (Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella. (2012). Students whose parents did not attend college feel less academically prepared, are more likely to live off campus, and are more likely to be less involved in extracurricular or volunteer activities (Padgett et al., 2012).

Understanding causes of ESL students' lack of persistence to graduation, motivation, self-efficacy, and ability or willingness to set personal goals was the purpose of the conceptual framework. Tinto (1993, 2004, 2007, 2010) provided a better understanding of the concerns related to ESL students' persistence to graduation and insights into students' barriers in fulfilling their dream of becoming college graduates. With limited research on college success of ESL students, conducting an in-depth study to explore high school teachers' and college professors' perceptions of ESL students' challenges yielded important data on students' personal and academic barriers to college graduation (see Cromley et al., n.d).to inform interventions aimed at positive social change for this growing population of learners.

<div align="center">**Review of the Broader Problem**</div>

ESL and Barriers to Academic Success

The most common theme emerging from the literature review was that ESL college students are underprepared for college and are required to take remedial courses, which extends their years in college and increases their likelihood of dropping out of college at a higher rate than non-English learners (Bettinger et al., 2013). Although the literature included many articles suggesting possible implementation of programs and strategies to address ELL attrition, only a few articles addressed the perspective of high school teachers and college professors regarding barriers to graduation by ESL students other than language acquisition (Bettinger et al., 2013).

There are many issues troubling ESL college students. The most common issue relates to poor performance and high attrition rates is poor preparation of K-12 students

for college-level work (Bettinger et al., 2013). Many students applying to and attending community colleges are underprepared, come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and attended high-poverty primary and secondary schools (Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014). These students are often taught by less qualified and less experienced teachers, are among students who also lack motivation, and have parents who may not support or be involved in their education (Martin et al., 2014).

Many ESL students face difficulties with becoming college ready (Johnson & Owen, 2013). All students, including ESL students, are required to complete 4 years of English and 3 years of mathematics, including the completion of 1 year of Algebra II or higher (Bettinger et al., 2013). However, when non-English speakers are classified as ELL and attend sheltered classes in K-12, they often do not complete the required English and math courses, resulting in extending their graduation from high school to at least 5 years (Robertson & Lafond, 2016). Approximately 20% of K-12 and college students are classified as linguistic minorities, that is students whose first language is other than English (Kanno & Harklau, 2012). ESL students who were born in the United States, also referred to as Generation 1, or who were born outside of the United States and speak a language other than English at home are the fastest growing subgroup nationwide (Kanno & Harklau, 2012).

Many educators serving young and adult ESL students complain that these students either have childlike qualities or act childishly (Jung, 2013). However, these educators fail to examine their practices and strategies for addressing student behaviors (Jung, 2013). By taking into account diverse cultural needs and addressing these needs in

both academic and personal settings, teachers allow young and adult ESL students to feel

safe, motivated, and able to handle circumstances in age-appropriate ways (Jung, 2013).

Additionally, it is often the teachers' lack of classroom management, appropriate

teaching strategies, and ability to create a culturally aware and culturally responsive

environment that fosters childish behavior (Johnson & Owen, 2013; Jung, 2013; U.S.

Department of Education Office for Civil Rights OCR, 2015).

The early implementation of rigorous curricula and encouragement of ESL

students in K-12 institutions helps students overcome their language deficiencies. Such

an approach is strongly recommended for postsecondary institutions as well (Samson &

Collins, 2012). Early support and rigorous cross-curriculum content-based education of

ESL students, such as advanced placement classes, are proven to increase college

admission and scholarships and decrease the cost of education as students complete

programs in less time (Flores, Battalova, & Fix, 2012). Many community colleges offer

college developmental reading and writing courses to ESL students who do not meet

college-level requirements (Hodara, 2014). Additionally, institutions with the highest

ESL student populations offer ESL courses to students who are in the process of learning

English (Hodara, 2014). These courses are designed to address initial barriers to

academic success and college attrition for ESL students by developing and sustaining

their literacy skills and creating a learning community for support (Hodara, 2014).

Although primary and secondary schools have implemented changes to their

practices, policies, and strategies to improve students' academic progress, college

persistence, and graduation rates, improving students' socioeconomic circumstances is

the change that is crucial to closing the achievement gap for ESL students (Martin et al, 2014; Rothstein, 2004). Kaya, Stough, and Juntune (2016) conducted research with gifted fifth grade students to determine whether income level correlated to performance on a verbal examination. Low-income students scored significantly lower on the verbal examination than students from the higher income group (Kaya et al., 2016). This research supports the notion of socioeconomic circumstances affecting students' academic achievement.

Barriers to Academic Success of ESL College Freshman

During the fall semester of 2012, community colleges served 45% of the undergraduate population in the United States, which includes approximately 13 million students attending 1,132 institutions (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2014). As of 2015, 57% of Hispanic adult learners were enrolled at community college, but only 16% graduated with a certificate or degree within 4 years (AACC, 2014). Nationwide, a leading reason why community colleges are chosen by ESL students is because of their open-door admissions policy (Janis, 2014). However, upon entering college, adult ESL students often complete fewer semesters than non-ESL students, have the lowest grade-point average during their first semester, and are 4 times more likely to drop out of college than non-ESL students (Janis, 2014). The reason adult ESL students are less likely to persist to graduation is the significant gap between their academic preparation and academic success (Janis, 2014).

Almon (2015) conducted a qualitative study of the perceptions held by ESL community college students concerning the reasons for their persistence to graduation,

transfer to 4-year institutions, or decision to leave college. The sample consisted of 28

students in different levels of college completion, including nine students who had

already dropped out (Almon, 2015). Among the reasons cited for leaving college were

family responsibilities and lack of financial capability (Almon, 2015). Obstacles to

academic success cited by students included linguistic barriers, cultural background and

multilingual identities, limited or no knowledge of college processes, and problems with

testing and placement (Almon, 2015). However, Villarreal and Garcia (2016) stated that

there are additional external barriers associated with Hispanic students, such as limited

resources in their former, mostly inner-city schools, high crime rates in their

neighborhood, and unstable families. ESL students who were successful while in college,

credited tutoring and collaboration with other ESL students, as well as self-motivation

and hard work (Almon, 2015). Martin et al. (2014) added that characteristics such as the

ability to set clear goals and to manage external demands as well as self-empowerment

are vital to college success. One of the biggest obstacles to success conveyed by ESL

community college students is full-time employment. Other significant obstacles were

lack of knowledge about financial aid, including the appeals process, and lack of

knowledge of curriculum requirements that resulted in their taking courses they did not

need to graduate (Almon, 2015).

College processes, such as obtaining financial assistance, choosing courses

required to graduate, applying for financial and graduation waivers if necessary, and

understanding requirements to transfer to 4-year colleges, are difficult to process and

require knowledge beyond simple levels of English acquisition (Almon, 2015). Yet

Grover, Miller, Swearingen, and Wood (2014) stated that students' success and ability to accommodate demands of employment, family, and college depends on students being able to self-direct. Teaching students how to take charge in their quest for both personal and academic success is challenging and difficult.

Many ESL students have limited access to advanced college-prepatory courses while in high school, resulting in a lack of academic preparation (Kanno & Harklau, 2012). When ESL students are placed in lower level courses they fall behind students in high-track courses in developing higher order thinking, which limits ESL students' ability to think critically, solve problems, produce original ideas, and develop passion for the core subjects (Kanno & Harklau, 2012). Researchers suggested that if students are to utilize a self-directed method correctly, it must be taught and facilitated from an early age (Grover et al., 2014). Many adult ESL students who have their own families and who returned to college when their children were in high school or college, expressed their concern with self-direction and time-management and stated that while their family members were very supportive of their quest for college graduation, they found seeking help from or studying with their own children was both challenging and burdensome (Almon, 2015; Grover et al., 2014).   Even though children of adult ESL students offered them support and the benefit of their knowledge about college experiences, adult ESL students still were unsuccessful in completing the degree program (Almon, 2015).

Villarreal and Garcia (2016) agreed that if students felt overwhelmed, frustrated, and required to take courses that were irrelevant to them, students were more likely to leave. In addition to issues related to the ESL students' families, the issue of multilingual

identity was identified (Almon, 2015). Most of the ESL students are required to take

remedial English courses where instructors put emphasis on writing and speaking

(Villarreal & Garcia, 2016). Stille (2015) added that since materials used in classrooms

suggest that literacy strategies and English language are privileged, ESL students may be

viewed as different, aliens, or students with deficiencies and will continue struggling with

meeting the unrealistic standards of the English-speaking model. This notion is supported

by some researchers who question the ethical implications of focusing on teaching

pronunciation to ESL students as it raises concerns about their loss of identity

(McCrocklin & Link, 2016).

ESL students worry about how they are perceived by other students and college

professors, so that participating in class or group presentation may cause them to feel

self-conscience of their accents (Almon, 2015; McCrocklin & Link, 2016). Cummins

(2001) supported the notion of students' fear of public speaking and collaborating with

other students and stated that classroom interactions are never impartial. He suggested

that social interactions, predominantly in educating emerging bilingual students, play a

vital role in their persistence and academic success (Cummins, 2001). Almon (2015)

supported Cummins' theory and stated that not all ESL students are as confident in

rejecting the perception of themselves as less capable or mediocre students. Many ESL

students stated that American students were less likely to help them or study with them.

Some American students worry that ESL students' poor English skills translate into them

not being as smart or hard-working as American students and that collaboration with ESL

students will negatively affect their grades (Almon, 2015).

Feeling rejected and stigmatized emphasizes a feeling of loneliness and lack of belonging. However, one of the most difficult problems for ESL students struggling with multilingual identity is a lack of interaction with college professors and staff (Almon, 2015). Such interactions were limited to requesting class assignments or asking for feedback on assignments. According to Cummins (2001), when ESL students notice their culture, language, or identity ignored or diminished, they are less likely to become involved. Mature ESL students felt that their professors did not listen to their comments or questions, as they gave students wrong answers or answers completely unrelated to the question asked (Almon, 2015). Because many ESL students are reluctant to speak or participate in class, professors who avoid interacting with ESL students may not realize that students' reticence does not mean that students lack motivation, competence, or even skills (Carter & Henrichsen, 2014).

Teaching ESL students, whether children or adults, is a challenging task requiring educators to incorporate proper classroom management strategies and to establish a supportive and safe learning environment to lower students' anxiety (Carter & Henrichsen, 2014). Stille (2015) supported this belief and encouraged educators to design and foster teaching strategies and learning activities that invest in students' cultural and language background. Such a positive and nurturing environment allows ESL students to gain confidence in speaking English (Carter & Henrichsen, 2014). ESL adult learners' interactions with their peers or teachers differ from their non-ESL classmates and vary from being too eager to answer questions and participate in class discussions to being withdrawn, reserved, or anxious and focusing only on observing others (Carter &

Henrichsen, 2014). Despite the efforts of educators, some adult ESL students tend to remove themselves from verbal interactions with others, and this results in making proper English acquisition quite difficult and lengthy (Baran-Lucarz, 2014). Such withdrawal is caused by students' internal fight to preserve their self-esteem as well as their desperate avoidance of embarrassment, humiliation, and condemnation (Carter & Henrichsen, 2014).

Vafai (2014) used an ethnographic methodology to examine the degree to which carrying out policies intended to assist ESL students with mastering work-ready skills addressed the "21st century skills" and knowledge students need to succeed in college and work settings. The "one-size-fits-all" type of educational approach to ESL students became a complex problem to both educators and students, sending mixed signals to immigrant students and causing issues with students fitting in and establishing their own identities (Vafai, 2014). Findings suggested that policies addressing the need for "21st century skills" have not been executed in mainstream classrooms. Such poor execution of college and work place requirements among ESL students sends a wrong message to students who, as a result, often face real life dilemmas and difficulties in succeeding in college and finding employment (Vafai, 2014).

Wendy (2015) conducted a secondary analysis using a retrospective, longitudinal, correlational study on ESL pre-licensure nursing students in Texas to evaluate the relationship between language, participation in a comprehensive reading program, and students' attrition rates. The two-year data collection was conducted between 2011 and 2013 and involved several different colleges and universities in Texas. During the first

year of study, the researcher collected data from 3,305 students and entered the data into

the Statewide At-Risk Tracking and Interventions for Nurses (SATIN) database (p. 17).

However, due to some inconsistencies in the data, the sample size was revised to include

a total of 3,258 pre-licensure nursing students out of which 529 were ESL (p. 17). These

students were 18 years old and over and studied at one of the 27 programs in Texas

(p.17).

The results showed that 14.6 % of students on track were ESL students, and 85.4

% were non-ESL students (Wendy, 2015). Students who were classified as off track or

out of the program tended to be older, with ESL students 1.5 times more likely to be out

of the program or off track than non-ESL students (Wendy, 2015). Previous research

indicated that poor reading comprehension was the biggest barrier to academic success

among college nursing students and suggested that new interventions based on individual

needs of students are highly needed (Wendy, 2015). There is a need for additional

research to identify adequate interventions for improving reading comprehension among

ESL nursing students (Wendy, 2015).

Atherton (2014) conducted quantitative research collecting data from 1999 to

2009 on 6,280 first-year students attending a 4-year public college in California who

participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program survey. The sample

consisted of 60.1% female, 50.6% white, and 21.4% Latino students. ESL students

comprised the second largest group of students participating in this study at 13.4%

(Atherton, 2014, p. 826). The purpose of this study was to establish if first-generation

students were less prepared academically than traditional students (Atherton, 2014). The

researcher argued that first generation students, among which were ESL students, usually have a lower grade point average than traditional students and are less likely to succeed in college due to mostly limited resources and lack of confidence (Atherton, 2014). This study examined scores from the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and Grade Point Average (GPA) (p. 825). The results showed that students whose parents attended college or were college graduates were considerably more likely to be better prepared academically for college (p. 827).

When looking at students whose parents were both college graduates, the probability of scoring above the median on verbal SAT test was 48% higher than for students whose parents did not attend college and 32% higher than for students for whom one parent graduated from college (p. 827). The probability of scoring above the median was 38% higher for students with two parents graduating from college and 20% higher for students with only one parent graduating from college (p. 827). However, the results differed when it came to high school GPA and suggested that although students whose parents both had college degrees were 20% higher than the first-generation students, there was no difference between students where only one parent graduated from college and first-generation students (p. 827). Therefore, the hypothesis claiming that first-generation students were less academically prepared than students of parents with college degrees was supported (pp. 825, 827).

The results of the three logistic regression analyses on the relationship between status and subjective measures of academic preparedness and first-generation students revealed that there was no difference between students' self-reported writing,

mathematical capabilities, and overall educational preparedness (Atherton, 2014).

Therefore, the results did not support the second hypothesis, which stated that in terms of

self-rating of education preparedness, the first-generation students are less prepared than

traditional students (pp. 825, 828). Atherton (2014) suggested that social behaviors and

trends acquired from friends and family add to already limited academic preparedness,

resulting in lower GPA and standardized test scores. These variables can create

difficulties with meeting college requirements where students eventually become

frustrated and are not successful as college students (p. 828). While these types of

methods produced some substantial results for ESL students, perhaps related to ESL

students' limited language proficiency and reading comprehension, the results were not

discussed in this study.

Failure to Integrate Academic, Professional, and Social Lives

Many college students struggle with adjusting to college life and merging

academic, social, and professional lives (Wyatt & Bloemker, 2013). If adult ESL students

are unable to connect their cultural experiences and perceptions to their college

experiences, they may face difficulties in assuming the identity of a college student,

making building relationships with both professors and peers much more difficult (Janis,

2014). Such lack of coherence between cultural background of adult ESL students and

their college experiences may create a conflict of identities and prevent them from

merging two separate worlds (Janis, 2014). Often, institutions of higher education are not

equipped to accommodate students whose cultural background and experiences are

different from their traditional fellow students, setting up adult ESL students to fail (Janis, 2014).

Another crucial factor affecting first generation college freshmen, their relationships, and experiences as college students are their own parents (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Most of the parents of first generation ESL students do not have a college degree (Hallam, Smith, Hite, Hite, & Wilcox, 2015). Parents of first generation students do not have college-related experiences and may not be equipped to provide appropriate resources or advice to assist their children in transitioning from secondary to postsecondary institutions (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; U.S. Department of Education College, 2015). As the parents of first generation students are limited in expertise and resources related to college education and social lives, their children are not receiving valuable support in building professional and social relationships with their peers and educators, which significantly handicaps their ability to request help with coursework, locate necessary resources, and ask for necessary emotional support and encouragement from both peers and professors (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

Language is another factor influencing academic success of ESL students (Hallam et al., 2015). Many ESL students convey that they struggle with courses as they were not allowed to use bilingual resources (Almon, 2015). Although these courses were easier after some time spent in the classroom, for many ESL students, struggling with coursework at the beginning of their college career was enough to cause them to leave college (Almon, 2015). ESL students who have a hard time communicating with their peers due to a thick accent or lack of vocabulary may experience the stigma of being the

one who is hard to understand, resulting in separation from groups of students. According to Lindemann, Litzenberg, and Subtirelu (2014), negative attitudes towards second language accents are common and can be observed in many primary and secondary schools as well as institutions of higher education.

Vasquez Heilig and Holme (2013) also emphasized segregation of ESL students based on their language proficiency, race, and poverty since their first year in public schools and continues throughout secondary and post-secondary institutions. In some cases, this stigma and isolation may be too much to handle and result in students dropping out of college during their freshman year (Almon, 2015; Henderson, Barker, & Mak, n.d.). One of the interviewed students stated that she struggled with acquisition of new vocabulary, timed tests, and the high demands of the amount of required reading and academic level writing (Almon, 2015). She also stated that many of the ESL students in college settings do not see their struggle as only their fault, since many college professors did not yet shift from teacher-oriented paradigms to a student-oriented paradigm and continued lecturing without any additional visual aids (Almon, 2015). Henderson et al. (n.d.) conducted research on nurse education in practice and found that cultural differences had a significant influence on communication between ESL and non-ESL students. Non-ESL students, clinical facilitators, and clinical nurses misunderstood or had difficulties understanding ESL students, were prejudiced towards other cultures due to lack of understanding of cultural boundaries, and stereotyped certain cultural behaviors (Henderson et al., n.d.; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, (2013).

Researchers recommend implementing programs designed specifically for language needs of ESL students in primary, secondary, and postsecondary settings, to build their confidence, language skills, and motivation levels (Hallam et al., 2015). ESL students are placed in English Learners' (EL) classes in Pre-Kindergarten and often, despite years spent in the U.S., are still in EL classes in high school (Callahan & Humphries, 2016). The most challenging language support placement is in high school, where, due to the graduation requirements, ESL students face obstacles in course assignments (Callahan & Humphries, 2016). The support offered by high school staff and faculty is a crucial factor in predicting ESL students' future educational path (Callahan & Humphries, 2016). Language acquisition must be accompanied by social and emotional learning (SEL), which is proven to improve academic performance and social skills (Wyatt & Bloemker, 2013). Social and Emotional Learning is a process where students and adults learn to manage and control emotions, set and attain reasonable and positive goals, create and sustain positive relationship with peers and teachers, make accountable decisions, and develop and demonstrate empathy for others (Collaborative for Academic, 2016). Unfortunately, little or no attention to SEL has been given in institutions of higher education, where the main focus remains on academic competency rather than teaching or enhancing skills in controlling emotions or making accountable decisions (Core SEL Competencies. (n.d.); Wyatt & Bloemker, 2013).

According to Martin et al. (2014), community college students typically come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, are underprepared, and are mostly non-white. Based on the notion that characteristics of low-income students transitioning from

secondary to postsecondary institutions have a direct effect on their persistence to graduation, it is assumed that community college students need more persistence to graduate from college than their middle and high-income peers attending four-year college (Engstrom, & Tinto, 2008; Martin et al., 2014). Drake (2014) supported this claim adding that most of the students struggling in schools come from linguistically isolated households, which means that all adults, age 15 and up, speak languages other than English and youth younger than 15 speak English well. It is also important to understand that while all ESL students obtained basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), not all acquired cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1989). Therefore, administration and leadership at community colleges may establish and foster characteristics of the successful graduate and improve students' persistence to graduation by understanding characteristics associated with low income, often first-generation students (Martin et al., 2014). Successful graduates are highly motivated and self-empowered, have clear goals, and have the capability to manage and overcome external demands such as homelessness, job change and job loss, pregnancy, personal relationship issues, or paying out of state tuition (Martin et al., 2014).

Overcoming Challenges and Becoming College Ready

To help underprepared freshman students achieve persistence toward graduation, it is important to address issues related to transition from high school and support them during their first year in college (Stewart et al., 2015). In recent years a theory emerged that economic status and social status of high school students are important factors influencing students' transition to institutions of higher education. Students who do not

solve the problem related to their social or economic status are less likely to persist to graduation (Stewart et al., 2015). There are several academic interventions already in place such as academic advising, and counseling and tutoring programs, which are somewhat helpful in overcoming the difficulties associated with transition to college, but are limited to the freshmen year (Stewart, 2015).

Although setting personal goals to complete high school or college is imperative, it is not enough to meet the goal, and it is necessary to take into consideration internal and external factors that may influence a change in plans or prevent students from obtaining a college degree (Tinto, 2015). Cavazos, Johnson, and Sparrow (2010; Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016) discussed the research conducted on 11 Latino students who had a grade point average of 2.9 or higher and students' responses on how to overcome challenges and become college-ready. After reviewing interviews, several themes were established, including positive reframing, self-talk, acceptance, and self-reflection, as well as maintaining focus on final goals, using low expectations as motivation, seeking support, and taking action. It is imperative to understand that Latino students are coming from mostly under-staffed, Title I, and underperforming schools lacking adequate and high-quality preparation for college course work (Hallam, Smith, Hite, Hite, & Wilcox, 2015). Developing cultural knowledge and bridging it with academic knowledge is crucial to Latino students' academic success (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016). It is crucial to realize that Latino students possess and bring with them skills of multilingualism that are frequently overlooked instead of being used as a strength (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016).

Another way to help ESL students overcome challenges and barriers preventing them from reaching the goal of becoming a college graduate is implementing culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Culturally responsive teaching is a method used by both adult ESL students and educators to shift the teaching paradigm and create teaching strategies and practices that are culturally responsive and easily accessible to adult ESL students (Johnson & Owen, 2013). Culturally responsive technique includes four different approaches that when used together, lower ESL students' anxiety and increase their interest in the English language. These techniques include (a) integrating learners' native language, (b) validating students through caring about their well-being, (c) valuing their culture and cultural experiences, and (d) creating a safe and respectful learning environment (Griner & Stewart, 2012; Johnson & Owen, 2013). Such a culturally responsive environment creates a setting where learning is meaningful and highly desirable and where teaching strategies adhere to many different learning styles (Griner & Stewart, 2012). The "one-fits-all" design used in many K-12 and college classrooms only widens the gap between white and minorities or marginalized students, like ESL students, which come from different socioeconomics and cultural background (Johnson & Owen, 2013).

Many educators may not realize that valuing ESL students' culture and cultural experiences as well as validating them through caring are crucial in students' academic success (Johnson & Owen, 2013). The key to a successful implementation of validation through caring is to care "for" instead of "about" ESL students' academic success and personal welfare (Gay, 2010; Johnson & Owen, 2013). It is imperative that teachers

reflect on their teaching strategies and approaches used in classrooms, where they have to remember to be flexible facilitators instead of lecturers (Johnson & Owen, 2013).

The college freshmen experience may be improved by creating freshman seminars where students are offered support in developing social and emotional competence to make their transition from structured high school to less structured college much easier (Wyatt & Bloemker, 2013). The pedagogical and structural features of freshman seminars are responsible for both cognitive and intellectual development of incoming freshmen (Padgett et al., 2013). Additionally, such seminars help students transition to college, persist towards their second year of college, and subsequently, complete their bachelor's degrees (Padgett et al., 2013). Nationwide, first-year seminars are offered to at least some students among 94% of accredited four-year institutions of higher education, and 90% or more of first-year students attend first-year seminars at 47% of U.S. colleges and universities (Padgett et al., 2013).

While discussing the academic success of college freshmen and their abilities to overcome barriers and challenges, it is important to look deeper into college freshman seminars where students learn about five core components of social and emotional competence: (a) knowledge of emotions in self and others, (b) self-management, (c) relationship, (d) tolerance skills, and (e) behavioral and perceptual flexibility (Wyatt & Bloemker, 2013). In the case of self-management, students learn delayed gratification, decision-making and negotiating skills, impulse control, and the ability to set and foster long-term goals (Wyatt & Bloemker, 2013).

Limited Teacher Training in ESL and Lack of Education Equity

 Tinto's retention theory explains that students need to be motivated and supported academically and socially (Tinto, 2004). To be successful in the learning environment students must want to persist even if difficulties arise (Tinto, 2015). There are many external and internal factors that play a role in students' attrition, such as interactions between peers and professors, sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and relevance to the curriculum (Tinto, 2015). However, one of the most important factors influencing students and their academic success is relationships and teaching methods of primary, secondary, and post-secondary educators (Dabach, n.d.).

 Preparing K-12 and post-secondary educators to take on the task of teaching and enhancing the achievement of ESL students requires establishing and maintaining K-12 and higher education teacher licensing programs and extensive on-the-job professional development (PD) that specifically address the teaching of ESL students (Green, Foote, Walker, & Shuman, 2010; Howard, Levine, & Moss, 2014). It is crucial to focus on the importance of PD that assists educators to teach the fast-growing English learner population (Green et al., 2010; Howard et al., 2014). With a significant growth of ESL populations across the U.S., college teacher education programs should include ESL courses to ensure that all new teachers are competent to evaluate and address not only the language needs of ESL students, but also students' cultural needs (Staehr Fenner, 2013). By doing so, educators assist students in meeting the requirements of becoming college-ready by evaluating obstacles and establishing clear goals and expectations (Staehr

Fenner, 2013). It is imperative that educators reflect on their practices and perceptions

through a multicultural lens (Nadelson et al., 2014).

As teachers spend most of their time with ESL students, they are the important

link between different cultures, students' social assimilation, and academic learning

(Dabach, n.d.). The quality of teaching and socialization strategies plays a major role in

ESL students' academic and social outcomes, setting a tone for their future as students

and citizens (Dabach, n.d.). Based on the need to establish how teachers are distributed in

highly diverse and public schools, a two-year qualitative study was conducted on teacher

placement in ESL classes at seven high schools in California (Dabach, n.d.). This study

argued that rules established at both federal and state levels for teacher placement, based

on seniority and teacher-quality measures, were responsible for placing less experienced

teachers in classrooms with ESL students (p. 245).

ESL students are classified as language minorities and the Bilingual Education

Acts of 1968 and 1974, also referred to as Title VII, recognized the need for additional

funding for an increasing number of English Learners (EL) students in the U.S. (Sinclair,

(2016). Yet many ESL students have been denied access to appropriate services in many

different settings such as primary or secondary schools as well as services at a

postsecondary level (Thompson, 2013). The Lau vs. Nichols Supreme Court case of 1974

argued that providing textbooks, curriculum, and teachers for students who do not speak

English or barely understand English is not equal at all and it prevents students from

receiving meaningful education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The Castaneda

vs. Pickard case of 1981 demanded that language minority children be treated equal to

White students, presenting them with equal opportunities to attend schools with higher academic achievements, and have access to specifically designed programs to address their linguistic needs (Thompson, 2013). Parents stated that low quality English-based curriculum with a prohibition of speaking students' native language only increased the achievement gap between non-ESL students and language minorities (Powers, 2017). Additionally, such practices lowered ESL students' self-esteem and only deepened the negative categorizing of Latino and Hispanic students (Powers, 2017). Because the State of Tennessee is an English-only State, students are not allowed to receive assistance or take standardized tests in their native language (Dale & Gurevitz, 1995).

Institutions of higher education must join the discussion with K-12 administrators who have expressed their concerns about the need for equity and social justice for ESL students, centered on inclusive, supportive learning communities (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010; Menken & Solorza, 2015). To establish educational equity and opportunity for ESL students, the states need to adjust their education policies. Horsford and Simpson (2013) discussed the ESL population and the need for expanding financial equity and opportunity for ESL students. In light of the challenge of meeting the financial needs of schools to better prepare ELL students, local governments, in conjunction with educators, must change their perceptions of ESL students and address their needs.

As Tennessee struggles to recruit ESL teachers, other surrounding states have also experienced a significant shortage of highly qualified ESL educators. In Indiana, only 325 teachers were certified to teach the 46,417 K-12 ESL students, which resulted in a student to teacher ratio of 143 ESL students to one licensed ESL teacher (Brooks et al., &

Morita-Mullaney, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). ESL students must be

fully integrated into the general education settings, with all teachers and administrators

building their own capacity to teach and support ESL students to emphasize the need for

college readiness (Brooks et al., 2010; Heineke, Coleman, Ferrell, & Kersemeier, 2012;

U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

The literature shows that certain characteristics of entry-level ESL students

significantly affect their persistence to graduation, including cultural and language

identity, self-efficacy, integration or lack thereof, and concern for how they are perceived

by their peers and professors (Martin et al., 2014). The literature supported Tinto's (1993)

theory that students' entry characteristics can predict their level of persistence. The

literature also suggested that academic, social, and emotional support are key factors in

improving students' academic success and retention (Atherton, 2014; Niehaus &

Adelson, 2014).

Implications

Increasing and sustaining college retention and college graduation among ESL

students is a difficult task that requires extensive support from primary and secondary

school districts. While primary and secondary schools work diligently to close the

achievement gap between ESL students and non-ESL students, there are still issues

related to both ESL student language acquisition and their significantly lower scores on

standardized tests (Tennessee Department of Education, 2014; Thonus, 2014). Two

common themes emerged from the literature review showing the need for establishing a

culturally responsive environment welcoming ESL students and allowing them to build

their self-esteem, and the need for more rigorous curricula in primary and secondary schools (Powers, 2017; Thompson, 2013). Data show that ESL students attending high schools where they had access to more advanced or college-level courses were more likely to persist to college graduation (Thompson, 2013).

The data from my study showed personal and academic barriers to ESL students' success in both secondary schools and institutions of higher education. The data also uncovered possible reasons for ESL students' failure to integrate and merge their academic, professional, and social lives. The data showed that the high school teachers and college professors were in agreement that there was a need for aligning ESL programs across K-12 and institutions of higher education. Therefore, it would be suitable to institute a bridge program to affect a positive social change. This bridging project would serve as a blue print for aligning primary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions to improve and unify the education of ESL students across the U.S. The genre that was used to promote social change focused on PD/training curriculum and sessions designed for secondary and post-secondary educators.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research case study was to explore the reasons for the high post-secondary attrition levels among ESL students in Middle Tennessee from the educators' perspectives. ESL students are the largest growing subgroup among students in primary and secondary institutions in Middle Tennessee (Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, n.d.). Nationwide, ESL students are underprepared and forced to take remediation courses, with only one-third of high school graduates finishing

college-ready (Bettinger et al., 2013). Students' low performance could be attributed to a shortage of ESL certified, also referred to as "highly qualified," teachers in both primary and secondary education settings. According to the reviewed literature, students' limited language proficiency and low academic achievement played a role in their academic success. Therefore, it was the school districts' responsibility to appropriately train and place teachers to better support ESL students' academic achievement by implementing best educational strategies and supporting their social and emotional learning. The literature also suggested that a lack of classrooms where diversity is present or celebrated negatively impacts ESL students' achievement and language development.

Although the literature review suggested that the results of reading and mathematics remediation courses for ESL students were lower than non-ESL students, there were positive outcomes for some ESL students who received additional services and support provided by institutions of higher education. The success of remediation classes depended on the institutions' commitment to assist ESL students. Also, creating freshmen seminars to improve the transition from high school to college, where students learned about the five components of social and emotional competence, have been credited with improving ESL students' college retention (Wyatt & Bloemker, 2013).

Section 2 of this project study provides information on the qualitative research methodology, collection of data, and interpretation utilized to design a vertical alignment among primary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions focusing on rigorous curriculum, relevant educational materials, and culturally responsive classrooms. After

the project overview in section 3, section 4 includes a reflection, summary, conclusions, and suggestions for additional action.

Section 2: The Methodology

In this section, I present the purpose for the research design and a detailed explanation of the research methodology. I discuss the sampling strategy that was used in this study, along with documentation of ethical responsibilities. I discuss data collection and give an overview of data analysis. Finally, I discuss the qualitative validity and reliability of the study. As stated in Section 1, the purpose of the study was to explore teachers' perceptions of ESL students' barriers to postsecondary education success. By using a case study design and conducting semistructured interviews, I not only presented different points of view and experiences of educators, but I also identified common themes and proposed interventions to initiate positive social change.

Research Design and Approach

For this study I employed a qualitative case study design based on the need for collecting data on teachers' perceptions of ESL students' barriers to college graduation. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), qualitative research is an inductive approach to provide detailed information regarding a phenomenon. Qualitative researchers seek to understand a certain phenomenon from the participants' perspectives (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

Qualitative research consists of systematic data collection and analysis to identify patterns and themes (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is suitable when there is a need for an in-depth exploration of a problem and a need to focus on the participants' perspectives and experiences (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is an inquiry-based

approach in which researchers use open-ended interview questions that generate narrative descriptions and the emergence of themes (Creswell, 2009).

A qualitative single case study design focuses on the exploration and understanding of a single subject (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Although a multiple case study may offer more comparisons in a diverse setting, a single case study is less complicated and is easier to accomplish for novice researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Houghton et al., 2013). Unlike quantitative research, which involves statistical analysis of numerical data, qualitative research allows the researcher to gather more in-depth data focused on participants' perceptions and the uniqueness of their experiences (Lodico et al., 2010). A quantitative approach would not have enabled me to answer the research questions or provide the insight needed to initiate positive social change.

Participants

This single case study focused on the perceptions of six purposefully selected Middle Tennessee public school teachers and six purposefully selected Middle Tennessee college professors from public 2- and 4-year colleges. Semistructured interviews provided a means to extract in-depth information about the participants' experiences and viewpoints regarding ESL students' barriers to persistence in postsecondary education programs (see Atherton, 2014; Turner, 2010). As Lodico et al. (2010) noted, researchers conducting qualitative studies use a purposeful sampling technique because people within a defined population have in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon to be explored. I purposefully selected participants from the groups of educators who teach in schools and

colleges that had the highest ESL population in Middle Tennessee, and who had worked
with the ESL population for at least 5 years.

I invited the first six high school teachers and the first six educators from
institutions of higher education who responded to my invitation and who met the
inclusion requirements to take part in the study. The inclusion criteria for high school
teachers was at least 5 years of experience teaching K-12 ESL students in schools where
the ESL population is at or above 50%. For college teachers, the inclusion criteria were
teaching at least 20 ESL students per day in a higher education setting. The exclusion
criteria were work experience of less than 5 years for high school teachers and teaching
fewer than 20 students per day for college teachers. The purpose of this qualitative case
study was to explore high school and college-level educators' perspectives and
experiences in preparing ESL students for college, and to identify factors that impact ESL
students' persistence to graduation.

Gaining Access to Participants

Prior to receiving formal approval from the Walden institutional review board
(IRB # 02-09-17-0381400), I submitted the necessary documentation to gain IRB
approval of the institutions of higher education where the research was conducted.
Additionally, I secured a signed letter of cooperation from the administrator of the
Middle Tennessee School District where I interviewed high school teachers. I asked the
high school administrators to provide me with a list of high school teachers who had at
least 5 years of experience working with a population of ESL students at or above the
50% margin. The universities' provosts were asked to identify and provide a list of

college professors who met the inclusion requirements of working with at least 20 ESL

students per day for a period of 5 years or more.

I e-mailed the consent form to all potential participants, which also served as an

initial recruitment letter explaining the overview of the study, as well as how potential

participants could ask for clarification or pose questions related to the study. I also stated

in the initial e-mail that responding back would constitute consent to participate and that I

would have them sign the consent form and confidentiality agreement (Appendix C) prior

to the interview. If the prospective participants did not respond within 1 week, I resent

the e-mail. If a prospective participant did not reply to the second e-mail, I assumed that

the participant declined to take part in this study. If a prospective participant agreed to

participate in the study, I arranged a location, date, and time preferred by the participant

to conduct the interview. Within 2 days of the scheduled interview, I contacted the

participants either by e-mail, text message, or telephone to confirm the location, date, and

time of the interview.

Establishing Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

To gather meaningful and accurate data, researchers must build trust and establish

rapport with participants who agree to take part in the study (McGinn, 2012). Stating the

purpose of the study and allowing participants to ask questions may lower their stress

level and make them feel comfortable enough to share their opinions and experiences

with the researcher (Condit et al., 2015; McGinn, 2012). It is imperative to clearly

explain privacy protections, transparency, the need for signing necessary documentation,

and participants' right to withdraw from the study at any point without fear of reprisal

(Condit et al., 2015).

For this project study, I recruited teachers from high schools that were a

significant distance from the area where I was employed. The Metropolitan Nashville

Public Schools district employs over 3,000 educators. The participants involved in this

study did not know that I taught ESL students at a Metro Schools' middle school.

Additionally, I did not have a personal or professional relationship with the professors

employed at the institutions of higher education chosen for this project study.

Ethical Treatment of Participants

No research was conducted until Walden University's IRB granted me permission

to carry out the study. Because this qualitative study involved purposeful sampling of

educators in both secondary and postsecondary settings, I assumed that potential study

participants understood the nature of this research and would be willing to participate.

Although the interviews took place after work hours, I needed written permission from

both the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools district and institutions of higher

education to conduct the study. Interviews did not begin without a completed and signed

written consent form containing all necessary information regarding this study. The

signed forms, transcripts, and study data remain in my home safe. Only I have access to

these materials, and all participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain their

confidentiality (see Creswell, 2012). I will preserve the data for 5 years and then will

electronically burn all of the files on my computer and shred all papers related to the

study. I was the only person who had access to the computer files and paper documents.

To answer the research questions, I used a purposeful sample of high school and college teachers who met the inclusion criteria. The participant sample consisted of ESL and non-ESL content high school teachers and college professors who were not considered to be a vulnerable population. I did not conduct a prescreening of participants for possible issues that might have influenced their responses, but I assured them that their identities would be protected. To ensure proper protection of participants and limit the pressure of interviews, I proposed a neutral and convenient location that limited participant travel time and eased the threat of a potential third-party interference. Participants were able to decide the time, day, and place the interviews took place. Further, all teachers who agreed to sign the consent and be interviewed were assured that they could opt out of the study at any time without fear of reprisal.

Data Collection

I conducted digital recording of interviews, which were stored on my laptop during the interviews and transferred to a flash drive after I returned home, except for one university that did not agree to such a transfer. I obtained written permission from participants to record the interviews prior to the interviews. I chose pseudonyms for participants to maintain their confidentiality. None of the participants refused to be recorded, so I did not have to take notes. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2008) stated that recording interviews is one of the most important data collection techniques because it gives the researcher an advantage to ask clarifying questions and allows participants to elaborate on their responses. However, the main disadvantage in qualitative research is the presence of the researcher, who can inhibit participants from saying what they really

think (Fraenkel et al., 2008). The interviews were transcribed for further analysis and checked by each participant.

The interviews were semistructured and included an open-ended question protocol to allow flexible conversation and extension to previously asked questions (see Fraenkel et al., 2008; Lodico et al., 2010). This type of questioning allows for exploration of a topic beyond the initial question (Fraenkel et al., 2008). An interview protocol is not only an instrument of inquiry in which a researcher asks questions to gain information related to his or her study, but is also an instrument used to conduct interviews about a certain issue (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Role of the Researcher

I was responsible for collecting all data and remained objective to protect the credibility of this study (see Merriam, 2009). I attended two Middle Tennessee universities prior to and while working at the Metropolitan Nashville Public School district. Since August of 2009, I have been working as an English learner teacher in the district where the study took place. Before I became a teacher, I served as a substitute teacher in K-12 schools in the North section of the district, but I did not take assignments within the area from which I acquired participants. I did not interview educators I knew personally, such as former coworkers or peers with whom I attended the same university.

My role in this study was not to participate but only to collect data, conduct member checking to prevent potential bias (see Lodico et al., 2010), analyze the data, and report the findings to key stakeholders. I hold a highly qualified certification of ELL teacher status as required by the Tennessee Department of Education, and I am a former

ESL college student. I have experience not only with curriculum development and its

application, but I also developed and delivered professional development sessions about

ESL students that included but were not limited to students' academic deficiencies,

language acquisition, cultural biases, rigorous curriculum, and social and emotional

learning. I am fluent in Polish and Russian, and I am currently studying Spanish.

Although my personal skills and range of experiences are significant, there was a slight

chance for personal bias. However, being aware of my abilities, experiences, and

preferences and acknowledging them assisted in minimizing my bias in the study. To

further minimize personal bias and to add to the credibility of the study, I used member

checking (see Lodico et al., 2010), a procedure in which the researcher asks study

participants to check the transcribed data and findings for accuracy (see Creswell, 2012).

Systems for Keeping Track of Data

Conducting a qualitative case study requires researchers to focus on the

organization of all documents, interviews, field notes, and coded materials as it is

extremely important to pay attention to data management (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2007;

Merriam, 2009). There are several steps that need to be implemented to ensure proper

data collection: data log, data coding and transcribing, and confidentiality of the

participants.

I utilized the Atlas.ti software to store, code, organize, and analyze collected data.

All documents were arranged in chronological order, with high school interviews coded

first, followed by interviews conducted at institutions of higher education. All interviews

were catalogued and stored on my laptop, which was secured by an additional password.

All copies of collected documents were scanned and stored on external flash drives labeled as Teacher 1 High School 1, 2, 3, etc., and Teacher 1 College 1, 2, 3, etc. I did not use a traditional journal, but I did use Atlas.ti notes option to assist me in reflecting on the research process and findings, and to make informed decisions to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant data (Lamb, 2013). I did not record interviews on paper, journals, or notes. I checked all collected data several times to ensure that it was inclusive and accurate.

Making sure that all collected data were properly coded, stored, and reviewed prevents possible misunderstanding at the stage of data analysis (see Creswell, 2012; McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003). Such well-organized and managed data facilitated the researcher to produce accessible and high-quality data, to complete a proper and accurate report of data analyses, and to preserve the data and analyses after the project study was completed (see Creswell, 2012).

Data Analysis

Once I completed interviews they were uploaded to a professional transcriber's website. Transcribed interviews were returned via my account on the transcriber's website within three days. Upon receiving transcribed data, I sent the transcripts to the participants, so they could perform member checking. According to Merriam (2009), member checking is one of the most important ways of preventing misinterpretation of information gathered during interviews as well as in identifying a researcher's biases and misunderstandings. This process requires the researcher to contact participants to review the initial findings and their transcripts and make any changes they desire (see Merriam,

2009). To complete the member review and speed up the process, I emailed the

transcripts to the participants and asked them to make any changes they desired. I advised

participants that they had one week to make any changes and to submit it back to me. I

also informed the participants that if transcripts were not returned by the due date, it was

assumed that the data were correct. When member checking was completed, I uploaded

all transcripts into the software program, Atlas.ti. The generated codes from the data

allowed me to extract common themes.

  Atlas.ti is a professional qualitative data analysis software that assists a researcher

to acquire an accurate and in-depth examination of gathered data (Atlas.ti, n.d.) I

conducted a word search within Atlas.ti., which allowed me to identify key words.

Utilizing visual tools such as word cloud is beneficial for researchers as it helps with the

organization of knowledge and ideas while attempting to complete various stages of

research projects (Renfro, 2017). I identified fourteen key words, and then reviewed the

initial data seeking to gain a general perception of the collected data (Creswell, 2012). I

then identified twelve key words in context, which revealed twelve major codes that led

to the development of the final themes. The twelve codes included: (a) English language

acquisition, (b) reading comprehension, (c) ESL, (d) relationship with students, (e)

reading level, (f) writing skills, (g) educational system in the U.S., (h) family

responsibilities, (i) academic skills, (j) employment, (k) life, experiences, and (l)

relationships, connection. To determine themes among the data I used the thematic

analysis method. I coded themes that emerged from the data across the entire data set,

organizing data related to each code (Creswell, 2012). A complete table of key words,

key words in context, and emerged themes can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Codes and Themes

Codes – Key words	Codes – Key words in context	Themes
1. Language (16)	1. English language acquisition	Language acquisition
2. Reading (8)		
3. English (9)	2. Reading Comprehension	
	3. ESL	
4. Know students (18)	4. Relationship with students	Academic achievement
5. Reading (16)		
	5. Reading level	
6. Language (14)		
	6. Writing skills	
7. Grade, writing (7)		
8. Know School (25, 19)	7. Educational system in the U.S.	Barriers to college graduation
9. Time (8)		
	8. Family responsibilities	
10. Work (7)		
11. Know (29)	9. Academic skills	Adverse circumstances
12. School (17)	10. Employment	
13. Home (12)	11. Life, experiences	
14. Family, parents (11)	12. Relationships, connection	

As thematic analysis focused on description and interpretation of both inductive and deductive data, where the emphasis was put on context, I analyzed the interview data obtained from each participant independently (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). I focused on finding a variety of themes and generated a thematic outline of the analysis. After completing the initial analysis of themes, I continued reviewing and refining the details of each theme and the overall story the analysis produced, creating clear definitions and names for each theme (Elo et al., 2014).

When focusing on creating a final report of the research, I selected vivid and captivating excerpts from the thematic data analysis and conducted a final analysis of selected excerpts (see Vaughn, & Turner, 2016). I aligned my findings of the analysis to the research questions, conceptual framework, and literature review (Table 2). I also reviewed the analysis for discrepant or negative data from the original data. It was important to review and analyze findings that were counter to the evidence (Kornbluh, 2015). By doing so, I looked for deeper meaning behind findings rather than focusing on initial interpretation (Kornbluh, 2015). No discrepant data were identified.

Table 2

Relationship of Research Questions to Interview Questions

Research question	Interview question
RQ1: What are the perceptions of high school educators concerning the reasons for the high post-secondary education attrition levels of ELLs?	Professional experience: IQ2. What is your experience teaching students from culturally diverse backgrounds? IQ4. Describe three methods that you use to assess students' academic performance. IQ10. What are the most visible issues related to ESL students' academic achievement? IQ12. What are the most distinctive issues related to the special needs of ESL students that you faced in your career? IQ13. Out of all listed issues, which would you classify as barriers to graduation? Why?
RQ2: What are the perceptions of college educators concerning the reasons for the high post-secondary education attrition levels of ELLs?	Professional experience: IQ2. What is your experience teaching students from culturally diverse backgrounds? IQ6. Do you find in your classroom ESL students who seem to be unmotivated? IQ7. In your professional experience, what in your opinion causes the lack of motivation among ESL students? IQ9. Based on your experience and relationship you have with your students, do you believe that lack of motivation is deeper than relevance to curriculum? Explain please. IQ10. What are the most visible issues related to ESL students' academic achievement? IQ12. What are the most distinctive issues related to the special needs of ESL students that you faced in your career? IQ13. Out of all the listed issues, which would you classify as barriers to graduation? Why?

Coding Procedures

According to Saldana (2013), coding methods must be connected to research questions. By utilizing a computer-based qualitative data analysis tool, the researcher has the advantage of creating possible connections and links between different characteristics of data (see Merriam, 2009). In advance of data analysis, I reviewed and used the previously mentioned conceptual framework. As I stated in the Conceptual Framework section, Tinto (1993) indicated that there are three major causes for students' leaving institutions of higher education, which include inability to integrate academic and professional/occupational goals, academic difficulties, and failure to merge academic and social life. The Model of Institutional Departure theory recommends ESL students' full integration into a formal academic curriculum, the formation of informal relations with faculty and staff, actively participating in extracurricular activities, and establishing informal peer-tutoring interactions (Tinto, 1993). The conceptual framework of retention theory is crucial to the proper data analysis of educators' perceptions of ESL students' barriers to college graduation.

I utilized Atlas.ti online software to analyze collected interview data. I carefully read each interview and assigned an appropriate code to each answer. I also used Atlas.ti's word cloud to generate word clouds from transcribed interviews, which allowed me to categorize the key words and themes in a visual format. The word cloud uncovered words specifically aligned with themes, placing language as the most commonly used word by educators supporting theme number one, the language acquisition (Table 1).

Data Analysis Results

I contacted six administrators from the local high school, but only three administrators agreed to take part in the study regarding teacher's perceptions of ELL students' barriers to college graduation. Two of these administrators aided in directing me to educators who met the requirements for this study. After sending over sixty emails to invite high school teachers and college professors to participate in this study and then following up with additional messages reminding educators about previous emails, two high school teachers agreed to take part in the study, three high school teachers declined, and the remaining educators never responded. However, through the teachers who agreed to participate in the study, I was able to identify an additional three educators. I had the same outcome regarding college professors, where one provost directed me to the Director of the EL Department, who then recommended contacting six educators. Out of the six, I received emails from two but only one met the study's requirements. This educator directed me to additional professors who responded that they were willing to participate in my research. Ultimately, I was able to find six current high school teachers, three two-year, and three four-year college professors who stated in their emails that they were willing to be participants in my study.

Interviews were conducted in the educators' classrooms or offices, and one interview took place at the educator's residence. Prior to the interview, I reviewed the consent form with participants and read the interview protocol to them. After completing all interviews, I transcribed each interview and emailed it to participants asking them to conduct a member check to ensure accuracy of the transcript. I informed educators that if

I did not receive responses or corrections to transcripts within seven days from the day I emailed them, it would be assumed that no corrections were needed to the transcript. Three out of twelve educators returned transcripts with comments and requested corrections. After I made the requested corrections, I emailed educators asking them to confirm that that the requested changes were made. All of them confirmed changes.

Relationship Between Research Questions and Outcomes

This project study focused on educators' perceptions of ESL students' barriers to college graduation. The alignment between research questions and interview questions confirm the purpose for research questions and eliminate questions that are unnecessary (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). It is imperative that the researcher utilizes only intentional interview questions since participants have varied experiences that are not necessarily easy to understand or relevant to the researcher (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the perceptions of high school educators concerning the reasons for the high post-secondary education attrition levels of ELLs?

2. What are the perceptions of college educators concerning the reasons for the high post-secondary education attrition levels of ELLs?

The study results revealed four major themes that included language acquisition, barriers to college graduation, adverse circumstances, and academic achievement.

High school teachers emphasized that language acquisition and academic achievement are limited due to students facing adverse circumstances such as traumatic experiences and difficulties adjusting or a difficult home life. However, college

professors indicated that ESL students' academic achievement is inadequate due to the students' limited English language acquisition. All study participants agreed that ESL students need additional assistance with language development, such as reading and writing, as well as counseling support for ESL students dealing with adverse circumstances. The relationship of research questions to interview questions is presented in Table 2.

Discrepancies

To ensure validity of the research, searching for possible discrepancies or opposing interpretations of data was conducted. Discrepancies are described as systematic and meaningful variations in the behaviors being reported or simply disagreements between participants (Al Ghriwati et al., 2018). Creswell (2012) suggested to consult participants to identify possible reasons for discrepancies. While visiting high schools and institutions of higher education, I conducted interviews with one ELL/ESL teacher and two teachers of content. All participants had similar answers to each of the interview questions and agreed with the emerged themes. There were no discrepancies recorded.

Themes

After I transcribed interviews, I carefully read through each interview and assigned an appropriate code to each interview question answer. When I completed coding, Atlas.ti generated four major codes, which I used to create the four leading themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). These themes were (a) language acquisition, (b) barriers to college graduation, (c) adverse circumstances, and (d)

academic achievement. To enhance the meaning of generated themes, I used Atlas.ti

word cloud and conducted a key word search where I identified 12 key words (Table 1).

By identifying the first set of key words, I reviewed coded data to acquire a general

perception of the collected data (Creswell, 2012). These 12 key words were (a) language,

(b) reading, (c) English, (d) know students, (e) grade/writing, (f) know school, (g) time,

(h) work, (i) know, (j) school, (k) home, and (l) family/parents. The themes and key

words presented the experiences of the participants as they described their desire for the

alignment between primary, secondary, and higher education institutions, which I refer to

as a bridging program described in detail in Section 3.

Theme 1: Language Acquisition

Theme 1 emerged from the analysis of questions 10, 11, and 13, which prompted

educators to identify problems linked to distinctive issues and special needs related to

ESL students' academic achievement, as well as barriers to college graduation. Half of

the interviewed high school educators and all the college professors believed that

language acquisition was the number one cause of ESL students' low graduation rates.

Tinto's (1993) retention theory explains that one of the main reasons students leave

college is academic difficulties, which aligns to the findings of my study. Based on the

themes that emerged, ESL students struggle with retention mostly due to language

acquisition. For example, teacher #2 from high school #3 stated, "Another barrier is the

lack of language. I mean, yeah, the lack of language and the lack of education. Many of

my students from Mexico and Central America, the school system is very, very poor."

Additionally, two high school teachers and every college professor confirmed that

language acquisition was a significant barrier to college graduation. Educator #1 from college #1 explained:

> Language proficiency. I think in terms of getting through not only the general education classes. I got students who are majoring in engineering and they're having trouble with those classes. They major in those classes; they're having trouble with the reading in those classes. So, the reading is a big issue, reading deficiency.

Most of the educators were proud of how their institutions provided extra assistance to students by creating an ESL Support Department focused on ESL students' language acquisition. Students are placed in this program with the goal of improving their reading and writing skills. Educator #2 from College #2 stated:

> I teach this learning support reading class. … I worked with one of our ESL teachers and we made a section of the learning support reading just for ESL students, …So, by putting a group of ESL students who choose to be with other ESL students we can get deeper into the cultural things, (and) go slower with the vocabulary… and… add vocabulary development.

Unfortunately, many of the ESL students do not take advantage of such programs. One educator expressed her disappointment in not doing enough to support ESL students in their quest to graduate college. Professor #1 from College #1 explained, "as an institution, (we) don't prepare students… I think there should be more to help those students succeed."

According to professor #2 from college #2, every year a number of ESL students refuse to enroll in ESL-related courses. This decision has a significant impact on their success in college level courses. Professor #2 stated, "I can tell when I get a student who signed the waiver is what we call it, which means they didn't go to where they were supposed to go and instead they just want to jump right in." Additional sample responses related to limited language proficiency are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Theme 1: Limited English Language Proficiency

Service	Sample responses
Limited English language proficiency	1. "A weakness overall nationally is that students are required when they first come to the country to take any standardized test, all right, but they've only been here for a few months." 2. "major thing I find the difficulty for international students and the ESL students is the language." 3. "sometimes their language acquisition, there is a problem." 4. "takes it to a whole other level when it's not your home language and you know when your vocabulary is not there, yet I can't even imagine. In college you know trying to learn the vocabulary for a normal college student it's tough. Let alone when you're starting a deficit of thousands of words" 5. "Yes and most of them are 18-years-old. And most of them graduated from high school in the United States." 6. "there are lots of issues that our students have related to the fact that they have limited English proficiency."
Limited reading and writing skills	1. "Another barrier is the lack of language. I mean, the, yeah, the lack of language and the lack of education. Many of my students from the Mexico and Central America, the school system is very, very poor." 2. "We have quite a few kids where they haven't had education since about seventh or eighth grade." 3. "I think it's an issue of language and being able to read the language and write the language and conceptualize in English I think is often difficult. And that concerns me." 4. "I have to be honest, I've even had some students where I wonder if an oral type of exam would work best because they have such difficulty with the writing. And I do think, you asked earlier a question about the student body and what type of students and so forth." 6. "I have a student in my class, my level two class this semester who has a regular diploma from the (school from) Tennessee. She got here to the States when she was in eighth grade. And she cannot read in English and she cannot write, and she has very limited listening skills and it is a huge challenge for her.

Theme 2: Barriers to College Graduation

Theme 2 emerged from the analysis of questions 13, 9, and 11. Completing the analysis of the answers regarding ESL students being unmotivated provided additional insight to potential barriers to graduation. These questions encouraged educators to look deeper into ESL students' difficulties with completing their course work. Educators were able to identify problems linked to barriers to college graduation, distinctive issues that were deeper than relevance to curriculum, and special needs related to ESL students' academic achievement. All the interviewed high school educators and half of the college professors confirmed that ESL students struggled with integrating academic and professional/occupational goals, which aligns with Tinto's (1993) retention theory. Educators discussed ESL students' family issues such as taking care of younger siblings, working until midnight, as well as being separated from their parents who sent their young children to their relatives in the U.S. or who might have been deported.

Both high school teachers and college professors expressed concern with ESL students often being the ones responsible for providing financially for their large families. Teacher #3 from high school #3 stated, "Many of my ESL students, especially high school level, they are simply here to learn the English so that they can get the job to make more money." She added that many of incoming ESL students are required to take a placement test and are later placed in freshman classes when they are already sixteen years old and should be placed in sophomore or junior level classes. As teacher 2 from high school 3 explain that when teachers attend to teach lower level ESL students by showing, "images of … cartoon characters to help them understand," ESL students who

came from Mexico, Central or South America experienced tremendous amount of hardship, often respond, "'I'm too old for this. I've seen too much.'" Table 4 displays additional information from teachers and college professors regarding students' experiences in the U.S. schools and their family-related responsibilities that educators consider as barriers to college graduation.

Table 4

Theme 2: Barriers to College Graduation

Context	Sample responses
Family responsibility	1. "Many of my ESL students especially high school level, they are simply here to learn the English so that they can get the job to make more money." 2. "his brother and his mother who he lived with, there is no father in the picture, they work at night" 3. "there's no home time to study or they're just so tired at the school that they need to sleep because they're working full time" 4. "part of it is either family life. Some students are expected to really take care of the family or to work 20 hours a week."
Experiences in schools in U.S.	1. "I would say the stress of living and working in a country and culture that is not your own and trying to go to school in that country at the same time I mean, emotionally, mentally it's very stressful." 2. "One of the big barriers that I see here is just – is our communication skills. And the reason is because to write your dissertation, you'd have to be able to write" 3. "We kind of joke sometime because there comes the Egyptian, you know conglomerates, and then Nigeria and they come in little packs because that's safety and you get that" 4. "The lack of social support, the lack of family support too because some of them… for their families, and they have a lot of pressure on them, and they don't have anybody who understands their position."

Theme 3: Adverse Circumstances

Students who go through severe traumatic experiences are often left with limited ability to learn as compared to their peers (Graham, Minhas, & Paxton, 2016). According to all educators who were participants in my study, a significant percentage of ESL students who arrive in the United States without their parents or any adult supervision experience difficulties with learning. Graham et al. (2016) stated that the long-term consequences of children being exposed to traumatic experiences is complex. Since ESL students experience a variety of complex trauma, they may be deficient in core abilities for self-regulation and interpersonal skills. Additionally, trauma may range from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood (Cook et al., 2015). Furthermore, children exposed to any type of traumatic experience are often diagnosed with depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), conduct disorder, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, sleep disorders, communication disorders, separation anxiety disorder, and reactive attachment disorder (Cook et al., 2015).

Many ESL students come from countries where extreme poverty, wars, government corruption, and gangs were part of their daily lives. According to the United States Customs and Border Patrol (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2017), a significant number of ESL students from Central and South America arrive in the U.S. as unaccompanied minors and in October of 2017 almost 67,000 minors, referred to as "inadmissibles", were reported (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2017). Older siblings between ages of 12 and 16 took care of younger siblings, often as young as

several months. Teacher #2 from high school #3 stated that "some of my Central American kids, I would say about 60% are unprepared because of life" The same teacher expressed concern for students from the Middle East stating:

> I had a student and he just couldn't pass anything, didn't get it. Turns out, the only thing he understood in English was how to write his name. … we found out he hadn't been consistently in school since kindergarten. He was Kurdish and at one point he had gotten kidnapped and tortured until his parents were able to pay to get him out.

A significant issue negatively affecting high school ESL students and their ability to successfully complete high school and college is peer pressure. Teacher #1 from high school #1 stated that pressure from gangs and the pressure for drugs, as well as teenage pregnancy, are common issues affecting ESL students. She explained, "We have a huge number of teenage moms, a huge number" Teacher #1 from college #1 added that many students express their feeling of lack of understanding and, "I think some of them feel like they don't have maybe a support base that understands their mindset." Teacher #3 from college #2 felt that many of the ESL students "are working and raising families and dealing with financial problems and dealing with a new culture" Table 5 shows additional comments regarding both high school and college educators' observations.

Table 5

Theme 3: Adverse Circumstances

Context	Sample responses
Traumatic experiences	1. "They did a very hard passage of walking, riding on top of trains, hiding from immigration officials. They saw a lot of really bad stuff." 2. "We found out he hadn't been consistently in school since kindergarten. He was Kurdish and at one point, he had gotten kidnapped and tortured until his parents were able to pay to get him out." 3. "I think the gangs and the pressure for drugs, and here at this school we have – it seems like especially in our academy, we have a lot of females in our academy. We have a huge number of teenage moms, a huge number and that's one that." 4. "I've heard some pretty, pretty bad horror stories of what girls have had to go through coming up. They also have a perception that they are maybe not wanted in society around here."
Difficulties adjusting/difficult home life	1. "So, a lot of that happens with our refugee kids. If you are in high school a lot of those parents work in nightshift because the kids are old enough technically to stay at home by themselves, but a lot of them get into trouble because they unsupervised." 2. "They're seen as foreign or they might be treated as if they're foreign and not fitting in. They have – I mean the English language itself is an adverse situation. Uncontrolled situations sometimes play into that. Sometimes, they don't. Cultural – cultural understanding. Sometimes, home sickness for their home country – some of those." 3. "Sometimes it's their academics, sometimes it's just their family circumstances because there can be a lot of instability… I also have a lot of kids that they are, you know they are living in poverty because their parents have very low paying jobs… they are not at home at nights because they work in the nightshift." 4. "Many have families either here or abroad jobs, lots of responsibilities, so I know that there is big lack of sleep, lack of transportation, lack of funds when their children have off from school. There is no one to watch them so they might miss school… Their primary responsibility isn't school."

Theme 4: Academic Achievement

When it comes to academic achievement, many high school teachers expressed their concern with the limited educational background of most of their ESL students. One of the high school teachers said, "We have quite a few kids [who] haven't had education since about seventh or eighth grade." Teacher #2 from high school #3 said that African students grow up in refugee camps, which were operated by numerous nonprofit organizations. She expressed her concern that although "some of nonprofit organizations are really, really good [and] the kids have great education" "Some of the nonprofit organizations aren't as vigilant in educating students" and "the kids have [educational] gaps." The same teacher's biggest fear was that ESL students were being left behind due to the requirements of the No Child Left Behand Act of 2001, which required K-12 ESL students to be subjected to standardized tests with the exemption of English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies (SS) for students who were in the U.S. for less than 365 days. However, these students were required to take Standardized tests in Math and Science. Teacher #1 from high school #1 stated, "they just don't know the science well enough to really make connections … they are pretty tenuous connections"

Teacher #3 from college #1 discussed "I see issues with academic performance, like writing skills, ability to write a grammatically correct sentence, … or the ability maybe to answer a sentence – and answer a question correct in a test because –maybe because of problems with language." The same teacher added that "we have graduate students come in and I don't know how they got that far, because they don't seem to have very much practical knowledge." It was emphasized that there is a high need for some

type of assistance program prior to these students getting accepted into colleges. Teacher #3 from college #2 added that "some of the students who were [academically] left behind deserve to be not left [behind], but at least delayed somewhere [held back] and helped a little bit more before they got to us." The same teacher stated, "there is a growing concern with the abilities of ESL students (who are) graduating underprepared from K-12 schools" and "most of them … graduated from high school in the United States." Table 6 shows more responses regarding academic achievement.

Table 6

Theme 4: Academic Achievement

Context	Sample responses
Relationship with ESL students	1. "a lot of these students have been out of ESL and the public schools for some of them for many years. And they end up back with us when they get to college because they just … didn't get the continuing support that they needed." 2. "a lot of the times with my ESL students, they get discouraged really easily and I tell them, look if I had to take Biology in Chinese or Spanish or something I would fail miserably, and I know it…" 3. "when they are basically having difficulty reading and understanding what they're reading, they're not mad at themselves, they get mad at me." 4. "Sometimes it seems difficult for some students … to accept assistance or help."
Reading/writing skills	1. "I understand that the state wants to push more students through and help them get their diplomas … But something went missing along the way." 2. "with the students who do not have that background, maybe they have a second or third grade education it's a lot more difficult. … we'll [create] lessons that ESL teachers might [think are] more [appropriate for students in] second or third grade." 3. "Their reading comprehension and their writing because they are always so far below the reading level that's required in high school" 4. "And we have graduate students come in who I don't know how they got that far, because they don't seem to have very much practical knowledge"
Tests and grading	1. "things that you can see with academic performance, like writing skills, ability to write a grammatically correct sentence, … or ability maybe to answer a sentence and answer a question correct in a test … because of problems with language." 2. "Students who got under a 19 on their ACT … and then there is different cutoff scores for if they take the ACCUPLACER test, but most people understand what a 19 ACT means." 3. "the text that they use on those tests are so high and they just … the reading skills they needed." 4. "f I don't push them then they will never get there"

Evidence of Quality

To ensure the quality of data collection, it is recommended that the researcher conduct a secondary data analysis (Janis, 2014). This involves an analysis of data that were already completed and presented in the initial report dataset, and it is suitable when trying to identify any supplementary information, expose additional details, or to review completed research through the lenses of another theoretical framework (Hakim, 1982; Sherif, 2018).

Credibility

According to Lodico et al. (2010), credibility is the accuracy of the data analysis and the researcher's interpretation of participants' responses. It is imperative not to allow the researcher's bias to affect the results of the study (see Creswell, 2012; Lodico, et al., 2010). The credibility depends on an appropriate data collection method and analysis, suitable conceptual framework, research questions, and it requires presentation of the type of verification methods such as triangulation or member checking (Santiago-Delefosse, Gavin, Bruchez, Roux, & Stephen, 2016).

To ensure credibility of the study, I maintained a database of the collected interviews to keep data organized and confidential (Yin, 2014). Once themes emerged, I emailed educators to ensure accuracy of transcribed data and conducted a member check (see Merriam, 2009). I informed them that if I did not receive response within a week, I would assume that transcripts and data analysis were correct. Only three educators responded with comments regarding issues related to grammar and syntax in their interview transcript rather than the accuracy of their transcripts. I reached out to

educators once again seeking their feedback regarding emerged codes and themes.

However, none of the participants responded and I assumed that participants did not

challenge the transcript report.

Transferability

According to Lodico et al. (2010), transferability is a possibility of application of

the investigation outside the individuals of a specific research study. This project study

focused on educators working with a large group of ESL students in public high schools,

universities, and community colleges. Therefore, the 3-day PD, which was developed

based on the findings of this project study, may be generalized to other public high

schools, universities, and community colleges nationwide. However, the responsibility

for assessing transferability will belong to the readers of this project study (see Creswell,

2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009).

Dependability

When researchers consider dependability, they think about the reliability of the

data over similar circumstances (Diane, 2014). To achieve such dependability, another

researcher must agree with the path taken throughout the different stages of the research

process (Diane, 2014). The study would be considered dependable if the findings are

duplicated in comparable environments with comparable participants (Diane, 2014).

As I previously stated, I transferred all data to Atlas.ti to maintain and organize

collected evidence (Yin, 2014). It is recommended that the researcher follows a clear data

collection protocol and systematically documents methods and procedures utilized in the

study to improve dependability (Yin, 2014). For this study, I created in Atlas.ti a case

study database where I conducted data analysis of all interviews. I followed up with a periodical reexamination of emerged themes to ensure dependability of the data results (see Merriam, 2009).

Discrepancies

To ensure validity of the research, searching for possible discrepancies or opposing interpretations of data was conducted. Discrepancies are described as systematic and meaningful variations in the behaviors being reported or simply disagreements between participants (Al Ghriwati et al., 2018). Creswell (2007) suggested to consult participants to identify possible reasons for discrepancies. While visiting high schools and institutions of higher education, I conducted interviews with one ELL/ESL teacher and two teachers of content. All participants had similar answers to each of the interview questions and agreed with the emerged themes. There were no discrepancies recorded.

Outcome of Data Analysis

Based on the results of this study, the proposed 3-day PD structured as a Professional Learning Community, provides necessary vertical alignment for teachers from primary and secondary schools with educators from colleges and universities. The suggested 3-day PD is aligned to those educators in the literature related to vertical alignments between K-12 and colleges (Knowlton, Fogleman, Reichsman, & de Oliveira, 2015). However, none of the already reported vertical alignment professional learning communities aid educators with teaching methods and strategies as well as formative and standardized assessment of EL and ESL students. Additionally, the proposed course

focuses on maintaining culturally aware and relevant classrooms and the development of meaningful and lasting relationships between faculty and staff of all stakeholders. During this course, all stakeholders may acquire valuable qualifications to promote the overall success of professional learning communities. As pertains to PD and online professional development learning (PDL), when teachers with varied experiences from primary and secondary schools interacted, a significant increase in closing students' achievement gaps was reported (Shaha, Glassett, Copas, & Huddleston, 2016).

Conclusion

In Section 2, I discussed the case study methodology that I used to explore teachers' perceptions of ESL students' barriers to college graduation. This study investigated high school teachers' and college professors' perceptions and experiences in teaching ESL students. Section 2 also included a summary of a discussion of potential researcher bias, the data collection, data coding, a presentation of the findings, and a method to increase the credibility of my findings. In Section 3, I proposed a project based on my findings to positively affect college graduation of ESL students and college readiness of high school students.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this project study was to explore teachers' perceptions of ESL students' barriers to college graduation as they transition from high school to college. The focus of the study went beyond educators' observations of ESL students' academic performance to concentrate on teachers' insights regarding circumstances that impact ESL students' academic success. Although 85% of ESL students in Pre-K to 5th grade are born in the United States, their language acquisition requires additional services as their primary spoken language is the language of their parents (Sanchez, 2017). According to Sanchez (2017), 65% of ESL students who attend 6th through 12th grade are foreign born. In Tennessee, 70-80% of school-age ESL students speak Spanish as their primary language (Sanchez, 2017).

To improve ESL students' language acquisition, Castrillón (2017) recommended aligning interventions to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and to the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD involves educators basing their lessons and assessment on students' prior knowledge to facilitate a higher order of thinking among all students. The ZPD encourages teachers to focus on fostering students' thinking processes, memorization, attention span, and problem-solving abilities (Castrillón, 2017).

Description of the Project and Goals

Although Tennessee implemented a High School and College Bridging program, this program focuses on all students transitioning into college by offering college developmental curricula in the senior year (Tennessee Higher Education Commission,

n.d.). In my study, all participants expressed the need for early language development classes aligned with college expectations, as well as having counseling available to students who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, trauma, or difficult home situations.

Based on the findings of my study, I developed the Bridge to College Professional Learning Community Program, which is a 3-day PD program that would be implemented twice a year in a face-to-face setting followed by online professional learning community (PLC) meetings conducted every other month via Skype for Business. During PLC meetings, educators will exchange ideas, suggestions, success stories, and concerns, and may request additional support from the program coordinator who will be available via a scheduled Skype for Business meeting. The program will concentrate on how teachers can better facilitate higher order thinking, promote student engagement, suggest counseling or recommend trained professionals to assist students facing adverse circumstances, and assist K-12 and college educators in aligning language development methods, teaching strategies, and assessments to facilitate academic achievement and college readiness among high school and college ESL students.

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief that he or she can be successful in a given situation or by completing a specific assignment (Tinto, 2016). Previous experiences have a significant influence on students' perceptions of themselves and their ability to control their environment (Tinto, 2016). Tinto (2016) stated that students do not want to be retained, but they want to persist or be motivated to complete their college courses and graduate. My study participants stated that to be successful in meeting learning goals,

ESL students in high school and college need support from the State of Tennessee to assist their institutions in terms of academic achievement and language acquisition, as well as guidance throughout the difficult process of language development. The project study program offers intense and hands-on support for K-12 and college educators by having them create, implement, and evaluate learning and teaching strategies necessary for developing students' academic English language proficiency and for increasing students' motivation and persistence to college graduation. The project study program emphasizes the need for developing cultural identity and understanding the significance of assessments as well as developing, supporting, and maintaining relationships between the Tennessee Department of Education, the school district's staff and faculty, and the local colleges and universities.

Although the literature suggested that various bridging programs designed to help students successfully transition to college have been in use for quite some time (Gadkaree, 2015; Kallison & Stader, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), there is a lack of empirical data on the alignment between high schools and colleges that focus exclusively on ESL students' college readiness with an emphasis on developing language proficiency and academic achievement. The Bridge to College Program provides ESL students with the tools needed to achieve their academic goals while also helping educators reach their professional potential in achieving set goals.

Rationale

The purpose of this project study was to explore educators' perceptions of barriers to college graduation for ESL students and to offer solutions to improve ESL students'

persistence to graduation. The data analysis revealed that educators were concerned about ESL students' limited language proficiency, academic achievement related to their language proficiency, adverse circumstances, and barriers to college graduation such as traumatic experiences, family and work issues, and financial instability. Educators also expressed the desire for more direct assistance from the district regarding more frequent and population-targeted PD, as well as more collaboration between K-12 educators and college professors regarding developing students' college-ready reading and writing skills. Furthermore, high school teachers suggested that having additional on-site psychological and counseling services, preferably bilingual, that focused only on ESL students and their needs could be beneficial to ESL students and improve their motivation to remain enrolled in high school and persist to college.

One of the possible positive social change aspects of a year-round Bridge to College PLC Program for ESL students, teachers, and college professors is increasing the academic language capacity of ESL students and establishing PLCs for ESL teachers and college professors across the Middle Tennessee region. Tinto (2017) explained that interaction between learners and teachers in a specific learning environment is a multifaceted and dynamic experience. This experience facilitates higher mental functioning (VanPatten, 2016). The same rule can be applied to educators who stimulate higher order thinking by exchanging their personal and professional experiences, ideas, and learning strategies.

According to Shaha et al. (2016), PD for teachers has been structured as conference-like sessions. In these settings, educators share methods and concepts of

content delivery to improve relevant skills (Shaha et al., 2016). Recently, there has been a shift in PD, where educators not only take part in conference-like professional development, but also participate in online professional learning (Shaha et al., 2016). This approach allows teachers to focus on their personal development without feeling judged or observed (Shaha et al., 2016). Teachers are key participants in ELL students' language development, academic achievement, and overall success (Tong, Luo, Irby, Lara-Alecio, & Rivera, 2017). However, many teachers, especially those in rural districts, are frustrated because they do not feel prepared to help ELL students (Hansen-Thomas, Grosso Richins, Kakkar, & Okeyo, 2016). Implementing a well-designed PLC would better prepare teachers to educate EL students (Mellom, Portes, Straubhaar, Balderas, & Ariail, 2018).

With only 20 U.S. states requiring additional courses for ELL teachers, there is no universal approach to preparing them (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). The limited background in teaching ELL students is caused by a lack of appropriate teacher preparation courses and a lack of relevant PD (Penner-Williams, Díaz, & Worthen, 2017). School districts that receive federal funds for language instruction for limited English proficiency stressed that many content area teachers lack the necessary expertise to appropriately address the needs of ELL students (Penner-Williams et al., 2017). Investing in training educators by implementing a vertically aligned PD between K-12 and institutions of higher education may help to solve this problem. The project I developed has the potential to improve ESL students' college retention and persistence to graduation. Interactions among educators and

improved communication among the department of education, local public schools, and colleges may also affect positive social change at local high schools by increasing course grades among ESL students and fostering their persistence to high school graduation.

Review of the Literature

The results of the qualitative data collection showed the need for additional assistance in improving ESL students' language proficiency and academic achievement. The search for supporting literature included information from Walden University's library, professional network websites, books, peer-reviewed journals, online and research databases, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools' websites, local 2- and 4-year colleges' and universities' websites, and the State of Tennessee and U.S. government websites. The topics researched included dual enrollment, professional learning communities, ESL students' retention, and success of bridge programs. Information and scholarly articles presented in the literature review were compiled from searching Walden University's library to access electronic databases such as ProQuest, Academic Search Complete, and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). I also used the Google Scholar search engine. Key search terms and phrases included *professional development for college professors*, *college professors' perspectives of professional development*, *importance of professional development of college faculty*, *English as Second Language (ESL) college retention*, *dual-enrollment programs*, *PLCs for teachers*, *bridging programs*, *bridging programs and students' academic achievement*, *gap between high school and college nationwide*, *gap between high school and college in TN*, *gap between high school and college of ESL students*, *perspectives of educators about*

PLCs, *high school graduation rates of ESL students in Tennessee*, *college enrollment of*

ESL students in TN, *college enrollment of ESL students nationwide*, *nationwide ESLs*

college graduation, *English Language Learners (ELL) in TN*, and *ESL students' access to*

quality education nationwide.

The literature review included issues related to a rapidly growing linguistically

limited population in U.S. schools and colleges. Although achievement gaps in English

and mathematics are beginning to decrease, primary and secondary school districts,

administrators, and content area teachers are concerned about studies showing a 20-50%

achievement gap between ELL and their social studies and science standardized

assessments (Miller, 2017). The literature also showed that teachers' point of view

regarding ELL and ESL students and other language minorities in the United States

shapes ELL/ESL students' academic achievement (Blanchard & Muller, 2015). Teachers

view their students through a limited ability to recognize who their students are and have

difficulties connecting with their students (Blanchard & Muller, 2015). This approach to

ELL and ESL students is unintentional and results from a lack of familiarity with

different backgrounds, culture, or languages (Blanchard & Muller, 2015).

According to Carley Rizzuto (2017), the problem is intensified because there is a

significant division between teachers who are eager to get to know their students and

incorporate their cultural background into the lesson plans, and teachers who are limited

in their knowledge of students and who do not make enough effort to differentiate

instruction. Carley Rizzuto recommended creating and implementing PDs focusing on

understanding second language acquisition theories, making classrooms culturally aware,

and making pedagogy responsive. McGraw-Hill Education conducted a survey of primary and secondary schools and found 80% of educators believe that ELL instruction support should be a priority and expressed interest in participating in appropriate professional development focusing entirely on meeting the needs of ELL/ESL students (K-12 Educator Survey Results, PR Newswire US, 2017). The current research also indicated that PD sessions focusing on linguistic and academic needs of ELL students are rarely available to other content teachers (Carley Rizzuto, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2010).

The literature review also revealed that to better serve a diverse college population, community college faculty need professional development sessions that are solemnly based on recent research (Wynants, & Dennis, 2018). However, college faculty have different points of view when it comes to online PD (Wynants, & Dennis, 2018). With recent demand for online courses and degrees, more faculty and staff need additional trainings that would address handling the course management system (CMS) such as Angel, Blackboard, or other software (Meyer, & Murrell, 2014). Additionally, the adjunct faculty expressed the need for professional learning that would address managing large courses (Dailey-Hebert, Norris, Mandernach, & Donnelli-Sallee, 2014).

The literature review also uncovered a successful implementation of several bridging programs, including a dual-enrollment program, professional learning communities, certain accelerated programs, and the usual community college courses. Although bridging programs are becoming more popular among colleges and high schools, and have been implemented for quite some time, there is a limited amount of

empirical data discussing bridging programs focused entirely on a professional learning community-like collaboration between the state's Department of Education and its representatives, K-12 districts, and institutions of higher education. Additionally, there is limited literature showing that currently implemented bridging programs benefited educators and their ESL students by improving their academic language proficiency and academic achievement or increasing their college graduation rates.

Based on the results of this project study, the high school teachers and college faculty from Tennessee's public schools and colleges were concerned with ELL and ESL students' lack of language acquisition and academic achievement and they were eager to accommodate the needs of ELL students both in classroom and outside the classroom. Educators explained how they were spending their own money and time outside classrooms to better serve their students' academic needs as well as help their students as much as they could with their personal struggles and family issues. Such high dedication and investment in ELL students' education, culture, and overall social and emotional learning (SEL) is highly desirable among other school districts (see Carley Rizzuto, 2017). The same educators supported current research and expressed their desire for more professional development sessions focusing on addressing language proficiency and academic achievement of ESL students.

Gap Between High Schools and Colleges

Although the number of Tennessee college students needing remedial courses decreased from 67% to 52%, the number of students who enroll in colleges and universities immediately upon high school graduation is lower than other states (State

Report Card, 2014). The Tennessee Department of Education found that too few students were appropriately guided and academically prepared for a pathway to college. Therefore, there is a great need for highly-qualified ESL teachers, instructional improvement, and the need to strengthen assistance to high school students who are navigating the path to college (State Report Card, 2014). The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center presented data on graduation rates from all 50 states, which showed that in 2016 there was approximately a 25% gap between high poverty/low income and low poverty/high income inner-city schools (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017). According to National Clearing House for English Language Acquisition and the Tennessee Department of Education, only 73% of ESL students graduated from high school during the 2013-2014 school year (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017; The Condition of College & Career Readiness. (2016). Additionally, during the 2013/2014 school year ESL students represented only 5% of students in schools nationwide that offered the ACT or SAT tests. Out of the 5% of ESL students, only 2.4% of ESL students participated in the ACT or SAT test (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017). Only 11% of ESL students enrolled in schools offering Gifted and Talented Programs (GATE) and took part in the program, and only 5% of ESL students in schools that offered Advanced Placement (AP) programs participated (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017). Therefore, in the 2013/2014 school year the overall nationwide enrollment in GATE was only 3% of ESL students and only 2% of ESL students were enrolled in AP courses (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017). The nationwide number of ESL

students increased from 4.3 million in 2002/2003 to approximately 4.9 million in 2015/2016 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017).

Based on decades of data collected from standardized test scores, high school graduation rates, and college admission rates, the trend of inadequate improvement in the academic achievement of minorities and high poverty students persists (Zhao, 2016). Such discrepancies in scores show a significant lack of equality in society, where efforts made to close the gap did not produce desirable effects and the gap continues to widen (Zhao, 2016). Gibson (2016) recommended focusing on building academic vocabulary, implementing computer-based instructions, and using open source learning software designed specifically for ESL language development (Gibson, 2016). Frischmann and Moor (2017) stated that institutions of higher education could benefit both colleges and students by offering bridging programs for incoming minority students from low income and high poverty settings, thus preparing them for the rigorous first year and beyond.

Dual-Enrollment Programs

One of the most common ways of closing the gap between high school and college level core courses is a dual-enrollment program where high school students can experience college level academic and social demands (Lukes, 2014). Based on the collected evidence, the dual-enrollment program increases academic performance of students enrolled in such programs, while also increasing their persistence to graduation and decreasing the years to graduate with a college diploma (Lukes, 2014). As of 2017, approximately 1.3 million U.S. teens are enrolled in dual-enrollment programs, a significant increase from 680,000 in the early 2000's (Vargas, Hooker, & Gervin, 2017).

However, the concern that college classes offered by high schools may be less rigorous could cause students to be less successful in the actual college settings and less likely to obtain a college degree (Ferguson, Baker, & Burnett, 2015). Vargas et al. (2017) suggested that dual-enrollment courses offered in high school must be equal to courses offered by local colleges, where students are given syllabi and textbooks and held to the same enrollment standards, assessments, and grading procedures as college freshman.

Since college level courses are often delivered by high school educators granted adjunct status within local community colleges, there is a growing concern with the quality and equivalency of dual-enrollment courses (Ferguson et al., 2015). Although communities opposed to the implementation of dual-enrollment programs suggested that such practices may lead to lowering college standards, the evidence shows a significant increase in high school graduation, college application and enrollment, and college graduation, predominantly among low-income students and minorities (Vargas et al., 2017). In Tennessee, prior to implementing a dual-enrollment program, less than 60% of high school graduates enrolled in colleges cited feelings of being prepared (Bowers & Foley, 2016). During the Fall semester of 2014, 33% of Tennessee college freshmen did not meet all three required ACT benchmarks in writing, reading, and mathematics (Bowers & Foley, 2016). In 2017, 19% of Tennessee high school graduates met all four ACT College Readiness Benchmarks in writing, reading, mathematics, and science, but only 39% of these graduates scored proficient on Reading Complex text ("The Condition of College & Career Readiness," 2016). The U.S. Department of Education classifies ESL students by ethnicity and race rather than language or origin (Okhremtchouk,

Levine-Smith, & Clark, 2018). Okhremtchouk et al. (2018) suggested that non-English speakers were supposed to be classified as ELL students only temporarily as they acquire English language. However, this classification impacts students' placement and achievement for years while they are enrolled in K-12 (Okhremtchouk et al., 2018) classes.

The Tennessee Board of Regents System (TBR) and its community colleges implemented more dual-enrollment programs in high school (Hunter & Wilson, 2018). Since the implementation of these programs, retention of students who were enrolled in dual-enrollment programs was higher than the retention of students who did not participate in the programs (Hunter & Wilson, 2018). Therefore, creating an additional bridging program focused on collaboration between high school and college educators could build on and improve already implemented dual-enrollment programs. This additional program would focus on developing the academic language skills of ESL students while at the same time maintaining the rigor of college-level courses.

Professional Learning Community

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are groups of educators meeting on a regular basis to identify and analyze the academic achievement of students, create formative and summative assessments, set realistic achievement goals, and create and share lesson plans, methods, and strategies to help students reach previously set achievement goals (Hoaglund, Birkenfield, & Box, 2014). Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017a) explained that collective efficacy, which is fostered in professional learning communities, can positively improve students' academic growth. Hord, the founder of

PLCs, stated that the PLC is most successful when school-based communities meet at least weekly, members share the mission and vision and are respectful of each other and their ideas, and authority and decision-making are shared (Hord, 2015).

According to Gray, Mitchell, and Tarter (2014), leaders who provide an enabling structure for PLCs by forming leadership opportunities, including all educators in decision-making processes, and establishing a hierarchy that supports teachers and promotes healthy collegial collaboration among teachers, increases student achievement. Professional Learning Communities are designed to determine what content students need to master prior to attending college and what needs to be done when students do not acquire the required knowledge (Hoaglund et al., 2014). Ndunda, Van Sickle, Perry, and Capelloni (2017) suggested that teachers have limited opportunities to collaborate with educators from outside their own school. Professional Learning Communities offer educators the opportunity to extend collaboration beyond coworkers and to implement the learning-centered model across their content.

Professional Learning Communities can be a powerful tool in increasing ESL students' academic skills in both high school and college. For the PLCs to be successful, educators must effectively engage in a range of authentic experiences (Hoaglund et al., 2014). Penner-Williams, Díaz, and Worthen (2017) stated that low academic language proficiency levels among ESL students stem from a lack of appropriate and adequate ESL teacher preparation processes, and from PD that does not focus strictly on the needs of ESL students. Additionally, researchers reported a lack of expertise among grade-level teachers regarding the educational needs of ESLs (Penner-Williams et al., 2017). A

significant need for highly-qualified ESL teachers is prevalent, especially when considering the equality for all teachers (Penner-Willems et al., 2017). Therefore, to address a high need for highly-qualified educators working with ESL students, it is imperative to develop and implement adequate and meaningful PLCs between high school and college educators.

Nationwide, many school districts and institutions of higher education created and successfully implemented PLCs among high school and college educators. Knowlton et al. (2015) reported on a successfully implemented partnership between Rhode Island science college professors and K–12 science teachers, through which educators created and participated in a two-month long professional development (PD). During the PD sessions, educators created and implemented online lessons and assessments aligned with college level requirements (Knowlton et al., 2015). Because of such an intense and long collaboration between the college and K-12 educators, college professors and faculty gained exposure to new teaching methods, new teaching strategies, greater awareness of students' learning styles, a better understanding of science standards in middle and high schools, and a better understanding of what was required for teachers to educate middle and high school students (Knowlton et al., 2015). College professors shared that due to their extensive collaboration with K-12 educators, they increased the usage of technology and applied an investigation-type of teaching approach, which was previously known and utilized only in K-12 settings (Knowlton et al., 2015).

In Tennessee, collaboration between institutions of higher education and K-12 public schools is limited to the following strategies: (a) dual-enrollment courses, where

students can earn both high school and college credit, (b) joint enrollment, where students earn only college credit, and (c) preparation for transition into college (Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, 2015.; Nashville State Community College, n.d.). For example, Tennessee State University created and implemented a four-week summer residential experience through a Summer Bridge Program, offering incoming freshmen hands-on academic activities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) (Tennessee State University, 2018). Additionally, the summer bridging program helps newcomers with adjustment to the rigorous academic program, the social and emotional pressure of being college students, and the overall transition from high school to a four-year university (Tennessee State University, 2018). This study revealed that there is a high need for intense collaboration between institutions of higher education and K-12 Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools with a desired input from the State of Tennessee.

Project Description

Needed Resources and Existing Supports

To successfully deliver the 3-day professional development, the Director of the Bridge to College PLC Program will request access to the District's training facilities, overhead projector and speakers, unlimited access to the wireless Internet, and approximately ten large extension cords for participants to charge their devises. All participants will be asked to bring their school-assigned or personal laptops, notepads, and pencils and/or pens while additional supplies, such as large poster-making paper, markers, and post-it pads, will be provided. A request will be made to grant access to the district's Blackboard, a web-based learning management system (Blackboard, n.d.),

where all involved stakeholders will be able to access the training materials, the outline

of the course, the online-based resources, and additional training modules. The Bridge to

College PLC Program's facilitator will provide handouts for all participants. A request

for permission to invite guest speakers will be made.

Potential Barriers and Potential Solutions

Developing and implementing a successful Professional Learning Community

may be difficult if all involved stakeholders do not buy into the change in basic

assumptions, do not maintain an open-minded approach to the required paradigm shift,

and who resist collaboration among educators outside their place of work (Tam, 2015;

TeKippe, S. S. (2017). Basic assumptions are already established principles and

expectations based on how educators tend to behave, plan, and what they implement in

their classrooms (Berger, Wagner, & Webster, 2014). The basic assumptions or

principles comprise the roadmap to the success of teachers and students (Berger et al.,

2014). The required paradigm shift refers to educators' ability and willingness to change

not only the way they teach, but also the way they collaborate and share meaningful

information (Hirsh, Psencik, & Brown, 2018). Tam (2015) stated that to make PLCs

successful, all involved in the program must maintain a professional dialog regarding

issues related to students' educational progress.

During the time of the scheduled 3-day long PD and PLC follow up meetings via

Skype for Business, K-12 educators may feel overwhelmed with the time commitment to

participate in the program. Stewart (2014) warned that educators must be sincere in their

collaboration and must be willing to add to their administrative requirements and duties,

as PLCs require full engagement and honesty to be successful. To help educators with the feeling of being overwhelmed, educators must have the ongoing support of the district in which the program is implemented. This support includes active participation in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the professional learning community. Additionally, administrators could allow educators to use half of the day designed by the district for in-school PD to participate in the PLC. Districts should have at least 1 day scheduled for PD per 9 weeks, which equates to 4 days per each academic year. Educators could also request a professional day off if this is an option available to them.

Public school districts or institutions of higher education may face many barriers while implementing a completely new PD program. One of the barriers that is the biggest threat to the successful implementation of the PD is lack of educators' buy-in and inability to maintain an open-minded approach to the required paradigm shift and collaboration outside their own comfort zone and outside their place of work. Sullivan and Downey (2015) conducted a qualitative study with teachers to identify and evaluate teachers' perspective of implementation of a new paradigm shift. The study showed that when administrators were transparent and implemented effective communication among all participants, offered suitable time to develop and implement new educational methods and strategies, and created different systems of accountability for all stakeholders, teachers' engagement and academic rigor significantly increased (Sullivan & Downey, 2015). It is strongly recommended that administrators adhere to the above-mentioned methods as evidence shows that challenges were surpassed by success (Sullivan & Downey, 2015).

Another barrier to successful implementation of the PD is educators' unwillingness to be observed by another educator. Educators must be open to the idea of being observed by other teachers and should be willing to give and receive constructive feedback (Choi Fung Tam, 2015). Ostovar-Nameghi and Sheikhahmadi (2016) explained that prior to peer observation, educators should understand the difference between a formal administrative observation and peer collaboration through observation. Peer coaching is a collaboration between teachers in a relaxed environment and atmosphere that is based on an exchange of ideas and reflective communication, where they can provide and receive feedback and assistance (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016). Additionally, such peer collaboration should not be imposed by the administrator, as it may be considered a threat to their professional autonomy and may be considered another way of being evaluated (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016).

To limit the possibility of teachers' lack of support for peer observation, Johnson, Reinhorn, and Simon (2018) suggested first establishing instructional teams, which over time proved to decrease teachers' professional isolation, encouraged educators' continuing development, and increased their effectiveness in classrooms. To create successful teams and encourage teachers' willingness to participate in peer observation, districts or individual schools could team up with other districts or schools that have successfully implemented instructional teams and conduct ongoing peer observations with these individuals. Such collaboration outside the school's settings may help educators feel less pressured and threatened by administrators.

Another barrier that can jeopardize success of the professional development is educators' not being able to agree with the district's or university's mission and vision for the implementation of PLCs and its operating philosophy, as well as not focusing on students' achievement. Such lack of agreement could suggest that educators lack a mutual respect and mutual commitment to both the students' and the program's success (Tam, 2015). In this situation, all previously mentioned solutions to barriers could apply. For example, administrative transparency, effective communication, building effective instructional teams, development of different systems of accountability for all stakeholders, or observation and feedback may significantly increase educators' buying into institution's or districts' vision and mission statements (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016; Johnson, Reinhorn, & Simon, 2018; Sullivan & Downey, 2015).

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

For the District and local 2- and 4-year public colleges and universities to create and implement the Bridge to College Program PLC, all stakeholders must examine and agree upon the content and establish common standards. Also, the District and the Tennessee Department of Education must issue final approval for the year-long PLC. Upon final approval of my study by Walden University, I will request an informational meeting with stakeholders and present the initial design of the Bridge to College Program. Appendix E, Table 7 shows the proposed timetable for implementation.

The initial 3-day-long introduction to the Bridge to College Professional Learning Community Program will begin during the first week of August. These days are established by the District and are designed to conduct different types of training for all

teachers in the District. The Bridge to College PLC Director will be responsible for

coordinating the time and place of the program, which will allow a larger group of

participants to have access to comfortable seating, Internet access, and outlets to plug in

their devices. The PLC Director will be responsible for scheduling future professional

development sessions and monthly meetings except for the months when K-12 teachers

administer benchmark and standardized tests. During that time, the PLC Director will

collect available data from Benchmark tests.

At the end of the school year, the Director will collect scores for World-Class

Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA Access Assessment, n.d.; WIDA Standards

Framework and its Theoretical Foundations, n.d.), the language proficiency test, and

TNReady scores, a part of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP)

(Tennessee Department of Education, 2016). These scores will be compared with scores

from the prior year to determine if ESL students made sufficient gains on all tests. The

Bridge to College PLC Program will be an interactive and hands-on PD that will provide

all involved stakeholders with insight into the program and in-depth explanations of

language acquisition. Educators, administrators, and college provosts will be briefed on

their roles as facilitators and educators. Please refer to Appendix A for PLC documents.

It is imperative that the initial day of PD is useful, motivational, and inspiring for

all involved stakeholders. Such well-prepared and well-delivered PD not only motivates

educators to buy into a new initiative, but also encourages them to offer their input and

suggestions (Voelkel Jr. & Chrispeels, 2017b). During the first day of the Bridge to

College Professional Learning Community professional development session the

Program Coordinator will introduce all involved stakeholders, set acceptable norms and

procedures, present the agenda for the entire day, and briefly introduce the results of this

project study. The first day of PD will require all stakeholders to complete an end-of-

session survey and a reflection journal entry that will be reviewed during day two of the

PD. A detailed outline of the PD's first day can be found in Appendix A.

The second day of the Bridge to College Professional Development Program will

include reviewing the survey and reflection journal entries of day one. Day two will

encourage all stakeholders to ask additional questions. Also, guest speakers, District's

Administration, and higher education institutions' provosts will be introduced and asked

to present their data, findings, and comments. Finally, educators will be placed into

previously assigned cohorts and will begin lesson and assessment planning. Appendix A

offers the outline for day two.

The final day of Bridge to College Professional Learning Community will begin

with a reflection on days one and two content and a question and answer session for all

stakeholders. Day 3 will include time to work in groups outside of the previously

assigned cohorts to facilitate learning and promote the exchange of ideas. The educators

will select to participate from several choices in break-out sessions focused on discussing

previously created lesson plans and assessments, identifying potential barriers to the

implementation of the lessons and assessments at their institutions, and seeking solutions

to potential barriers. By allowing educators to collaborate with educators from outside

their cohorts, I will ensure that all stakeholders are held to the same expectations and

standards and that all of them receive the necessary feedback from all involved educators,

administrations, and college provosts. Participants will finish day three with an open

discussion and will reflect on the professional development and its impact to affect

positive social change for high schools and colleges. Appendix A outlines activities for

the last day of Bridge to College Professional Development.

<p style="text-align:center">Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders</p>

The Bridge to College Program was informed by the results of my research,

where both K-12 and college educators expressed the need for additional assistance in

educating and supporting ESL students. Additionally, the literature review suggested that

creating professional learning communities for both students and educators not only

improves students' academic achievement but also allows educators to extend their

pedagogical knowledge and professional experiences (Knowlton et al., 2015).

Developing and implementing the Bridge to College Program Professional Learning

Community may positively affect not only ESL students, but also Metropolitan Nashville

Public Schools educators, as well as faculty and staff from local 2-year and 4-year

colleges and universities.

My role in the Bridge to College PLC Program's professional development is that

of the program coordinator. I will also serve as the program's facilitator with assistance

of other facilitators designated by the District. The role of all involved stakeholders is to

be active learners, where the requirement will be to participate in a wide range of

activities, such as whole group discussions, small group discussions, small group hands-

on activities, and results delivery, as well as the creation and presentation of lesson plans

and reviews of standardized test data. Participants will be required to complete tutorial

modules on the District's Blackboard and final assessments at the end of each day, which

is required by the District for every professional development endeavor.

Project Development Evaluation

The appropriate evaluation measure for this project is an outcomes-based

evaluation. This type of assessment allows the program coordinator, the entire district or

individual schools, and institutions of higher education to determine the effect the

professional development had on the behaviors of the target population. The data

collected during the evaluation process will provide important information concerning the

design of the Professional Development. Any changes applied after the implementation

of the PD will be informed by the outcomes of the evaluation, which will ensure that the

PD meets the needs of educators and significantly improves ELL/ESL students' language

acquisition, academic achievement, and college graduation rates.

Outcome-Based Evaluation and Goals

Upon completion of a 3-day professional development, all involved stakeholders

will complete an online survey indicating if the initial 3-day long professional

development provided enough information for the collaboration to begin and if the PLC

cohorts met regularly to provide educators with assistance to improve ESL students'

college readiness. The goal for the outcome-based evaluation is focused on gathering

immediate information to determine if the PD was: (a) meaningful, (b) relevant, (c)

timely, (d) realistic, (e) engaging, (f) organized, and (g) if the facilitator was

knowledgeable. The overall goal is to assess how and if the PD positively affected lesson

planning, teaching methods and strategies, collaboration, engagement, and if the PD requires additional support services or changes.

The yearly evaluation process will be based solely on the outcomes of students' academic achievement and language proficiency. The Bridge to College PLC Program Coordinator will review the data of ESL students from high school WIDA language proficiency tests, ACT scores, and college placement tests to determine if the goals for ESL students' academic growth were met. Depending on the outcomes of both collected data and completed surveys, the PD, Bridge to College PLC Program, may need to be modified.

Justification for Outcome-Based Evaluation

Outcomes based evaluation is recommended when assessing the quality of a newly implemented program (Lawton, Manning, & Lawler, 2017). This type of evaluation will let the program coordinator know whether the PD was effective in meeting its objectives (Saderholm, Ronau, Rakes, Bush, & Mohr-Schroeder, 2016; Taylor, 2009). It will also provide feedback that may help the program coordinator to consider different approaches to facilitate teachers' acquisition of skills and to better connect PD activities with teacher lesson planning (Saderholm et al., 2017; Taylor, 2009). Furthermore, the outcomes-based evaluation will assess activities utilized in the PD to determine if they promoted the development of educators' knowledge and offered them tools to transform newly acquired knowledge into practice (Lawton et al., 2017).

Key Stakeholders

The key stakeholders include high school and college educators, college provosts, the district Chief of Staff, the district Chief of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment, the Chief Academic Officer for instruction and curriculum, the Director of Schools, school administrators, and the Bridge to College PLC Program Coordinator. The purpose for developing the Bridge to College PLC Program is to align methods and teaching strategies as well as to set achievable, yet rigorous, goals between K-12 schools and local colleges. Both K-12 teachers and college educators will be subjected to high expectations in both student achievement and collaboration.

<div style="text-align:center">Project Implications</div>

Local Community

The purpose of this project study was to explore educators' perceptions of barriers to college graduation for ESL students and to offer solutions to improve ESL students' persistence to graduation. In 2014, about 4.7 million students enrolled in public school were classified as ELL and 3.6 million ELL students were enrolled in an ELL program (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The majority (78%) of ELL school-age students were Hispanics. The Bridge to College PLC Program was informed by interviewing high school and college educators. All participants agreed that there is a high need for assistance in helping ESL students improve their language proficiency and academic achievement while meeting their social and emotional needs. Although the high school graduation rate among ELL students in TN increased from 71% in 2012 to 76% in 2017 (Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, 2015.; National Center for Education

Statistics, 2015), 24% of the ELL students did not graduate from high school or college due to their limited language proficiency, academic achievement, or family and financial difficulties (Sanchez, 2017).

According to the study participants, ESL students often lack the basic language skills needed to persevere in demanding educational settings. This deficiency prevents them from obtaining consistent and decent employment, leaving them struggling to support their families. Unfortunately, ESL students' low graduation and retention rates, as well as inadequate academic achievement and language proficiency, are not unique to the State of Tennessee but mirror a national trend. In 2014, 8% of Hispanics nationwide who did not complete high school remained unemployed (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Although the percentage of Hispanic students between ages 16 and 24 who dropped out of high school or college decreased nationwide from 27.8% in 2010 to 8.6% in 2016, the Hispanic students' dropout percentage in 2016 was still higher than the White and Black dropout rates, with 22.6% of Hispanic students dropping out as compared to 8.2% for White students and 11.6 % for Black students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

The literature review, as well as data presented in this project study, suggested that primary and secondary ELL students as well as college ESL students in Tennessee need significant support in language acquisition, academic achievement, and college readiness. The implementation of PD focusing entirely on a unifying approach to lesson planning, evaluation, and vertically aligned collaboration between K-12 and college educators, may significantly improve ELL/ESL students' scores on WIDA language

proficiency tests, standardized tests, and persistence to college graduation. Additionally, educators who actively participate in PD, and later PLC sessions, may share their newly acquired knowledge with other teachers in the building through the development of instructional teams or grade level teams.

Acquiring knowledge on language acquisition and appropriate differentiation in lesson planning and delivery could benefit all teachers as the strategies used for language development and academic achievement could be applied to general population struggling readers. Finally, with ELL and ESL students meeting the academic requirements of local schools and universities, they may persist to graduate studies, which could lead to increased numbers of specialists in the fields of health care, engineering, education, business and accounting, or public health. By practicing vertical alignment between Kindergarten through grade twelve and colleges in Tennessee, educators may help ELL/ESL students accomplish their goals of becoming doctors, nurses, or accountants to fill the projected job openings. According to the Metro Planning Department, by 2035 there will be an estimated two million six hundred thousand more residents in Tennessee, one million more than in 2018 (Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2018).

Across-the-Board Share of Experiences

This research showed alignment between the State of Tennessee and the nationwide trend of ESL students who are still not making adequate gains in language proficiency and academic achievement, thus preventing them from being as successful as other ethnic or racial groups (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). ESL

students are held to the same norms and expectations as non-ESL students; therefore, to help them close the achievement gap, educators across the nation seek opportunities to better serve their ESL and EL student populations. Since the ESL population makes up a significant number of students enrolled in public schools nationwide, implementing an ongoing professional learning community focused only on the ESL population's needs may be a desirable choice for other school districts and colleges nationwide. Such an approach, focused on aligning expectations and implementing rigorous yet accessible curriculum among high schools and institutions of higher education may not only unify districts in their quest to improve ESL students' achievement and graduation rates, but may also fulfill requirements of The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) by increasing the overall reading and mathematics proficiency among the lowest-performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

This study focused on educators' perceptions of ESL students' barriers to college graduation. Although there is literature showing the ESL students' point of view, there is limited empirical data showing the point of view of both K-12 and college educators. Therefore, other states may be prompted by this study to conduct their own studies of ESL education and to develop their own professional learning communities for K-12 and college educators. This could lead to greater effectiveness in serving ESL students nationwide. The District will be the first documented in the nation to offer a professional learning community to both high school and college educators that provides an ongoing PD for educators working exclusively with ESL students.

Conclusion

A qualitative study was conducted, and six high school and six college educators served as study participants. Once I completed interviews, I analyzed their responses to open-ended questions, coded findings, and looked for common themes. Once common themes emerged, I evaluated them through the lens of Tinto's persistence theory (Tinto, 1975; 1988) and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978). After conducting a literature review based on the findings of this study, I established that there is a significant need for aligning educators' teaching strategies, methods, and expectations between K-12 districts and institutions of higher education. One of the methods that may be beneficial to both K-12 and college educators is creating and implementing PLC focusing only on ESL students' improvement of language acquisition, academic achievement, and social and emotional learning.

ESL students' language proficiency and academic achievement are necessary for meeting the requirements of the 21st Century Skills referred to as a set of skills, knowledge, character traits, and work behaviors that, according to educators and other individuals involved in education as well as potential employers, are very important to success in academia and workplaces (Vafai, 2014). These skills include critical and logical thinking, collaboration, content understanding, and most important, communication, community involvement, and self-sufficiency (The Glossary of Education Reform for Journalist, 2016). Since the number of ESL students enrolled in schools in the U.S. has significantly increased, national, state, and local governments were forced to offer adequate teacher preparation programs, ensuring that teachers gain

appropriate pedagogical knowledge for working with ELL students (Tran, 2014).
However, current programs may not always prepare teachers for what they face in
classroom.

In Section 3 of this project study, I presented the rationale, detailed description,
and the implementation timetable of the PD. The literature review offered support for
developing a learning community that would allow teachers and educators to align and
share their expectations and expertise, create common lesson plans, and seek support in
research-based practices. I included information regarding all involved stakeholders,
potential barriers, and a detailed evaluation of the program.

During the Professional Development Bridge to College Professional Learning
Community Program, K-12 and college educators can exchange ideas and enhance their
teaching skills to help ESL students improve their language skills and academic
achievement and persist to college graduation. The findings from this project, as well as
the development and implementation of the Bridge to College Professional Learning
Community Program, will create opportunities for additional research. Section 4 lists the
strengths and limitations of this project and recommendations for possible future research
as well as my personal reflection on my scholarly experience and progress.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

I conducted a qualitative single case study to identify high school and college educators' perspectives of ESL students' barriers to college graduation. The goal of this project study was to use the findings from the research to establish a 3-day PD program for K-12 and college educators followed by the launch of an online PLC. The purpose of establishing a PD program and PLC was to improve ESL students' academic language proficiency, academic achievement, and college graduation rates. As Krashen (1979) stated, English language academic development is a lengthy process, which makes educating ESL students difficult. Kindergarten through 12th grade educators play a crucial role in preparing future college students.

Because this project focused on barriers to college graduation, I used Tinto's retention theory as the conceptual framework. Tinto (1993) stated that there are three key reasons for students leaving college: (a) academic difficulties, (b) inability to integrate academic and professional/occupational goals, and (c) failure to merge academic and social life. This study was conducted at six local high schools and two local public colleges that have a significantly larger ELL population than other high schools and colleges in the state of Tennessee. The results of this project study confirmed that language acquisition is a complex and difficult process and may take many years before individual students develop academic fluency (Krashen, 1979, 1992). The findings also confirmed that students' academic difficulties; inability to integrate academic, family, and work goals; and lack of social integration were the barriers to college graduation (see Tinto, 1993).

In this section, I present the strengths and limitations of the Bridge to College Professional Development program and bi-monthly PLC. I also reflect on what I learned about my personal strengths and weaknesses throughout the process of conducting original research. Finally, I discuss implications, the potential for social change, and recommendations for future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Current empirical evidence indicated that ESL students in Tennessee are not adequately prepared for college (Tennessee Department of Education, 2015). The National Clearing House for English Language Acquisition and the Tennessee Department of Education reported that during the academic year of 2013/2014, only 73% of ESL students became high school graduates (National Clearinghouse for English Language Learners, 2015). Because there was limited empirical data available regarding vertically aligned PD between K-12 and college educators related to ELL/ESL, this project suggested a way to address this gap.

Donovan, Borda, Hanley, and Landel (2015) conducted a 4-year study on how collaboration between K-12 science teachers and college science faculty impacted educators' beliefs about science and how it affected their classroom practices. The results showed that primary and secondary schools' teachers changed their beliefs about teaching science and began implementing constructivist theory and grounding their planning in research (Donovan et al., 2015). Additionally, some college educators changed their approach to teaching undergraduate science and moved from lecture to more inquiry-based assignments as well as more group work (Donovan et al., 2015).

Koellner and Jacobs (2015) suggested that PD should be based on content, processes, and structure to allow educators to focus on students' different ways of thinking and learning. Studies showed that primary and secondary schools are often disconnected from institutions of higher education, and the need for collaboration is much higher than in previous years (Smith, Kindall, Carter, & Beachner, 2016). This project study's strength was that it offered an opportunity to vertically align strategies between K-12 and college educators to promote student success. Such alignment encourages close collaboration between educators from different schools, subjects, and institutions of higher education to focus on the improvement of ESL students' language proficiency, academic achievement, and college graduation.

Nashville Public Schools' ELL Office offers PD sessions focusing on ESL students for all educators, but these sessions are segregated to either primary or secondary schools and do not include college educators (Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, 2015). Although PLCs have been used by public schools and colleges in Tennessee, none of them were designed for collaboration among K-12 and college educators for concentrating on ESL students' needs (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017). This project study offered solutions for educators to address the lack of vertical alignment and collaboration between K-12 and college educators in Middle Tennessee. The project study offered an in-depth evaluation of data, program expectations, common goals, aligned curriculum, common assessments to evaluate ESL students' progress, and interaction with all stakeholders.

Empirical data suggested that online PLCs serving educators are successful (Blitz, 2013; Owen, 2015; Owen, 2016). Successful PLCs engage involved educators, create a sense of belonging, improve educators' content and pedagogical knowledge, and initiate positive changes in educators' instructional methods and practices (Blitz, 2013; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017b). The Bridge to College 3-day PD was established based on educators' viewpoints and their voiced needs for additional assistance with ESL students' language acquisition, academic achievement, and college graduation.

One limitation of this project is its degree of transferability in the way that different school districts decide to implement it and evaluate it (see Creswell, 2009, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Transferability could be either a strength or limitation of the project depending on the specific outcomes of a district's project implementation. The implementation will begin with ELL and general education teachers practicing in high schools and colleges. During the first year of the program implementation, educators will begin monitoring and collecting data from all students enrolled in high school, and during the second year the monitoring and data collection will extend to students in Grades 5 through 8. During Year 3 and beyond, elementary school teachers can also be included in this professional training. The purpose for including middle school teachers during the second year is to ensure consistent implementation of rigorous and college preparation curricula among all K-12 teachers. Vertical alignment promotes better understanding among K-12 and college educators through restructuring and connecting teaching methods and strategies used by all educators.

Some recent studies indicated that educators were concerned with current PLCs' design and implementation, and that teachers had limited time for teacher learning and collaboration (Hudson, 2015). The success of the PD as well as the planned online PLC depend on the educators' engagement and willingness to collaborate online. To address educators' possible limited engagement during the PD session, the facilitator could approach an individual or a group of educators and engage in constructive and collaborative dialog regarding the current discussion topic. An additional option would be to ask the individual teacher or group of teachers to join the facilitator at his or her table and engage in deeper and more specific dialog. Some studies indicated that teachers feel isolated and contribute less when asked to participate in online PLCs, which may limit or impede students' academic development (Blitz, 2013; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017b; Watson, 2014).

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Although PD was the planned approach for this project study, there are alternative approaches to address the local problem. One would be a vertically aligned, detailed, and goal-oriented curriculum plan for primary and secondary ELL and college ESL students. Curriculum development for a specific target population is designed to help districts, schools, administrators, and educators meet the needs of a specific group of students (Henson, 2015). Prior to implementation of curriculum development, educators would have to participate in several PD sessions to gain better understanding of relevant learning theories and models, and educators would have to choose the models and theories that apply to their learning styles as well as the school environment and

population they serve (Henson, 2015). Based on findings from the current study, the

curriculum must be multicultural and allow educators freedom to choose teaching

materials (see Henson, 2015). Recent studies on implemented changes in curriculum for

ELL students in science and PD for teachers indicated a significant positive effect not

only on active ELL students but also on former ELL students, ELL students who

previously exited ELL services but were reclassified, and general population students

(Llosa et al., 2016).

     A second alternative approach could be a policy recommendation aligned to

current state or federal policies to identify areas that need to be changed in assessing

ELL/ESL students' academic growth. Findings from the current study could be presented

to the local department of education before implementing changes to the existing

standardized testing or changing the requirements of ELL/ESL students taking such tests

and creating content-based portfolios. These portfolios would remain aligned with the

state's standards. Because ELL/ESL students may not struggle with language acquisition

but rather may struggle with logical and critical thinking skills, a portfolio-based

evaluation could be more suitable for this population of learners. Another requirement

would require teachers to participate in all PDs designed for ELL/ESL educators and

follow the portfolio design for all ELL/ESL students. High school ELL students would

also receive additional support in areas such as social and emotional learning, counseling

in their native language, and weekly tutoring and preparation for standardized tests used

for college admissions. Such an approach to ELL/ESL students' needs would require

additional funding. However, the results may not only increase high school graduation

rates, but may also improve students' language acquisition, academic achievement, and college graduation rates. This project could be modified to exclude elementary and middle school teachers for the first 5 years until consistent data from both high schools and colleges were available. However, the potential success for all ESL students may be delayed, and many K-8 ESL students due to their lower gains in academic language may miss the opportunity for high school or college graduation if this action is taken.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Scholarship</h2>

Educators are responsible for creating meaningful differentiation and implementing transformative elements into lesson plans (Bernstein, 2018). Teachers in public K-12 schools are required to establish student-centered classrooms and incorporate blended learning, technology-based activities, and assessments for all students (Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, 2015). Teachers are scholars of teaching and are obligated to prove that they use a transformative approach to learning by presenting data for students' growth (Bernstein, 2018). Scholarship of teaching involves teaching future scholars, sharing personal knowledge, creating meaningful learning methods and techniques, and helping students develop critical and logical thinking skills (Register & King, 2018).

The journey to completion of this project study involved my participation in every form of scholarship. I am a middle school ELL teacher working toward a doctoral degree in education. The time I spend with my students from various backgrounds, cultures, and experiences forces me to seek new practices, track trends in education, and translate knowledge into practice. The knowledge I seek is not only related to transformative

student-centered education but is also centered around a trauma-informed classroom related to post-traumatic stress syndrome, social and emotional learning, and exceptional education trends and strategies. Because all K-12 public school educators are required to renew their teaching license every 10 years, I must show evidence of completion of a specific number of hours of PD, which is dependent on my yearly evaluation scores (Tennessee Department of Education, 2015). To support my research questions and findings, I completed two literature reviews. By completing this project study and evaluating the most recent empirical data related to my research topic and findings, I was able to identify not only the gap in practice, but also the gap in literature regarding vertically aligned PLCs among K-12 and college educators.

Throughout this research process, I have grown as a scholar-practitioner. I initially desired to complete a project study based on quantitative data. However, despite the amount of time consumed by qualitative research and the hard work required for proper data analysis, I appreciated the rich and in-depth data I was able to collect. Through the process of scholarship of teaching and the scholarship of learning, I realized that my personal experiences as a former ESL student and my current experiences as an ELL teacher and researcher are connected. Through personal experiences I became a better, more understanding teacher, and through my professional experiences I became a better scholar who understands teachers' concerns. Over the last 10 years, I told my students that hard work always pays off, and now I can see that many sleepless nights completing this project study produced results closely related to my personal and

professional experiences. I will continue to identify issues for research related to education of ESL students.

Project Development and Evaluation

My experience with project development was limited to two different work settings: (a) a business environment prior to becoming a teacher, where I wrote and implemented a business plan, and (b) the middle school settings, where I designed and delivered PD on ELL students' language proficiency and PTSS. My previous experience with quantitative research data collection was limited and took place only during Statistics courses while in college. I had no prior experience in qualitative data collection, and initially, I was quite overwhelmed. I experienced difficulties with gaining permission from local high school administrators to conduct my study, followed by difficulties with recruiting participants. Another setback was data transcription and analysis. I am glad that I utilized data analysis software, which allowed me to not only group answers by themes, but also collect quotes associated with each theme. Although I analyzed each interview line by line, I saved time on searching for quotes.

The literature review was time-consuming and nerve-wracking. I experienced difficulties with finding appropriate articles that supported my quest to identify educators' perspectives of ESL students' barriers to college graduation. I identified a lack of empirical data on established PLCs focused entirely on ESL students and their needs. Furthermore, I was unable to find literature describing a PLC that would call for cooperation and vertical alignment between K-12 public schools and local public colleges. Yet, the development of the Bridge to College PLC consumed the least of my

time. As a middle school teacher and former ESL student, I knew what support both educators and ESL students need to fulfill the English language proficiency requirements and improve academic achievement. By participating in the District's professional developments, I knew what would be needed to conduct a PD program, where I would like this to take place, who should be present, and how much time would be needed to complete each task to develop rigorous lesson plans and assessments.

Creating an evaluation focused on questions that would help me, as the program developer and coordinator, to identify flaws or inadequacies related to the timeframe of my project and its delivery will be helpful. Each day of PD will end with an evaluation, which will allow me to immediately review scores and possible suggestions so that I can apply the necessary changes to the next day's session. Formative evaluations will inform more detailed and extensive changes to the program.

Leadership and Change

This project study, and the resulting PLC, will contribute to positive leadership among educators and positively affect social change within ESL programs in both K-12 and college through the vertical alignment of curriculums to increase ESL student success. I am a lead ELL teacher at the school where I teach, and I have experience as a leadership team member, discipline committee member, and technology committee leader. I teach my students to be young leaders by building their self-esteem, encouraging them to take charge, and motivating them to strive to change the world for the better. I noticed that by leading the change, I can motivate others to do the same. This journey

helped me gain different perspectives on the qualitative research process and my role as a leader in making a difference in ESL students' progress.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

Prior to enrolling in a doctoral program, I completed a dual accelerated master's degree in education and obtained a teaching license in Business 7-12 as well as endorsements in ELL. I accomplished this while working full time as a teacher, raising a 5-year-old, and being pregnant with my second son. I knew that embarking on a journey to an advanced degree was challenging, time-consuming, and often negatively affected marriages and family dynamics. Yet I was determined to research, learn, and make a significant difference in my students' lives. I was also preparing to become a K-12 principal and focus on creating a trauma-informed learning environment for students who have experienced violence, abuse, war, or other trauma. As I completed this research I noticed that my study participants and colleagues often spoke of trauma that ESL students experience and how it affects their learning. This journey unified my joy of teaching with my newly discovered love for researching and transformed me from a teacher of scholarship into a scholar of teaching.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

Prior to 2008, I was working in a corporate office with no thought of becoming a teacher. However, due to the stock market crash of 2008, I had to look for new employment. I first became a substitute teacher and traveled throughout the District's various schools and grade levels. I was asked to become a permanent substitute teacher at one of many high schools with a high number of ELL students. Within less than one year,

I was offered an ELL teaching position at one of the local middle schools. I was hired on an alternative license pending completion of college course work in education and passing the Praxis test. I was out of my comfort zone working in an area beyond my professional expertise. Yet, I found myself applying knowledge gained through my personal experiences that allowed me to complete required ELL endorsements and grow as a teacher. I fell in love with teaching, mentoring, and molding young ELL minds, who by relating to me as a former ELL student, began making tremendous gains in both academics and personal growth. Over the last ten years, I helped hundreds of students exit ELL, and many of them applied to and completed college. Some of my students write their college application essays about their middle school ELL teacher, who helped them make their dreams of attending college possible.

The knowledge I gained throughout performing my research and the completion of this project study will have a significant impact on my future professional experiences and my desire to continue my quest to become an administrator of a school with a predominately ELL population. My goal as a scholar practitioner is to transition to a college setting and lead undergraduate and graduate students, possibly ESL students, to becoming influential and rigorous ELL/ESL teachers or college professors.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

The results of this project study led to the development of the Bridge to College PD and PLC. I anticipated the results to require a policy change regarding ESL services and students within the State of Tennessee. However, the results of the research showed that by vertically aligning K-12 and colleges, such drastic change was not necessary.

Therefore, creating and delivering PD sessions focusing entirely on arming educators with tools to improve ESL students' academic achievement was more suitable.

Completion of this project created an extraordinary sense of accomplishment. There were moments when I doubted my ability to proceed beyond the prospectus, yet determination and personal sacrifices pushed me through and created a clear vision of what type of project I would like to create to benefit ESL students. I am confident that this project will create positive experiences for ELL/ESL educators as well as promote significant growth in students' language acquisition, academic achievement, and college graduation.

Potential Impact on Social Change

The Bridge to College PD and PLC was developed solely because of the study participant responses I collected when conducting interviews for this project study. If implemented correctly, not only will this project positively impact ESL students' language acquisition and academic achievement, but it will also develop a significant professional partnership between K-12 public schools and colleges. Such a partnership will have a positive impact on the local community, as ESL students' achievement will promote employment and increase their self-efficacy. Additionally, more students will consider applying to local colleges rather than seeking acceptance from institutions of higher education outside the State of Tennessee.

This project can potentially strengthen the ELL college preparation programs and serve as an example to other K-12 Districts and colleges nationwide. Successful implementation of a program that can be transferable to other institutions can positively

impact social change nationally or even globally. This project will address ESL students'

needs but will also shed light on the shortage of ELL teachers and ESL faculty.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This project study was developed to address concerns voiced by interviewed

educators. PLCs are recognized nationwide as a successful innovation responsible for the

improvement of student achievement (Hallam et al., 2015). Vertical alignment between

K-12 teachers and college educators not only showed a positive effect on students'

achievement but also enhanced educators' teaching methods and strategies (Smith et al.,

2016). However, none of the collaborations focused directly on the needs of ELL/ESL

students. The Bridge to College PD and PLC has the potential to contribute to enhancing

educators' professional skills and to improve ELL and ESL students' language

proficiency, academic achievement, and college graduation.

Educators taking part in this project are responsible for engaging in the PD,

reviewing data, and creating lesson plans and assessments based on their findings. Bi-

monthly communication in the form of an online PLC, and constant evaluation of their

practices, teaching strategies, and rigorous approach to curricula are outcome goals. All

stakeholders must understand that such vertical alignment does not only provide service

to the local community, but also has the potential to significantly impact the nation as an

approach to educating ELL and ESL students (Smith et al., 2016).

The Bridge to College PD and PLC offers several different options for future

research. One option is a quantitative approach to compare high school WIDA's language

proficiency scores from the first five years of implementation of the project with the

WIDA's scores from the five years prior to its implementation. Additional research could focus on colleges and evaluate two areas: English proficiency placement test and college graduation rates based on the same period as high school-based research. Another research option could be a follow up to my study, which would focus on educators' perspective of ESL students' barriers to graduation with an emphasis on what type of changes, if any, took place after the implementation of the Bridge to College PLC. Such an in-depth qualitative research method could generate a rich pool of data showing the positive and negative aspects of the project as well as offering potential suggestions or comments for change and improvement. Finally, a mixed-method study related to this project could focus on ELL/ESL students' perspectives of changes in teaching methods, strategies, and the rigor they experienced prior to the implementation, and after the implementation, of this project. All proposed future research could provide insight into the effectiveness of PD in improving ELL and ESL students' language proficiency, academic achievement, and college graduation.

Conclusion

The strengths and weaknesses of professional learning communities are documented throughout this project study. This research explored teachers' perceptions of ESL students' barriers to college graduation. The qualitative case study research revealed four themes suggesting the reason for ELL high school and ESL college students' struggles involve: (a) language acquisition, (b) barriers to college graduation, (c) adverse circumstances, and (d) academic achievement. A 3-day vertically aligned PD and bi-monthly PLC for K-12 and college professors shows potential to unify and

positively impact educators' approaches to teaching methods and strategies, provide data

collection and evaluation, encourage rigorous curricula delivery, and positively impact

social change. The success of Bridge to College Professional Community Learning will

contribute to improvement of ELL high school and ESL college students' quality of life

and the overall improvement of communities in which they reside.

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Appendix A: The Project

The Bridge to College Program was created based on the findings of the research I conducted regarding educators' perception to ESL students' barriers to college graduation. After interviewing local high school teachers and college educators and completing the data analysis, four major themes emerged that included language acquisition, academic achievement, adverse circumstances, and barriers to college graduation. The primary identified barrier to college graduation of ESL students was the lack of academic language proficiency in reading and writing. Therefore, ESL students' need for becoming proficient in academic English prior to their acceptance to college was the drive for the development of this project.

This project is focused on developing and implementing a PLC for middle school teachers, high school teachers, and college professors and is focused on increasing ESL students' academic language proficiency, academic achievement, and college graduation. The implementation and evaluation of the 3-day PD sessions are detailed in this appendix.

Goal: The goal of the Bridge to College PLC is to increase ESL students' language proficiency, academic achievement, and to improve college graduation rates among this population of learners.

Purpose: The purpose of the project is to provide K-12 and college educators with the education, tools, and activities necessary to better prepare them to positively impact ESL students' language proficiency, reading and writing skills, academic achievement, and college graduation rates. Activities include familiarizing high school educators with

current college educational trends, expectations, and currently implemented programs that college ESL Departments utilize to assess and assist ESL students. Additionally, college educators will share ESL and general courses' formative and summative assessments that ESL students face while in college. Also, college educators will review K-12 data, standards, tools, and resources that students and educators use to promote language and academic growth.

Participants:

- Bridge to Program PLC Coordinator

- District's full-time middle and high school's English Learners (EL) and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers

- District's Chief Academic Officer of Instruction and Curriculum

- EL Office Director

- EL Middle and High School Coaches

- ESL Department's faculty and staff of local colleges and universities involved in working with college ESL population, and college provosts

Duration:

This will be a 3-day PD program followed by bi-monthly learning community meetings to be conducted via Skype for Business.

Resources Needed:

- Access to the District's Blackboard, overhead projector
- Educators individual laptops• Wi-fi availability
- Elmo or Ladybug (document reader)
- Writing utensils/paper
- Access to Password-Secured SharePoint Documents
- All educators must bring electronic versions of at least 1 semester of

their most recent lesson plans, sample assessments, syllabus, activities, etc.

Learning Outcomes:

1.   All participants will be able to identify the factors that impact on the academic, social, and emotional needs of ESL students.

2.   Middle and high school educators will be able to integrate college-level practice, assessments, and supplemental tools in all language development-related K-12 courses.

3.   All participants will be able to identify middle school' 'at risk' students and develop a remediation plan that will be reviewed twice a year.

4.   Middle and high school educators will demonstrate the ability to utilize the District's formative and summative data to identify strengths and weaknesses of ESL students, review results with college educators, and make data-driven decisions regarding appropriate lessons, activities, and assessment planning.

5.   College educators will demonstrate the ability to utilize the institutions' formative and summative data to identify the strengths and weaknesses of ESL students, review results with K-12 educators, and make data-driven decisions regarding appropriate lessons, activities, and assessment planning.

6.   College educators will describe strategies to integrate K-12 practices, assessments, and supplemental tools in all college-level courses.

Objectives:

1.   Discuss the current K-12 standards and college curriculum.

2.   Introduce orientation resources, training, and materials on the District's Blackboard website.

3.   Compare and contrast teaching methods, practices, and assessments between K-12 and college educators.

4.   Access and review student resource materials.

5.   Locate tutorials and complete training modules.

6.   Locate appropriate cohorts in Blackboard and review participants' educational and professional background.

7.   Access sample ESL students' K-12 grade-level summative assessments, and college sample assessments, and review results.

8.   K-12 educators will locate, analyze, and apply ESL students' summative assessment data.

9.   College educators will actively participate in data identification processes.

10.   Discuss standardized assessment data.

11.   Discuss the process for utilizing data in planning lesson and assessments.

12.   Identify cohorts' strengths and weaknesses

13.   Identify specific data of ESL students that will be shared among all stakeholders, and will be utilized by individual cohorts, PDs reviews, in end-of-course evaluation, and later, in bimonthly PLC via Skype for Business.

Methods of Instruction

1.   Review and align K-12 standards with college expectations

2.   Online training modules and assessments

3.   Individual assessments of prior knowledge

4.   Whole-group discussion

5.   Interactive whole-group online presentations

6.   Breakout sessions: cohort collaborations

7.   SharePoint Documents

Agenda

Day 1:

0800-0930   Introduction of PD's Coordinator; Review of the Project Study's

Findings; Overview of Purpose, Goals, Learning Objectives, and

Learning Outcomes; Overview of Current ESL Students' K-12

Standards and College Curriculum (Slides: 1-2)

0930-0945   Break (Slide: 4)

0945-1130   Whole Group Interactive Activity: Review of K-12 ESL Students'

Benchmark, Standardized, End-of-Course, and College Placement

Tests, Mid-Term and Final Exams - Compare Students' Scores and

Establish Common Ground for Future Planning; Review of

Educational Resources, Orientation, and Training Resources   (Slides: 5 -8)

1130-1230   Lunch (Slide 9)

1230-1315   Review District's Blackboard Training Modules and Assessments

(Continue with Slide 10)

1315-1330   Break (slide 11)

1330-1430	Complete Training Modules in District's Blackboard, Complete Assessment for Each Module (Slide 12)
1430-1530	Discussion (Slide 13)
1530-1600	Wrap Up, Introduce Agenda for Day 2; Q & A; Evaluation (Slide 14)

Day 2

0800-0830	Review of Day 1 Activities (Slide 15)
0830-0930	Introduction of Guest Speakers: K-12 EL Office Director, Colleges' and University's ESL Department, College Professors, College Provosts, and the District's Chief Academic Officer of Instruction and Curriculum; Presentations of Each Department and Its Role in Bridge to College PLC (Slides 16)
0930-0945	Break (Slide 17)
0945-1130	Preview of Previously Presented Data in Blackboard; Assignment

of ESL students' Specific Data to Each educator/Cohort for Further Analysis Beginning

the Analysis of Assigned Data;

	Parking Lot (an anonymous Q & A method used by K-12 educators during professional development) (Slide 18)
1130-1230	Lunch (Slide 19)
1230-1400	Collaborative Activity: Based on Presented Data Cohorts Create Lesson Plans, Check for Alignment with K-12 and College

Sample Syllabi and Align Expectations (Slide 20)

1400-1415   Break (Slide 21)

1415-1500   Change Cohort and Exchange Lesson Plans Ideas (22)

1500-1530   Whole Group Discussion; Parking Lot (Q & A) (Slide 23)

1530-1600   Wrap Up, Review of Agenda for Day 3; Q & A; Evaluation (Slide

    24)

Day 3

0800-0830   Summarize Day 1 and Day 2 Discussions and Activities, Pose

    Additional Questions, and Share Several Completed Lesson

    Plans/Syllabi with All Stakeholders (slide 25)

0830-1000   Cohorts Develop Formative and Summative Assessments; Propose

    Potential Changes Necessary for Implementation in Case of ESL

    Students Not Making Appropriate Progress (Slide 26)

1000-1015   Break (Slide 27)

1015-1130   Continue Development of Assessments; Q & A in Small Groups;

    Recommendations from Bridge to College PLC Coordinator, ESL

    Office Director, College Departments and K-12 Executives (Slide

    28)

1130-1230   Lunch (Slide 29)

1230-1430   Develop Remediation Courses and Activities using Results (Slide

    30)

1430-1445   Break (Slide 31)

1445-1530	Upload of All Completed Lesson Plans and Assessments to
	SharePoint Document; Review Schedules and Agendas for
	Bimonthly PLCs via Skype for Business (Slide 32)
1530-1600	Wrap Up the Bridge to College PLC; Q & A; Evaluation

PowerPoint Presentation and Content Delivery
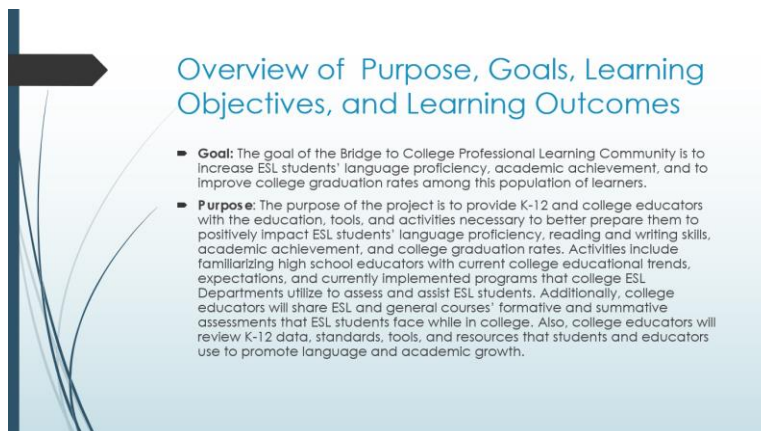
Disclaimer: All participants will receive a handout with 2 power point slides on each page to allow for ease of reading and note taking.

Slide 1: Welcome, Introductions, Review of the Project Study Findings, and Agenda

Facilitator will introduce him/herself and will introduce each participant, including participant's background and accomplishments.

Slide 2: Overview of Purpose, Goals, Learning Objectives, and Learning Outcomes

Facilitator will ask participants to read the slide and discuss at their tables why it is important to improve ELL/ESL students' language acquisition, academic achievement, and college graduation. Based on the purpose, how do they see the need for vertical alignment?

Slide 3: Overview of Current ESL Students' K-12 Standards and College Curriculum

Participants read standards in groups at each table, discuss findings, and compare K-12 with college standards to identify similarities and differences.

Slide 4: Break
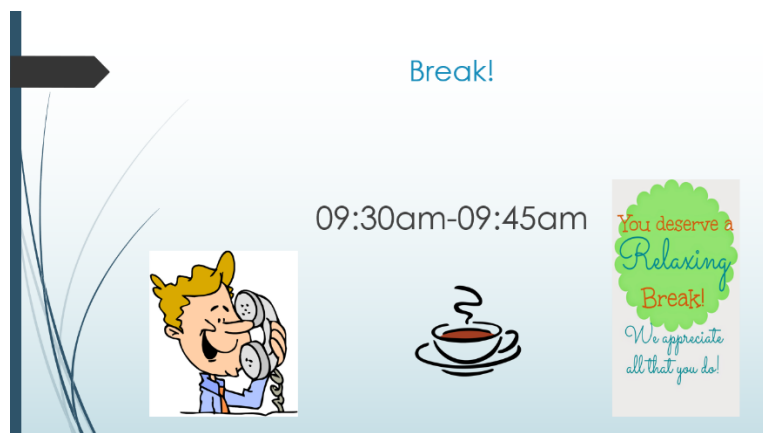
Slide 5: Whole Group Interactive Activity: Review of K-12 ESL Students'
      Benchmark and Standardized Tests.

Prior to the group activity, the facilitator will introduce and explain the presented data.
Participants will work at their tables in groups of about six to identify gaps
      between ELL students and the general population in all content areas. The

facilitator will also explain the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and why is it important

to know it to the college educators.

Slide 6: End-of-Course and College Placement Tests and Mid-Term vs. Final Exams –
Compare Students' Scores.

Facilitator will introduce a guest speaker, college provost or ESL Department Chair, who will explain the presented data. Participants will work at their tables in groups about six to identify gaps in ESL students' achievement.
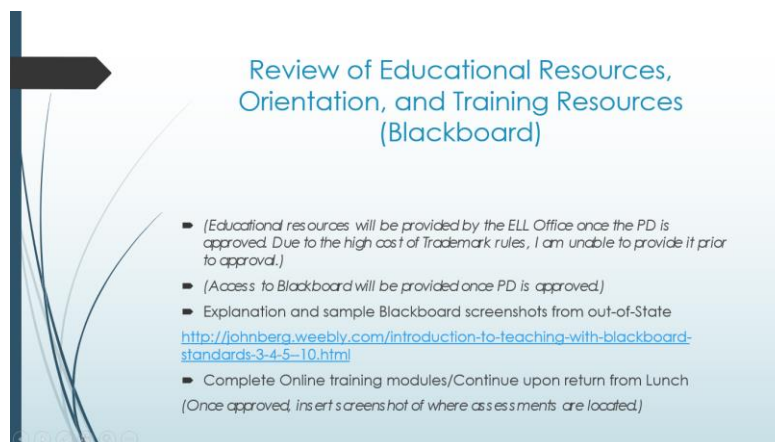
Slide 7: Establish Common Ground for Future Planning

The guest speaker will explain expectations for college level reading and writing and college faculty will work at their tables with K-12 teachers brainstorming possible ideas and solutions for unifying expectations for both K-12 ELL and college ESL students.

Slide 8: Review of Educational Resources, Orientation, and Training Resources (Blackboard).

Facilitator will present a sample Blackboard learning system from other states, and then access XXXXX Blackboard and go over each learning module. This will be a lengthy process and will continue past lunch.

Slide 9: Lunch Break

Slide 10: Training Modules in District's Blackboard

Facilitator will again review training modules in Blackboard and will walk around the room assisting educators with accessing and reviewing modules as well as answering any questions that may arise while reviewing content.

Slide 11: Break

Slide 12: Complete Training Modules in District's Blackboard and Complete
Assessment for Each Module

Facilitator will continue walking around and assisting educators with completing assessments as well as answering any questions that may arise while reviewing content.

Slide 13: Whole Group Discussion

Facilitator will moderate a whole group discussion. While some participants will feel comfortable speaking in a large group of people, some prefer to provide questions on paper. For such participants, there will be four different areas in the presentation hall for anonymous placing of sticky notes with questions in the so-called "Parking Lot." After the completion of a whole group discussion, the facilitator will collect questions from the Parking Lot and either answer them or pass them to the appropriate guest.

Slide 14: Wrap Up

Facilitator will introduce Agenda for Day 2 and offer additional Q & A at tables with guests. Facilitator will remind participants to complete a short survey on Blackboard as well as remind them to sign out.
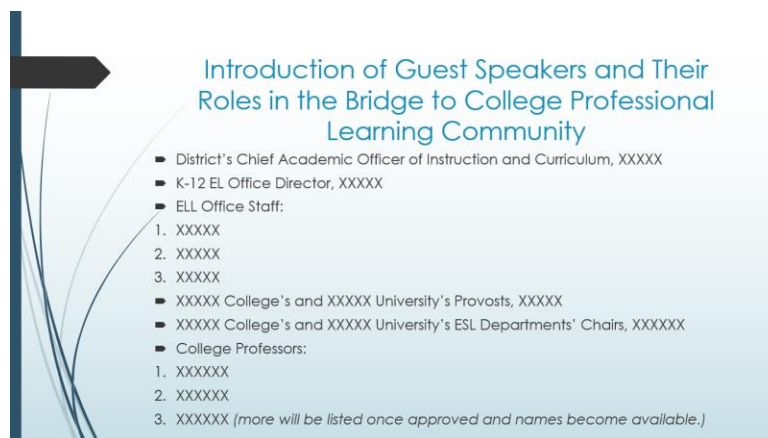
DAY 2

Slide 15: Review of Day 1 Activities
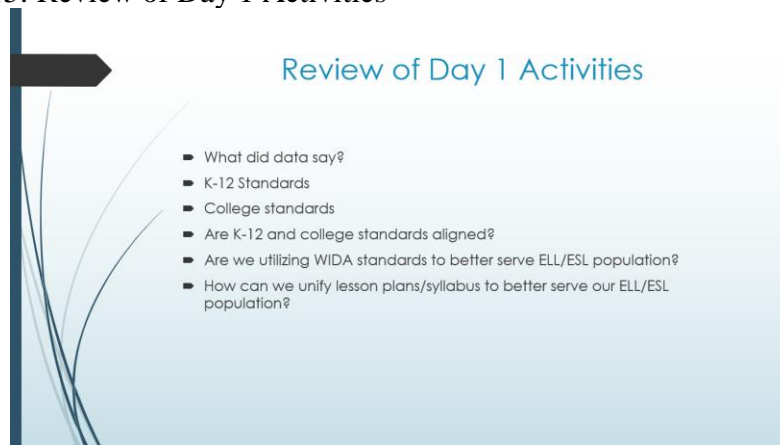
Facilitator will initiate exchange of what we already learned, will asked open-ended question based on data review from Day 1, and will listen to potential solutions and ideas and ask for emails with suggestions. Work email address will be provided on copies of Agenda for each day.

Slide 16: Introduction of Guest Speakers and Their Roles in the Bridge to College Professional Learning Community

Facilitator will introduce guest speakers and their place of employment. Each of the guest speakers will explain their roles in Bridge to College Professional Learning Community. Each guest speaker will present their own PowerPoint presentation.

Slide 17: Break

Slide 18: Preview of Previously Presented Data in Blackboard; Assignment of ESL students' Specific Data to Each Cohort for Further Analysis; Beginning the   Analysis of Assigned Data; Parking Lot

Data Dive and Assignments to Cohorts

- Please log into you Blackboard account and find appropriate heading with your name and title "standardized test scores" next to it
- Once you reviewed your individual data, move back to your Blackboard Home screen and locate "Cohort #...." and individual educators, with whom you will complete a "data dive"
- Begin further data analysis by reviewing personal background of your students and comparing their WIDA language proficiency scores with their standardized test scores.
- Begin brainstorm how you can improve students' language proficiency through teaching content
- Use Parking Lot or seek assistance from facilitator and guest speakers

At this point, the facilitator will walk around and assist educators with the data dive as all educators work within their own cohorts. Facilitator will explain why getting to know the personal background of their students is important while lesson planning.
Once the Parking Lot receives some questions, the facilitator will address the entire group of educators to answer questions, which may help other participants with their data dive.

Slide 19: Lunch

LUNCH

➡ 11:30 – 12:30PM
Please return promptly

Slide 20: Collaborative Activity

Collaborative Activity

- Based on presented data, T-Chart created during Day 1 of PD, and your own lesson plans and activities, please begin creating lesson plans and activities aligned with WIDA and content standards as well as college standards and expectations.
- College faculty and staff: please create syllabi that is in alignment with WIDA standards and try to implement activities that K-12 teachers mentioned in the T-chart or are planning on using based on this PD's findings
- You may use any outline that your school or institution of higher education uses for the purpose of lesson planning/syllabi planning

Facilitator will walk around and assist educators with appropriate standards usage and lesson planning. All educators work within their own cohorts. Once the Parking Lot receives some questions, the facilitator will address the entire group of educators to answer questions, which may help other participants with their lesson and activities planning.
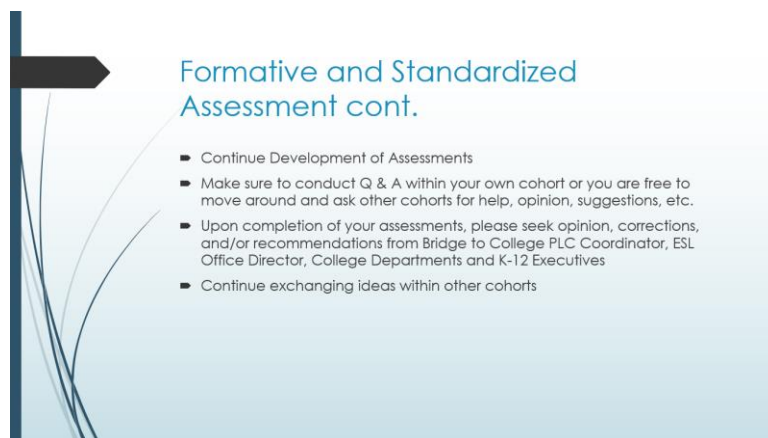
Slide 21: Break

Break!

14:00-14:15pm
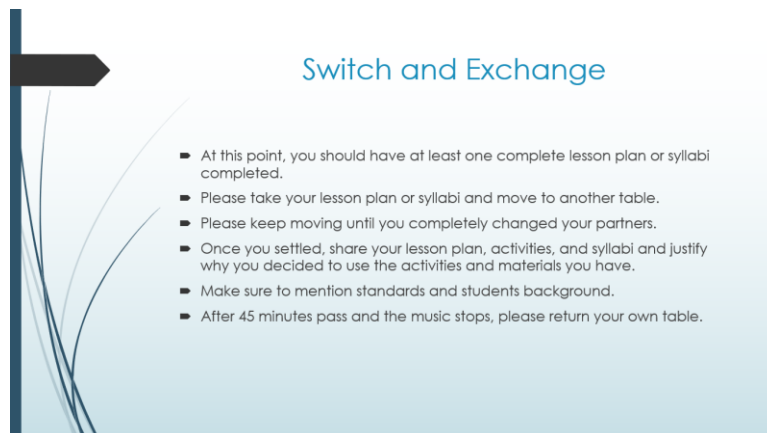
Slide 22: Change Cohort and Exchange Lesson Plans Ideas

Facilitator will moderate and listen to presented lesson plans. Facilitator will ask questions about 3 Rs: Rigor, Relevance, and Relationship. Are the lesson plans rigorous? Are they relevant to students' background and culture? Do you have a good relationship with your students, so they will work for you?

Slide 23: Whole Group Discussion; Parking Lot (Q & A)

Facilitator will begin a whole group discussion. While some participants will feel comfortable speaking in a large group of people, some prefer to provide questions on paper. For such participants, there will be four different areas on the presentation hall designed for placing sticky notes with questions in the "Parking Lot." After completion of a whole group discussion, the facilitator will collect questions from the Parking Lot and either answer them or pass to the appropriate guest.

Slide 24: Wrap Up, Review of Agenda for Day 3; Q & A; Evaluation

Facilitator will Introduce Agenda for Day 3 and offer additional Q & A at tables with facilitator and guests. Facilitator will remind participants to complete a short survey on Blackboard as well as remind them to sign out.
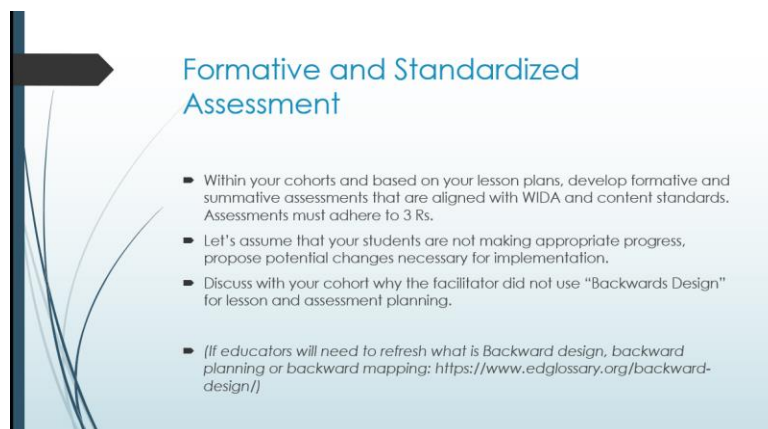
Day 3

Slide 25: Summarize Day 1 and Day 2 Discussions and Activities, Pose Additional Questions, and Share Several Completed Lesson Plans/Syllabi with All Stakeholders
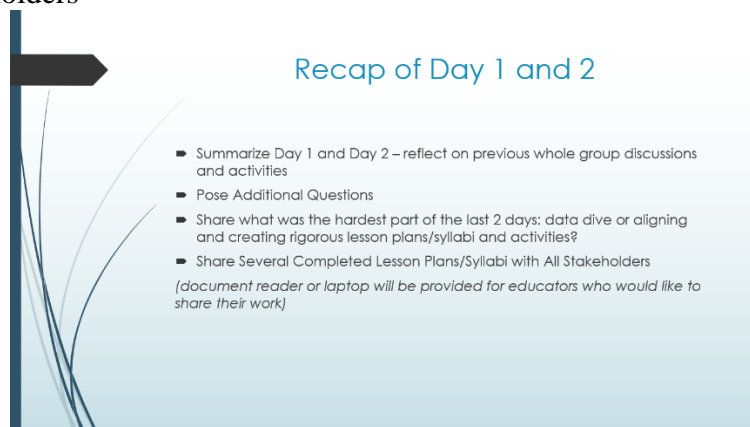
Facilitator will initiate exchange of what we already learned, will asked open-ended question based on data review and lesson planning from Day 1 and Day 2, and will listen to potential solutions and ideas and ask for emails with suggestions. Work email will be provided on copies of Agenda for each day.

Slide 26: Cohorts Develop Formative and Summative Assessments; Propose Potential Changes Necessary for Implementation in Case of ESL Students Not Making Appropriate Progress

Facilitator will walk around and assist educators with appropriate standards usage and assessment planning. All educators work within their own cohorts. Once the Parking Lot receives some questions, the facilitator will address the entire group of educators to answer questions, which may help other participants with their lesson and activities planning.

Slide 27: Break

Slide 28: Continue Development of Assessments; Q & A in Small Groups; Recommendations from Bridge to College PLC Coordinator, ESL Office Director, College Departments and K-12 Executives
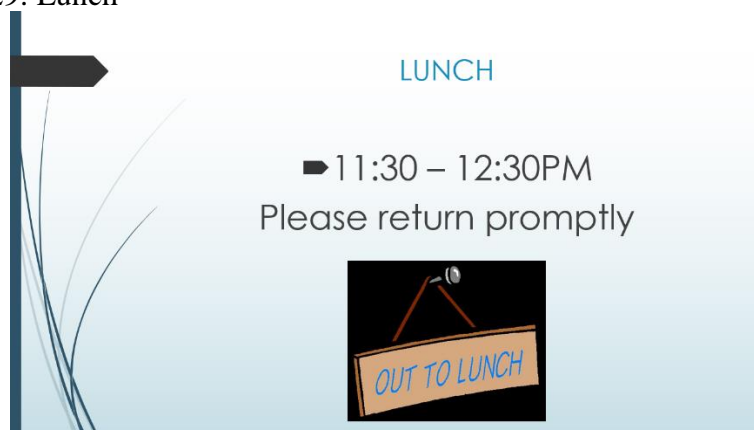
Facilitator will only walk around and assist educators with appropriate standards usage and assessment planning. All educators work within their own cohorts. Once some assessments are completed, educators are encouraged to visit with facilitator and other guests to seek opinion, corrections, or recommendation. Once the Parking Lot receives some questions, facilitator will address the entire group of educators to answer questions, which may help other participants with their lesson and activities planning.

Slide 29: Lunch

Slide 30: Develop Remediation Courses and Activities using Results

Facilitator, with collaboration from college provost, will encourage college professors to use knowledge and ideas gained from the 3-day collaboration with K-12 teachers and create an outline for a possible remediation course that could be implemented in institutions of higher education to better serve ESL students. Educators are free to use any idea that they think may work. K-12 teachers must come up with a tutoring plan that would bring ELL students to appropriate level prior to their transition to college.
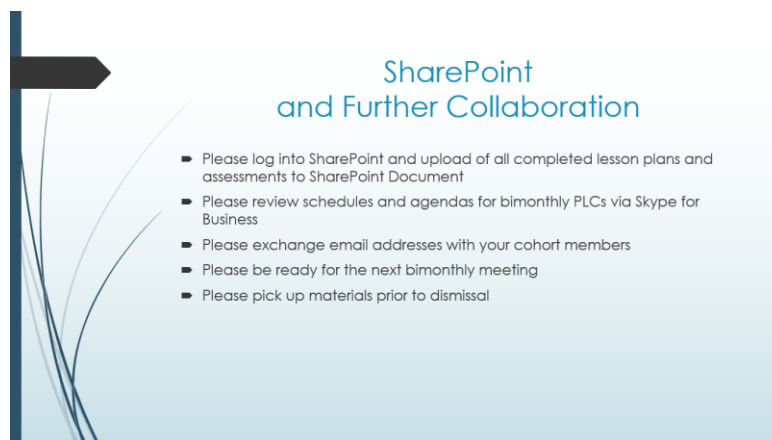
Slide 31: Break

Slide 32: Upload of All Completed Lesson Plans and Assessments to SharePoint Document; Review Schedules and Agendas for Bimonthly PLCs via Skype for Business

Facilitator and guest will walk around and assist educators with uploading their lesson plans to SharePoint. Educators will be encouraged to share their lesson plans, activities, and syllabi past the PD and throughout the academic year.

Slide 33: Wrap Up the Bridge to College PLC; Q & A; Evaluation
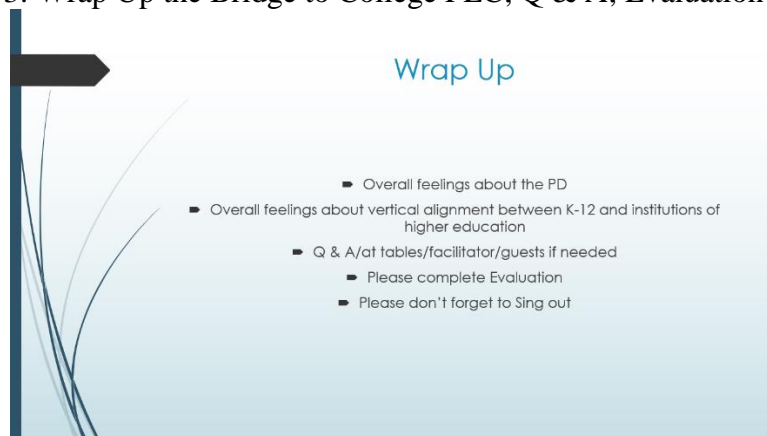
Facilitator will initiate discussion and gather the overall feeling about the PD and the vertical alignment between K-12 and college. Participants will complete the PD evaluation. Questions to ask:

Was it helpful to collaborate with each other?

Was it difficult to create lesson plans first and them assessments?

How well do you understand K-12/college standards and planning methods?

How well do you feel prepared to create lesson plans that are aligned with college expectations and standards on your own?

Are you planning on incorporating more activities into your syllabi?

Daily Evaluation

Bridge to College PLC

Date:

Upon completion of the Bridge to College PLC, please complete the evaluation. The purpose for this evaluation is to assess the quality of the PD and to inform continuous course improvement. For each question, please circle the number that best represents your answer:

1 = No   2 = Somewhat   3 = Yes

Your assistance in explaining "No" and "Somewhat" answers is much appreciated.

Part 1: PD's Content

1. Were the learning objectives clear and realistic?   1   2   3

   Comments/suggestions:

2. Were the learning objectives realized?   1   2   3

   Comments:

3. Was the topic relevant to your profession?   1   2   3

   Comments:

4. Was the course content well-organized?   1   2   3

   Comments:

5. Was there an acceptable amount of time allotted for

   each activity?   1   2   3

   Comments:

6. Were the collaborative and break-out sessions throughout

the PD helpful?   1   2   3

        Comments:

7. Do you believe that the resources presented to you will help in

improving ESL students' language proficiency and academic

achievement?   1   2   3

Comments:

Part 2: Coordinator's Skills and Content Knowledge

1. Was the coordinator's appearance and speech professional?   1   2   3

   Comments:

2. Do you believe that the coordinator possesses expert knowledge

of the topic?   1   2   3

   Comments:

3. Did coordinator stay within allotted time?   1   2   3

   Comments:

Part 3: Overall Seminar

1. Was the PD agenda well planned (for example, allowing

   enough time for breaks and lunch)?   1   2   3

   Suggestions:

2. Do you believe you will be able to apply what you have

 learned during the 3-day PD?   1   2   3

3. In your opinion, what is the overall rating of the 3-day PD?   1   2   3

     Suggestions:

Thank you for completing this evaluation! Please do not hesitate to reach out with additional comments or suggestions! We value your opinion and expertise!

Appendix B: Semistructured Interview Protocol

<u>Interviewer's Notes</u>

Interviewer's: _____

Name of the Institution: _____

Interviewee (Title and Name): _____

Survey Section Used:

_____ A: Background and Personal Questions

_____ B: Professional Experience

_____ C: Professional Development

Other Topics Discussed: _____

_____

Documents Obtained: _____

_____

_____

Post Interview Comments or Leads:

_____

<u>Introductory Protocol</u>

To facilitate our interview, I would like to audio record our conversations today. Please

sign the consent form. For your information, only I will have access to the recording,

which will be ultimately destroyed after it will be transcribed. In addition, please sign a

form that was developed to meet our human subject requirements. In essence, this

document states that: (a) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if

you feel uncomfortable, (b) all information will be held confidential, and (c) I do not intend to cause any harm. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study.

I do not anticipate for this interview to last longer than one hour. During this time, I will ask you some questions that I would like you to answer. If I notice that we are getting close to the allotted time, I may need to interject in order to move forward and finish this interview.

Introduction

You have been selected to participate in this study because you have been identified as someone who has the desired experience teaching ESL students and who can share teaching strategies, learning processes, and assessment utilize to check students' academic growth. My research project focuses on high school teachers and college professors' perceptions of ESL students' barriers to graduation. I am particularly interested with understanding how faculty assesses student learning and how educators make content and classrooms relevant to ESL students. Additionally, I would like to hear from educators who work closely with ESL students about potential internal and external difficulties that ESL students face. The purpose of my study is not to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, I will try to identify ESL students' potential barriers to graduation.

Background and Personal Questions

1. Tell me about your educational and professional background.

   Probe: How long have you been at….?

   Probe: What is your undergraduate major?

   Probe: When did you first become interested in becoming a teacher?

2. How well do you feel the university from which you received your degree in education prepared you for the teaching profession?

3. Why did you decide to be a teacher (an ESL teacher - for sheltered-classroom ESL and ESL professors/teachers only)?

   Probe: Describe your fears associated with teaching ESL students.

4. What are the requirements to teach ESL established by your institution?

5. How are the ESL students classified at your institutions?

   Probe: What levels of English proficiency do you teach?

6. Are you planning on remaining in your current position within the next 10 years? Please explain why.

7. What makes you an effective teacher?

8. What is your most successful accomplishment in both personal and professional settings?

Professional Experience:

1. What is your understanding of standards-based education?

   What is your experience teaching students from culturally diverse backgrounds?

2. What type of opportunities have you had to bring multicultural education into your classroom?

> Probe: Describe how you make your lesson plans culturally relevant for your ESL students.

3. Describe three methods that you use to assess students' academic performance.

> Probe: What formative assessments do you use to assess students' language acquisition?

> Probe: What standardized assessments do you use to assess students' language acquisition?

4. Describe the teaching strategies and techniques that in your opinion are the most effective in teaching ESL students.

5. Do you find in your classroom ESL students who seem to be unmotivated?

6. In your professional experience, what in your opinion causes the lack of motivation among ESL students?

7. How do you address unmotivated students?

> Probe: What techniques do you use to keep your students actively engaged?

8. Based on your experience and relationship you have with your students, do you believe that lack of motivation is deeper than relevance to curriculum? Explain please.

9. What are the most visible issues related to ESL students' academic achievement?

> Probe: Would you say that ESL students are underprepared? Why?

10. How would you identify the special needs of your ESL students?

11. What are the most distinctive issues related to special needs of ESL students that you faced in your career?

12. Out of all of listed issues, which would you classified as barriers to graduation? Why?

13. How do you address these issues in your classroom?

14. In your opinion, what type of adverse circumstances ESL students face while in high school/college? Please explain.

15. What strategies or methods do you use in your classroom to address cultural, social, and emotional needs of your ESL students?

16. What strategies or methods do you use outside of your classroom to address cultural, social and emotional needs of your ESL students?

17. Do you feel that educators in both K-12 and college should incorporate teaching values, morals, and cultural awareness and what could you do to accomplish this task?

18. What do you see as strengths and weaknesses of ESL programs implemented in your institution? If you do not feel comfortable answering this question, please look at the State of Tennessee's Title III as a whole and give your honest opinion. (Title III is the portion of No Child Left Behind that serves ESL students).

Professional Development:

What kind of ESL-related professional development classes have you taken?

Probe: What kinds of additional ESL-related college classes have you taken so far?

1. In how many sessions of ESL-related PDs per year are you professionally obligated to participate vs. other PDs required by your district/institution?

2. Most of K-12 and institutions of higher education offer Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Describe your experiences working in your content area with other educators and the way this collaboration positively affected your ESL students.

Appendix C: Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: *Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of ESL Students' Barriers to College Graduation* I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:
1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access, and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature :   **Date :**

Appendix D: Recruitment Letter

EMAIL / Address

Date

Dear _____,

       My name is Barbara Griffin and I am conducting a research project to learn about teachers' and educators' perspectives on ESL students' barriers to college graduation. I am inviting you to join this study. I am a doctoral student at Walden University working on my degree in Higher Education Leadership. Your role in this study will be to participate in an interview to answer some questions about your experiences teaching ESL students.

       You are you obligated to participate in this study and even if you decide to join the project, you can still change your mind later. If you agree to participate in this study, everything you will share with me during this research will be confidential. If you would like to take part in this research, please respond to this email or call me. After you confirm your willingness to participate in this study, I will contact you to schedule an interview time with you that will be the most convenient to you. I will also forward to you the required participation documents.

       Thank you for your willingness to take part in this project. Your help and time are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Barbara Griffin

Barbara.griffin2@waldenu.edu

615-423-7693

       CONFIDENTIALITY NOTE: This e-mail message contains information which may be privileged, confidential and/or protected from disclosure. The information is intended only for the use of the individual or entity named above. If you think that you have received this message in error, please e-mail the sender. If you are not the intended recipient any dissemination, distribution, or copying is strictly prohibited.

Appendix E: Implementation Table

Table 7

Implementation Timeline

Date	Action	Outcome
December 2019	Findings to District's Chief of Staff, Department of Communications, Government Relations, Research, Evaluation and Assessment	Receive procedures and seek guidance for implementation of a new program
January 2020	Brief District's committee on research results	Gather input from stakeholders
February 2020	Present data and recommendation to selected Faculty and Staff Leadership Committee during summer Professional Development sessions	Gather input from the Faculty and Staff Leadership Committee; Finalize written approval program implementation
March 2020	Present findings and recommendations to Local community colleges and four-year universities	Gather input from institutions of higher education's faculty and staff
End of March 2020	Meet with District's Chief Academic Officer Instruction and Curriculum and begin curriculum review process	Adjust course outline for approval
April 2020	Finalize curriculum changes per Chief of Academic Officer's suggestions	Adjust course outline for approval
May 2020	Present final course outline to the Chief of Academic Officer and the Director of Schools	Gain approval for implementation of Bridge to College Program
May 2020	Meet with Provosts of institutions of higher education	Gain approval for implementation of Bridge to College Program
June 2020	Recruit teachers and college educators to participate in a pilot PLC and place them into cohorts	Create cohorts with not more than 10 educators in each cohort (50% K-12 and 50% higher education faculty and staff)

August 2020	Begin a three-day long professional development for all educators, district representatives, higher education provosts, and representatives of Tennessee Department of Education	Evaluate educators' access to online-based tools and provide support services
September 2020	Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) online meeting	Cohorts meet briefly (up to 1 hour – length of the meeting at discretion of each cohort) to discuss results of implemented strategies, share results of formative assessments, and report it to the Bridge to College Program Director
November 2020	Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) online meeting	Cohorts meet briefly (up to 1 hour – length of the meeting at discretion of each cohort) to discuss results of implemented strategies, share results of formative assessments, and report it to the Bridge to College Program Director
January 2021	Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) online meeting	Cohorts meet briefly (up to 1 hour – length of the meeting at discretion of each cohort) to discuss results of implemented strategies, share results of formative assessments, and report it to the Bridge to College Program Director
February 2021	Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) online meeting	Cohorts meet briefly (up to 1 hour – length of the meeting at discretion of each cohort) to discuss results of implemented strategies, share results of formative assessments, and report it to the Bridge to College Program Director

May 2021	Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) online meeting	Cohorts meet briefly (up to 1 hour – length of the meeting at discretion of each cohort) to discuss results of implemented strategies, share results of formative assessments, and report it to the Bridge to College Program Director
June 2021	Evaluate effectiveness of Bridge to College Program	Review ESL students high school graduation rates end of course test scores, and ACT/SAT scores. Seek feedback from all educators, district representatives, higher education provosts, and representatives of Tennessee Department of Education and propose changes for program content and delivery