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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PREPARATION TO MEET THE NEEDS OF SECONDARY ENGLISH
LEARNERS WITH LIMITED FORMAL EDUCATION

by

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A Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

May 2015

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To my students, whose courage, strength, and resilience inspire me daily.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents, Jim and Shirley Herman, who have always believed in me even when I didn't believe in myself. You both always taught me to stand up for my beliefs and speak out for those who can't speak for themselves. In a small way, I hope this capstone will give a voice to the marginalized and silenced immigrant refugee students whose needs are all too often overlooked and forgotten.

Thank you to the leaders and members of the MinneSLIFE committee, and the MinneTESOL organization. Your collaboration and ideas have been a great source of support for me and encouraged me to keep working to advocate for SLIFE. I look forward to many more fascinating discussions with all of you.

Many, many thanks to the teachers who participated in this study and contributed your insights and feedback to the surveys and interviews. Your thoughtful and honest comments were necessary to begin the dialogue on this topic, and I hope to keep the discussion going long after this paper is finished.

My deepest gratitude to my capstone committee, Dr. Jill Watson, Julia Reimer, and Dr. Amy Hewett-Olatunde. Your expertise and willingness to share resources with me were lifesavers. I feel so fortunate to have had my "dream team" for my committee, and know that this capstone would not have come together without your valuable comments and feedback.

Finally, I want to thank my husband and biggest champion, Lars Hill. Your patience and support (tech and otherwise) helped me to keep going even when I wanted to give up. Now you can stop asking me when I will finish my capstone!

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LIST OF DEFINITIONS

EL	English Learner
ELL	English Language Learner
ESL	English as a Second Language
L1	Native language
L2	New language being acquired
LESLLA	Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition
SLIFE	Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education
SIFE	Students with Interrupted Formal Education
Sheltered Instruction	A model of providing English learners with academic content that is modified and scaffolded to meet their needs.
WIDA	World Class Instructional Design and Assessment. A consortium of states dedicated to the design and implementation of high standards and equitable educational opportunities for English language learners.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Paw Eh sits nervously in her English class. This is her third year in an American high school, and she is worried about graduating. She arrived in the United States at age 15 from a refugee camp in Thailand and not only knew no English, but was only semi-literate in her own language. Her family had to flee her home country of Burma due to war, and she attended school on an intermittent basis in the refugee camp. Her first and second years in the U.S. were spent entirely in sheltered English Learner (EL) and content courses, where most of her instruction was provided by EL teachers. These teachers considered her a bright and motivated student who had wonderful potential. In her third year, she was placed in mainstream classes where she is expected to do grade-level work and prepare to graduate. Paw Eh did not receive credit for most of her sheltered EL classes, so in order for her to graduate in four years, she was forced to double up on content classes. She is taking both biology and chemistry at the same time, as well as world history and United States history at the same time. Some of these classes have EL support, but most of them do not. Paw Eh is overwhelmed by her schedule and has trouble following along and understanding her teachers in her classes. She reads at a third grade reading level, so she is not able to comprehend the reading required for the standardized reading test. She never took science classes in the refugee camp, so cannot grasp the complex content in her biology and chemistry classes. Her family is starting to pressure her to find a job so she can help support the family. She is starting to believe that they are right, that her dream of going to college and becoming a teacher is an impossible one. She feels like she is not smart enough for high school, and is considering dropping out.

Sadly, the situation of students like Paw Eh is all too familiar to me and to other teachers of secondary students with limited formal education. Refugee and immigrant students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) present one of the biggest challenges in secondary schools today, and by many accounts these students are the “highest of high-risk” for dropping out (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang 2009). According to Fry (2005), ELs account for twenty-five percent of the high school drop-out rate, and of these students, seventy percent are students with limited formal education. In addition to social, emotional, and family factors, many students are dropping out for academic reasons. According to Rong and Preissle (1998), many refugee and immigrant students drop out because of a lack of psychological and academic preparation before entering U.S schools, and House (2001) found that another factor contributing to the decision to drop out was students’ negative self-perceptions about their academic ability. I will explore more of this background in my literature review in Chapter Two, but for now will cite DeCapua and Marshall (2011) in their assertion that many students with limited formal education drop out because of cultural dissonance and that an insistence on providing a one-size-fits-all curriculum that does not attend to the needs of SLIFE means that those students will at best get a superficial understanding of the material. By ignoring the specific needs of these students, many secondary schools are denying them access to a comprehensible, accessible education, and thus are not putting them on a viable path to graduating with English and academic proficiency, nor on a path to college and career readiness.

When I started my teaching career a few years ago, I quickly developed a passion for working with refugee students. My first teaching experience was at a secondary school that was founded specifically to provide instruction to newcomer ELs, many of whom were refugees with limited formal education. I went into this experience feeling rather unprepared to work with semiliterate refugee students and felt that my

teacher training had not prepared me to understand and address their academic, cultural, emotional, and physical needs. I was overwhelmed by their broad range of needs, and did not know where to begin when there was so much for my students to learn. However, I also felt myself drawn to these students because of their amazing stories of survival and for their inspiring resilience, and their determination to be successful. In my first year, I drew on the advice and expertise of my colleagues to structure my lessons to make them accessible and beneficial for my students.

In my second year of teaching, however, I experienced what many new teachers do: a layoff, which resulted in my transfer to another high school in my district. My new high school was a traditional mainstream high school, but it had an EL population hovering around fifty percent, many of whom were refugee newcomers with limited formal education. In a typical high school, ELs are often given two years of sheltered instruction that is scaffolded to their instructional level, and then are expected to enter mainstream classes with some EL support. In my experience, this model at this high school was reflective of the one that DeCapua and Marshall describe as culturally dissonant to students with limited formal education in that it does not adapt instruction for their specific set of needs (2011). Another downfall of the model at this school was that its administration, while well intended and under pressure to “turn the school around,” was attempting to prepare these students to pass state standardized tests in their first year in the country. One hazard with over-testing these students is what Menken (2008) warned of when he wrote:

English language learners are now showered with standardized tests from the moment they enter school . . . an immediate effect of (this) testing policy is that ELLs are overwhelmingly failing the tests, labeled as deficient and low-performing, and barred from advancement (p. 35).

While I saw this pattern being repeated with the ELs at my school, especially those with limited formal education, I felt ill equipped to know how to effectively advocate for these students to help put them on a

viable path to advancement. The major barrier for many of the students I work with is time. Since many of them enter U.S. schools at high school age, they have an extremely limited amount of time to learn how to speak, read, and write in English, master academic language, concepts, and critical thinking skills, and acquire test-taking skills to pass high-stakes tests. This presents an uphill battle for even the best and brightest of these students. Although I have been frustrated, and at times offended, by the lack of respect and attention given to SLIFE educational needs, this has left me with a resolve to work toward a better solution for these students and the teachers who work with them. For these reasons, I feel it imperative for EL teacher candidates to be made aware of the specific challenges of teaching SLIFE in order to better educate and advocate for these students.

SLIFE have typically been underrepresented in research related to ELs and language acquisition. Tarone and Bigelow (2004) point out that most second language acquisition studies have been focused around highly literate, highly educated language learners, and that the language acquisition of students with limited formal education has rarely been studied or documented. And, as Roxas (2011) has pointed out, few studies have focused on the obstacles and challenges of teaching students with limited formal education, or on the ways that teachers and EL programs have addressed their needs. In Chapter Two I will include more detail on the dearth of research around teaching students with limited formal education, and how the topic of teacher preparation and SLIFE is one that needs much more exploration and documentation.

This capstone will explore teacher perceptions of their preparation to meet the various needs of students with limited formal education. The purpose of the study is to survey EL teachers who work with SLIFE regarding their experiences teaching these students, the amount of preparation they received to work

with SLIFE, and their suggestions for improvements to teacher education programs in how they address providing effective instruction for these students. The primary research questions that I aim to answer are the following: *1) What perceptions do teachers have of their preparation to teach secondary EL SLIFE, and 2) What do they wish their teacher education program had addressed related to teaching SLIFE?* One of the objectives of the study is to make recommendations for improvements to teacher education programs so they more adequately prepare new EL teachers to work with SLIFE, which would benefit not only the teacher educators, but also the teachers, and most importantly, the students who are so in need of effective instruction and advocacy. In addition to the aforementioned groups, the results of this study could benefit others in the field of second language research and advocacy. As Tarone and Bigelow (2011) point out in their research agenda for second language acquisition and low-level literacy adults and adolescents (or LESLLAA, as they are referred to in this article):

Omission of learners with limited formal schooling and limited literacy is risky for SLA researchers as well as those who prepare teachers and for those who teach LESLLAA. Recommendations for LESLLAA pedagogy by SLA researchers aren't based on research on LESLLAA learners. This is a serious problem for teachers, curriculum developers, and teacher educators that plays out every day as exceptions are raised, materials are (mis)adapted, and opportunities for students to gain the most basic print concepts are missed (p. 7).

I am hopeful that by exploring and offering data and scenarios related to the preparation to teach SLIFE in the secondary classroom, the results of my study will offer a contribution to this need for a more holistic perspective on second language research and pedagogy that includes students with limited formal education.

In Chapter Two, I document the literature that exists around educating secondary students with limited formal education and meeting their unique needs, as well as explore some of the gaps in this

research. I will also explore existing research on teacher preparation and how well it prepares new teachers to work with SLIFE. Chapter Three describes my study, the context, the participants, and the type of research I did. This includes the methods I used, including the survey and interview questions that I used with participants. In addition, it describes the material and the data collection techniques I used to gather and analyze the data I will collect. Chapter Four presents the results of my study and the analysis of it. Chapter Five includes the summary, the discussion, as well as the limitations and the implications of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to determine teacher perceptions of their preparation to address the academic, literacy, cultural, emotional, and physical needs of students with limited formal education (SLIFE). The primary research questions that I aim to answer are the following: *1) What perceptions do teachers have of their preparation to teach secondary EL SLIFE, and 2) What do they wish their teacher education program had addressed related to teaching SLIFE?*

This chapter presents an overview of the research on the specific needs of SLIFE and the education of SLIFE at the secondary level. This will include an explanation of who SLIFE are and how they are identified. In that discussion I will explore some of specific challenges that educating SLIFE at the secondary level presents. Next, I will describe current curricular and instructional recommendations for teachers working with SLIFE. Finally, I will investigate the research related to teacher education and SLIFE, and point to gaps in the research that my study will attempt to fill.

Who are SLIFE?

First of all, it is important to clarify the nomenclature regarding students with limited formal education. Depending on the author and context, these students are referred to as students with interrupted formal education (SIFE), pre-literate students, or students with low-educated second language and literacy acquisition (LESLLA). There are undoubtedly many other acronyms used to refer to this population, but for the purposes of this study, I will use the identification that DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) prefer: students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) because it is more descriptive of the students

in this category. It is important to note that by referring to a student as SLIFE, it does not imply that the student has no education, but that his or her education may have been interrupted or limited due to a variety of political or socioeconomic factors. In my experience, there are some limitations to using the term SLIFE because it could mean that a student has interrupted schooling and is two years behind his/her peers in literacy and academics, or it could mean that the student has never been to school before and has no literacy. The profiles and needs of these two students are very different, so more work needs to be done in the future to incorporate these nuances into the nomenclature.

It is also important to elucidate what sets SLIFE apart from other English Learners. According to Freeman and Freeman (2003), ELs can be divided into three groups: adequately schooled newcomers, long-term English learners, and inadequately schooled newcomers. Adequately schooled newcomers can be described as students who are fully literate in their first language (L1), who received consistent schooling in their home country, and who do not have gaps in academic content knowledge. For these students, language and literacy acquisition can usually happen more quickly because students are building on language and literacy that already exist in their first language. Long-term learners are students who have been in the country for several years, who have received the majority of their education in U.S. schools, but who still display significant gaps in their language and academic content knowledge when compared with their native English-speaking peers. Inadequately schooled newcomers, or students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), are defined in a separate category. According to the Minnesota legislation called the Learning for Academic English Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act, enacted in 2014, an English Learner with interrupted formal education is defined the following way:

50.14 comes from a home where the language usually spoken is other than English, or
50.15 usually speaks a language other than English;
50.16(2) enters school in the United States after grade 6;
50.17(3) has at least two years less schooling than the English learner's peers;
50.18(4) functions at least two years below expected grade level in reading and
50.19 mathematics; and
50.20(5) may be preliterate in the English learner's native language (HF 3062, 2014).

SLIFE are often refugees coming from war-torn countries, but it is important to make the distinction that not all refugees are SLIFE, and not all SLIFE are refugees. For this reason, it is important to have a system in place to accurately identify SLIFE. Appendix A shows DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang's (2009) Checklist for Identifying Potential SLIFE, which includes sixteen criteria for identifying SLIFE.

A further point to acknowledge when considering the profile of SLIFE is the rich cultural and life experiences that these students bring with them (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). These students lack literacy and academic experience, but one of the worst mistakes a teacher could make is to consider these students feeble-minded or incapable of learning. SLIFE bring a wealth of life experiences and untapped skills, as well as linguistic and cultural capital. Where they lack formal schooling, they have acquired other knowledge and learning. Teachers of SLIFE can help their students succeed in school by building on these strengths and prior knowledge and incorporating their students' cultures into their teaching.

Another important reason to identify and monitor SLIFE in a separate category was highlighted in a 2012 report from the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans (CAPM, 2012). In their report, CAPM describes the "model minority stereotype" that exists in Minnesota regarding Asian students (p. 7). Asian students are often regarded as very high-achieving and are not usually considered when educators and policy makers are discussing the "achievement gap." However, the report points out that when the data on

Asian Pacific students is disaggregated, it is clear that students who are refugee experienced have their own achievement gap. For example, as a whole group, 66.1% of Asian Pacific Islanders (API) were proficient on the 2011 Minnesota state reading assessment. However, when this data was disaggregated, 50.3% of refugee experienced API were proficient, while 80.3% of non-refugee experienced API were proficient. The lowest scoring group of API were Burmese students, of which less than 17% were proficient. Most Burmese students are refugees with limited formal education. Data such as this are a prime example of why SLIFE need to be specifically identified and monitored in a separate category from other EL students, and discussions around educational equity and achievement gaps need to include refugee experienced and SLIFE.

Refugees in Minnesota

Although not all refugees are SLIFE, the majority of SLIFE are refugees, and it is important to examine the profile of refugee students to understand their unique needs. The United Nations' definition of a refugee is "a person who flees because of a fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group, political opinion, armed conflict, and lack [sic] a durable solution" (UN, 1951/2003). The United Nations estimated that in 2002 there were 12 million refugees worldwide, with an additional 5.3 million who were displaced within their home country, and an additional 940,800 asylum seekers. In the last thirty years, Minnesota has received an increasing number of refugees primarily from Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa. Minnesota is currently believed to have the largest communities of Karen, Hmong, Somali, and Liberians in the United States (Johnson, 2005). According to a report of the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (2013), from 2000-2012, the number of refugees who have made Minnesota their first

home was 37,139. This number does not include refugees who relocate to another state or those who move to Minnesota after being resettled elsewhere in the United States, which is rather common. According to the Minnesota Department of Health (2013), there were approximately 563 secondary refugee resettlements in 2013 alone. However, this number may be higher since there is currently no systematic method of identifying secondary resettlement of refugees to Minnesota. Figure 1 displays the top five countries of origin of refugees who were resettled directly to Minnesota from 2008 to 2012 (Minnesota Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2014).

Table 2.1. Top five countries of origin of refugees who were resettled in Minnesota from 2008 to 2012.

Country of Origin:	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total
Bhutan	105	202	146	190	134	777
Burma	365	797	1,060	691	894	3,807
Iraq	104	197	101	120	138	660
Ethiopia	31	88	75	96	67	357
Somalia	183	643	304	566	856	2,552

According to Article 22 of the Geneva Convention, states are required to provide equal schooling opportunities to refugee children. The same is stated in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which the United States is a signatory (as cited in McBrien, 2005). To comply with these accords, education should be a high priority for the successful relocation of

refugees. Several researchers have shown that education is essential for successful socialization and acculturation of refugee students, as well as for their emotional healing (Hones & Cha, 1999; Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton, 1990). Clearly, Minnesota has a high number of refugee students and has an obligation to provide a meaningful education that helps these students make a successful transition to a fruitful new life in the United States.

Identification of SLIFE

In their guide to supporting SLIFE, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008), advises getting an accurate idea of students' educational background and academic proficiency so that educators can determine a starting point for targeted instruction that meets that students' needs. As DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) have pointed out, there are many challenges present in attempting to identify SLIFE. First of all, since many of them come as refugees from unstable or war-torn countries, it is often difficult to receive accurate and detailed school records on their education in their home countries. To determine their proficiency in their L1, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) recommends assessing students' native language proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In addition, they recommend assessing students' English proficiency in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and math. They also recommend that schools conduct intake interviews in the family's native language to get an idea of the student's educational history and to build rapport and trust with the family. These intake interviews should cover topics such as the student's educational experience, including frequency of attendance in school and the language of instruction. This is also an opportunity to obtain information on the student's non-academic needs, such as health needs or mental health problems.

In Minnesota, it is sometimes difficult to assess students' English and literacy proficiency at the lowest levels because many assessments, such as the WIDA ACCESS Placement test (W-APT), that students entering high school are given are meant to assess proficiency in academic English and are not intended to assess literacy at the lowest level (WIDA, 2007). In my professional experience, most schools also do not have assessment materials in students' native languages. Another challenge is that many school districts lack the resources to have an interpreter interview new students about their education history and to document this information in the student's record. As a result, students are often placed in inappropriate classes and there is no opportunity to offer a program model that specializes in meeting SLIFE needs apart from those of adequately schooled newcomers.

Addressing the Specific Needs of SLIFE

As mentioned previously, SLIFE present many challenges to teachers at the secondary level because of their unique set of needs. As Trueba, Jacobs and Kirton (1990) point out, when teachers and teacher aides are not trained to understand the issues faced by refugee children in their classrooms, they may speak or behave in insensitive ways that bring about shame or depression in the students (as cited in McBrien, 2005). DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) describe the importance of "educating the whole child" when educating SLIFE and the need to focus on affective issues, such as emotional needs, as well as addressing language and academic needs. (p. 32). They also outline key elements of successful SLIFE programs and list "devoted and well-trained teachers" (p. 84) as one of these elements. They state that teachers need to nurture students and to be sensitive to their academic, literacy, emotional, physical, and cultural needs. I will explore these areas of need in this section of my literature review.

Academic Needs of SLIFE

One of the biggest challenges involved with teaching SLIFE is that most of them enter high school with academic background knowledge and literacy abilities that are far below those of their native English-speaking peers or peers with adequate schooling (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Many of my SLIFE students have told me that their schools in the refugee camps were overcrowded and resources such as books and writing materials were scarce. Students have also shared that they were frequently pulled out of school to work and help their families. According to van Waas (2010), stateless people in Thailand, including Karen refugees, are 75% less likely to attend primary school than Thai citizens (as cited in Windle & Miller, 2012). These interruptions to their education and lack of quality education result in many educational deficits for SLIFE. Many SLIFE enter secondary schools without basic literacy skills and instruction needs to begin with the alphabet and basic phonemic awareness. Another important consideration is that many SLIFE come from oral cultures that have a different way of perceiving and organizing knowledge (Watson, 2010). A further example of academic differences that DeCapua and Marshall (2011) describe is the difference between formal and informal education. They describe *formal education* as highly structured within a regulated and predetermined system. *Informal education*, on the other hand, is incidental learning that takes place in response to needs as they come up. SLIFE often arrive in U.S. schools with many rich experiences in informal learning, but with a lack of formal learning. As a result, SLIFE are accustomed to learning about topics that immediately relevant to them, rather than learning about abstract topics that are common in Western education.

DeCapua and Marshall (2013) provide an excellent example of how SLIFE learning can differ from Western-style learning. They define *academic thinking* as, “ways of viewing and organizing the world that

are derived from Western-style formal education and that are grounded in scientific tradition” (p. 43). A good example of this is their description of how some SLIFE approach the concept of definition in learning. According to Cazden (2001), one of the most common questions asked in classrooms is “What is x?” This type of definitional questioning can present many difficulties for SLIFE since it asks them to provide characteristics, functions and categories related to the object or concept being defined. However, according to Paradise and Rogoff (2009), these types of definitional questions are not common in informal learning settings where learning often takes place through observing and then imitating elders or community members in the practical application of information. (as cited in DeCapua & Marshall, 2013). So, teachers of SLIFE need to provide their students with a framework on which to base definitions and explain the importance of being able to articulate definitions before approaching the exercise of definition with students.

In addition to definition, categorization tasks can also present a challenge for SLIFE. Teachers of SLIFE often make the false assumption that their students are familiar with the concept of categorization and that their students’ criteria for categorization are all the same. Watson (2010) describes a study by Greenfield, Reich, and Olver (1966) that compared Wolof children in Senegal who attended school and could read to their age peers who had not attended school and were not literate. Formally educated, literate children had no trouble grouping objects according to abstract, logical categories, a task that preliterate children who had not attended school could not perform; instead they sorted objects according to concrete characteristics or functions. Referencing Deutscher, (2010) and Lakoff (1990), DeCapua and Marshall (2013) point out another complication, saying, “Cultures conceptualize and categorize the material world differently, choosing culture-specific divisions regarding animate-inanimate, gender, colors, or divisions of

time” (p. 44). When approaching an academic task such as categorization, teachers of SLIFE need to be aware of not only the language that students need to complete this task, but also of ways to model and scaffold the academic background knowledge that students will need to complete this task.

DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) describe the same academic challenges that I have witnessed in my classroom when they point out that not only do SLIFE need to develop academic language proficiency, but they also need to master grade-level content knowledge. In Minnesota, this content knowledge is codified in challenging college and career readiness standards that all secondary students must meet. In addition to this, SLIFE must also develop basic literacy and numeracy skills and acquire basic academic knowledge, all within the short time frame of secondary school. In my experience, most SLIFE are expected to complete high school within four years the same as their U.S. born peers. With increased pressure from school and district administrators to move students through the EL system more quickly, many students are exiting EL programs with limited language and literacy and only preliminary knowledge of the academic skills mentioned above and thus are not adequately prepared for mainstream classes and certainly not for college. New EL teachers must be aware of these challenges for SLIFE and how to address them and advocate for appropriate programming for these students.

Second Language and Literacy Acquisition and SLIFE

As mentioned previously, there is a great lack of research that focuses specifically on the language and literacy acquisition of SLIFE. One challenge for newcomer SLIFE is their lack of oral proficiency in English and lack of literacy in both their L1 and English (Watson, 2010; Young-Scholten & Strom, 2006). Tarone and Bigelow (2011) describe how pre-literate and low-literate learners do not have explicit,

conscious knowledge of linguistic units like phonemes, morphemes, and words. They describe Scholes (1998) research that knowledge of words and word boundaries even in one's native language is gained only from alphabetic literacy. Both Kurvers and van de Craats (2007) and Tarone, Bigelow and Hansen (2009) have conducted research that shows that a lack of literacy in students' first language changes the way in which SLIFE perceive phonemes and even how they respond to oral recasts. This is extremely important to consider when teaching basic literacy to SLIFE because they will need literacy instruction that is targeted to meet their needs rather than a typical program designed for native English-speaking emergent readers, such as a prepackaged phonics program.

In examining this research, one interesting finding by Kurvers (2007) is that adult SLIFE who are learning to read words go through essentially the same stages of literacy development as children learning to read in their native language (L1), specifically: visual recognition, letter naming, decoding, partial decoding, and direct recognition. Teachers of SLIFE need to be familiar with these stages of literacy development in order to teach skills at each of these levels. However, teachers should not focus solely on a skills-based approach to literacy. Pearson, Raphael, Benson, and Mada (2007) advocate for a balanced reading approach that reflects multiple dimensions of literacy instruction along both context and content continua. Due to the challenge of acquiring both English and literacy, Collier and Thomas (1997) contend that most adolescent learners who lack prior education require a much greater length of time to reach academic and linguistic proficiency in English. These distinct language and literacy needs of SLIFE require particular education and training that teacher education programs ought to be addressing.

Emotional and Physical Needs of SLIFE

Negative Effects of Trauma

One of the most difficult things about teaching refugees is the knowledge that many of my students have survived horrific events, but being unable to communicate with them about it due to the language barrier. I will never forget one of my Karen students in my first year of teaching trying to tell me through broken English and hand gestures that his sister was killed in the war in Burma. I have had students tell me about family members being killed by landmines, being kidnapped and forced to be porters for the Burmese army, and even had a student tell me about his grandmother being burned alive as soldiers ransacked their village. It was a shock to me to realize that my students, who were in many ways typical teenagers, had experienced such violence and trauma at such a young age.

According to a recent University of Minnesota study, Karen refugees from Burma, which is Minnesota's fastest-growing refugee group, have very high rates of war trauma and exposure to torture (Koumpilova, 2015). Along with the interruption in schooling that war causes, this type of emotional trauma has a significant impact on language learning (Bigelow & Watson 2012). Neuner, Catani, Ruf, Schauer, Schauer and Ebert (2008) conducted a study of war-torn countries in which they demonstrated that trauma has a negative impact on an individual's ability to hold new information, particularly symbolic information, in memory. Toddlers who were relocated in the developmental period of rapid language acquisition and cultural socialization later display language-related learning problems and social confusion (Rong & Preissle, 1998; Sokoloff, Carlin & Pham, 1984). Goodwin (2002) illustrated the effects of trauma well, stating:

Those who are uprooted from their countries, who escape persecution and death, who are just one step ahead of starvation, and who have witnessed the horrors of war, genocide, massacre, ethnic cleansing, and the murder of family members and friends are emotionally, spiritually, physically, and psychologically affected in deep and devastating ways (p. 163).

According to a report from the Center for Victims of Torture, there are a number of warning signs of trauma that many refugees can display (Johnson, 2005). This report was written for primary care physicians, but I believe that, like doctors, teachers who work closely with refugee students should also be aware of the warning signs of trauma in order to understand their students' educational needs and to connect students and their families with the proper support. According to the report, refugees usually do not receive education on the psychological effects of trauma and, due to cultural stigma around mental health issues, are often hesitant to seek mental health assistance. A few signs of trauma outlined in the report are symptoms such as short-term memory problems, irritability, feeling watchful or on guard, exaggerated startle response, and even suicidal thoughts. For refugees, the stress of starting a new life in the United States can often worsen these symptoms. According to Montero, Newmaster and Ledger, (2014), intensive supports are necessary to not only minimize the huge gaps in formal learning that SLIFE present, but also to address the psychosocial needs associated with flight and trauma common to refugees (Bigelow, 2010; Gunderson, 2009; Stewart, 2010). If students' mental health needs are not being met, they will have little chance of achieving success in school, so it is imperative that teachers and schools that serve SLIFE have the proper support networks in place for students and families who are grappling with the aftermath of trauma.

The report has a number of recommendations of ways to alleviate the effects of trauma in refugees. These include helping survivors to discover their innate resiliency, participating in physical exercise, strengthening social connections, experiencing relaxation techniques, and minimizing maladaptive coping such as drug and alcohol use. If a teacher observes any of the above signs of trauma in a student, their first step should be to contact the students' family and put them in touch with a social worker or social service agency that can connect the family with the support and service they need. Beyond this, the school can also help to support these students by providing them with opportunities for physical and emotional outlets. One such outlet could be offering physical education classes to SLIFE. According to the report, many refugees are accustomed a high level of physical activity in their home country, and it's difficult for them to adjust to a much lower level of physical activity in the United States. The report shows that, "refugee trauma survivors who are physically active reported improved sleep, better energy level, increased mood state and a better overall sense of well-being" (p.10). Another emotional outlet could be offering art classes to SLIFE. The report also shows that, "In those so inclined, creative activities such as painting, drawing, writing, or poetry can be helpful both in expressing feelings and conveying past experiences" (p. 12). As shown above, the effects of trauma are devastating and long-lasting for refugee families. Teachers, school administrators, school social workers, and communities that work with refugees need to educate themselves on the effects of trauma and work together to support students and families who are victims of trauma.

Negative Effects of Acculturation

Most people who have studied abroad or spent time in a foreign country can tell you that "culture shock" is real and can be difficult to deal with. Adler (1975) and Pedersen (1995) outlined five stages of

acculturation: (a) a honeymoon period, like a foreign vacation, where the person retains the home culture; (b) a second stage marked by irritation with confusing cues, for example, how to interpret an unfamiliar traffic sign; (c) a third stage that learns and integrates these cues but is characterized by anger at the differences; (d) a fourth stage, recognizing the positive and negative elements of both cultures; and (e) a final, bicultural stage where the person can navigate both cultures in some comfort. SLIFE who are resettling in a new country are not only dealing with the challenges of learning English, and catching up on academics, but they are also trying to acculturate and understand the cultural norms of their new home. This presents many challenges for students. In a review of literature on mental health and social adjustment for refugee children, Eisenbruch (1988) found that refugee children experience a sense of loss of cultural identity and feel a sense of bereavement for this loss.

There are also challenges as refugee students adjust to a new school culture. In addition to culture shock, DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) also describe SLIFE experiencing “school shock,” especially for those students who have very little formal education (p. 36). These students need to learn typical classroom behaviors such as sitting in a desk, holding a pencil, and asking for a hall pass. School shock can result in behavior problems for some students. McBrien (2005) states that many refugee students view schools in their home countries as places of authoritarian rules and harsh physical punishments when they broke the rules. American schools, on the other hand, are sometimes viewed by refugee students as places with no behavioral rules. As a result, some refugee students can become discipline problems and “many refugee teens turn to gangs, drugs, school dropout, and sexual promiscuity” (McBrien, 2005, p. 347).

When SLIFE are placed in school environments that are culturally insensitive or discriminatory, the psychological results can be devastating for them. A study by Trueba, Jacobs and Kirton (1990) of Hmong

students in Southern California found that students experienced trauma and psychological side effects, including depression and panic, because of teacher expectations that they perform complex skills and show understanding of cultural knowledge in a language still foreign to them. These students were placed in an “English only” program with very little first language support, and the staff had received very little multicultural or ESL training. Trueba and colleagues reported that these children often referred to themselves as “dumb” and a few even talked about committing suicide (as cited in McBrien, 2005, p. 350).

Discrimination, racism, and bullying often result when schools fail to address the acculturation needs of their immigrant and refugee students. Based on his experiences as a school psychologist, Carter (1999) gave an account of many incidences of racism and bullying toward Muslim students. He described how Muslim students were bullied for displaying signs of their religion, such as wearing a hijab or fasting during Ramadan. He also stated how many of these students were accused of being terrorists by U.S.-born classmates. We have seen this as well here in Minnesota, where a group of Somali Muslim students recently walked out of St Cloud Tech High School twice in one week in protest “saying they were outraged that the administration had not done enough to stop classmates who taunted them for being terrorists, tried to pull off their hijabs and regularly hounded them” (Rao, 2015).

Clearly, the need for attention to the acculturation needs of refugee and immigrant students is great. Teachers, school administrators, and schools in general must make it a priority to educate themselves on the cultures of their immigrant students and provide multicultural education for their students and staff. Ascher (1989) suggests that bicultural integration is the most beneficial mode of acculturation of refugee students. She recommends that schools provide cultural training for teachers, intercultural activities for U.S.-born and refugee students, and an emphasis on bilingual education. Eisenbruch (1988) also stated that

schools can be positive centers of acculturation for refugee and immigrant students when teachers and school receive adequate training to respect the native cultures of refugee and immigrant students and allow them ample time to learn English. In my view, ESL teacher preparation programs also need to educate new teachers on the acculturation needs of students and provide training on how to reduce cultural barriers for SLIFE.

Physical Needs of SLIFE

Another challenge confronting SLIFE is that many of their physical and health needs were not met when they were children and displaced or living in refugee camps, which affected their overall development. Citing studies on young refugees in Australia by DEECD (2008b), O'Sullivan (2006), and the Victorian Settlement Planning Committee (2006), Windle and Miller (2012) state that many refugees had to flee their homes, have been separated from and lost family members, and have gone for long periods without adequate food, shelter or health services. In their report on the achievement gap, Barton and Coley (2009) point to factors such as low birth weight, hunger and nutrition, and being read to as a child as factors that affect cognitive and academic achievement. Since they often lacked access to adequate health services and nutrition as young children, these are all factors that heavily impact SLIFE. In my own experience, I have seen many SLIFE who have suffered health problems such as hearing loss from untreated ear infections, long-term effects of untreated tropical diseases, and developmental delays as a result of malnutrition or injuries as a child. This results in many SLIFE requiring special education services. Unfortunately, it is also very difficult to refer a newcomer student for special education services, so there is often a delay in getting these students the help and support that they need. Teachers of SLIFE need to be

aware of all of the above factors in order to help students get the emotional and physical support that they may need in order to be successful in school. In addition, school nurses, counselors, and social workers also need to be aware of these specific challenges with SLIFE.

Cultural Needs of SLIFE

As if the academic, literacy, emotional, and physical needs that I listed above were not enough, SLIFE also have a number of cultural needs that impact their ability to be successful in American schools. According to DeCapua and Marshall (2011), SLIFE come to school with a different set of cultural norms that influenced their learning in their home country and that educators in the U.S. need to address in order to provide effective instruction for them. One of the primary cultural differences for SLIFE is coming from a culture of orality and having to adapt to a culture of literacy. Watson (2010) describes this difference as an abyss that SLIFE must traverse, often having to abandon their oral mode of thinking and living in the process of adapting to Western schooling and becoming literate. DeCapua and Marshall (2011) include a quote from a SLIFE student that illustrates this point quite well:

I live village, nothing for read, no sign, no book. I go school, we read what teacher write but I ask why learn read if no something to read. Here I walk street, everywhere read. Before I no need reading but here everything is read. –Sergio, El Salvador (p. 24).

Another cultural difference that DeCapua and Marshall (2011) describe is that many SLIFE come from collectivist cultures, while in the United States we have a highly individualist culture. For example, many SLIFE are used to working cooperatively on projects, whereas U.S. schools often focus on competition and individual achievement. According to DeCapua and Marshall (2013) students need to feel a sense of interconnectedness with the other learners and their teachers. As mentioned previously, SLIFE

are also accustomed to learning about things that are immediately relevant in their lives, rather than learning about abstract academic concepts. In the next section I will discuss how DeCapua and Marshall (2011) developed the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm[®] (MALP[®]) as a way of bridging SLIFE students' cultural way of learning and helping them to transition to Western ways of learning.

In order to provide effective instruction that places their students on the path to advancement, teachers of SLIFE must not only be aware of the various academic, emotional, physical, and cultural needs of their students, but must also use this information to structure their lessons and assess their students. Awareness of these needs will also prepare teachers of SLIFE to provide effective instruction at their students' level, to be better advocates for their students, and to help connect them with the emotional support they need as they mourn losses from their journey and adjust to life in a new school and country.

Curricular and Instructional Recommendations for SLIFE

In order to know what kind of preparation future teachers should receive to meet the needs of SLIFE, it is important to examine what effective instruction for SLIFE looks like. Freeman and Freeman (2002) advocate for a targeted program for SLIFE, stating that these students “have needs that traditional ESL and bilingual programs . . . cannot or do not meet” (p. 33). As Short and Boyson (2012) have pointed out, besides newcomers' different native languages and countries of origin, the differences in their literacy skills and educational backgrounds prove to be the most important factors for a newcomer program's design. As I have researched what makes an effective instructional program for SLIFE, I have found several different program models. But, these models have similar threads connecting them since they take into account the profile and backgrounds of their SLIFE students.

In their writing on the subject, Vinogradov and Liden (2009) recommend providing instruction for SLIFE that contextualizes learning within real-life, relevant themes; that builds oral language and vocabulary; and that teaches pre-literacy skills. They also recommend assessing students in both their first and second languages. Their recommendations focus on teaching SLIFE at the adult level, where the goals of instruction are more focused on real-life English learning than on the academic English that many secondary EL programs need to incorporate. Deem and Marshall (1980) recommend the use of a language experience approach, which draws on students' personal experiences and background knowledge to increase vocabulary and reading/writing abilities. Freeman, Freeman and Mercuri (2002) outline four key factors for a successful program for SLIFE: engaging students in theme-based academic curriculum, grounding lessons in students' background and culture, organizing collaborative activities, and creating confident students who value school and themselves as learners. In their report of aspects of successful newcomer programs, Short and Boyson (2012) echo some of these themes, but also add that successful programs have flexible scheduling of courses and students, make connections with families and social services, offer extended time for instruction, and have selective staffing plus targeted professional development.

DeCapua and Marshall (2011) have a proposal for designing culturally-relevant lessons for SLIFE with their Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm[®] (MALP[®]). This program model includes recommendations for many of the aforementioned aspects, but also provides specifics on how to adapt instruction to meet the cultural needs of SLIFE. As the title suggests, this program model suggests a mutual adaptation in which not only is the student required to adapt to U.S. cultural norms in the classroom, but the instruction should also be adapted to accommodate the cultural learning needs of the student. A few key

components of the cultural accommodations of this program are establishing and maintaining two-way communication with students, making lessons applicable and relevant to students' lives, moving from shared responsibility to individual accountability, and moving from oral transmission to the written word. Appendix B shows a checklist that teachers can use to effectively incorporate MALP[®] in their lessons, and Appendix C is a graphic organizer displaying the continuum of MALP[®] and how it moves students from a SLIFE worldview to a more Western view of education. By creating a classroom and instructional setting that includes the aforementioned components, teachers of SLIFE will have a teaching environment that is not only more welcoming and supportive, but that is also respectful to the specific needs of this population.

To provide appropriate literacy development for SLIFE, Montero, Newmaster, and Ledger (2014) recommend using a guided reading model that employs use of running records with students. They used students' rich oral language and life experiences as a background on which to build print literacy instruction. They advocate focusing on early literacy skills such as decoding and phonological awareness, but caution against reducing the literacy program to a strictly skills-based program, as this may discount the rich background knowledge of students and alienate them from classroom learning. Montero and colleagues state that, based on their initial research and, "assuming that students' physical and mental health needs are being adequately addressed" it is possible for students to exit their guided reading ELD program after 2.5 years with a fourth or fifth grade reading level (p. 67). They recommend that SLIFE transition to an ESL supported content area program from there, and eventually transition to mainstream classes. They posit that, with proper instruction, non-literate SLIFE who enter secondary schools at age 14 or 15 may have enough time to gain literacy skills and earn sufficient credits to graduate high school before ageing out at age 21 or 22 and pursue postsecondary education.

A final program design approach is for schools and programs to incorporate bilingual education for SLIFE as much as possible. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) examined language acquisition in context with psychosocial adjustment and found bilingual children to be the most well-adjusted of immigrant and refugee children. They had the highest test scores, lowest rates of depression, and the highest education and career goals. The researchers caution against “English only” programs as these increase cultural dissonance and cause immigrant students to lose their native language and fall short of acquiring proficiency in English.

Teacher Education and SLIFE

While the previously mentioned program models offer many valuable strategies and ideas of how to adapt instruction for SLIFE, it is unclear whether information on teaching this population is being conveyed to future teachers in their education programs. According to Montero, Newmaster, & Ledger (2014) most secondary teachers are unprepared for the foundational print literacy needs of many adolescent refugees. They state that most ESL teachers received training that presumes that learners would be literate in their first language, and state that, “ESL pedagogies that focus on content area and /or general language development are not meeting the academic needs of adolescent refugees with limited print literacy abilities” (p. 60). Woods (2009) also states that, “more ESL training and support will not be enough because these students need literacy programs, not just language programs” (p. 93). According to DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009), in addition to a lack of textbooks and curriculum for SLIFE at the secondary level, EL teachers often lack adequate training because this population has specific literacy development and content-area knowledge needs that are distinctly different from other ELs. One of the primary challenges that teachers of SLIFE face at the secondary level is that their students lack both L1 and L2

literacy, and these teachers often do not have adequate training to provide the basic literacy instruction that they need (Bigelow & Watson, 2012; Short & Boyson, 2012). Vinogradov and Liden (2009) state that the needs of SLIFE are “rarely discussed” in the preparation of EL teachers (p. 133). They point to a “disconnect” that exists between graduate programs at universities and the immigrants and refugees who live just a few blocks away (p. 133). In fact, I was not able to find much in the way of research that demonstrated that teacher education programs are preparing future educators to meet the unique needs of SLIFE.

Lack of Research on Teacher Preparation to Work with SLIFE

Although I was not able to find much research affirming that teacher education programs are preparing teachers to work with SLIFE, part of the reason for this could be that there is simply not much research out there on teacher education programs and SLIFE. King and Bigelow (2012) indicate several gaps in the research around educating SLIFE when they note how it is uncommon to find data around how SLIFE engage in classroom language learning. They also assert that studies focusing specifically on learning strategies among L2 learners seem to have largely ignored or overlooked adolescent or adult emergent readers (King & Bigelow 2012). In her report on preparing teachers to work with ELs, Calderon (2008) states that more research is needed on how to better measure the impact of pre-service and professional development programs, to compare models for pre-service, to compare professional development models, and on large scale replication of effective models. Finally, as Roxas (2011) points out, “Few studies (Hones, 2002; Lee, 2005) have focused on the obstacles and challenges that teachers of refugee students face and the types of responses employed by teachers when working with refugee students

in schools located in urban districts” (p. 2). It is precisely this gap in the research on teacher perceptions of their preparation to meet the needs of SLIFE that I would like to contribute to with my study of teacher perceptions of their preparation to meet the emotional, physical, cultural, literacy and academic needs of students with limited formal education.

Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the research field of the teaching of SLIFE at the secondary level. This included an explanation of who SLIFE are and how they are identified. In that discussion I explored some of the specific challenges that educating SLIFE at the secondary level present, including their academic, literacy, emotional, physical, and cultural needs. Next, I described several secondary models that have been successful at meeting the needs of SLIFE. Finally, I investigated the research related to teacher education and SLIFE, and pointed to gaps in the research that my study will attempt to fill. This literature review provided the background information and research context on SLIFE that are essential to understand as I moved into the research phase of my project in which I investigated whether or not recently graduated EL teachers feel that they received adequate preparation to meet the needs of SLIFE in their classrooms. In the next chapter, I will explain the research process and methods I plan to use in order to answer these questions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

I am studying teacher perceptions of their preparation to address the needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) because I want to find out if practicing EL teachers at the secondary level feel that they received adequate preparation from their teacher education program to meet the academic, emotional, physical, and cultural needs of SLIFE in their classrooms. The primary research questions that I aim to answer are the following: *1) What perceptions do teachers have of their preparation to teach secondary EL SLIFE, and 2) What do they wish their teacher education program had addressed related to teaching SLIFE?* I would like to use the results of my survey to propose ways to improve teacher education programs so that they integrate preparation for teaching SLIFE at the secondary level.

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter will describe the subjects, setting, and research and elicitation methods that I will use to explore and analyze this research question. I will begin by explaining my rationale for choosing a mixed method and Grounded Theory approach in my research on teacher perceptions of their preparation to meet the needs of SLIFE. This is followed by a description of the tools I used to gather my data: a survey and interviews. I will describe the participants, the settings, and the procedures for administering the survey and the interviews. I will then explain how I analyzed and verified my data. Finally, I will explain what steps I took to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of my research subjects.

Mixed Method Data Collection Approach

Mixed Method Data Collection Approach

In considering the best way to answer my research question, I first had to decide which methods would be most appropriate in finding the answers to my research questions. I first thought about surveying recent graduates of ESL teacher education programs to ask about their preparation to work with SLIFE, but then reconsidered when I realized that these teachers may not have many suggestions for improving their teacher education programs if they did not have much experience in the field. I then decided to survey teachers with a few more years of experience working with SLIFE at the secondary level. However, I was concerned about having sufficient data from such a small sample size since this is a very specific portion of the EL teachers. So, I decided on a mixed method approach in which I would use both surveys and interviews that would provide me with both quantitative and qualitative data. As McMillan and Schmacher (2010) explain, a mixed method is often the preferred method for researchers because, “the nature of the data collected is not confined to one type of method, which encourages the production of a more complete set of research questions as well as conclusions” (p. 397).

In planning my research, I decided to use a two-phase design made up of qualitative and quantitative phases (Creswell, 1994). The first phase involved a survey of EL teachers using a questionnaire that I constructed with both close and open-ended questions. As Mackey and Gass (2005) state, “Depending on how they are structured, questionnaires can provide both qualitative insights and quantifiable data, and thus are flexible enough to be used in a range of research” (p. 96). The qualitative

portion of this research comes in the form of the open-ended questions on the survey and in the interview, while the quantifiable data is provided through Likert scale questions on the survey. This type of research is suitable for this research topic and question because it allows me to analyze trends in responses to the Likert scale questions, while giving the respondent the opportunity to provide more details and case-specific information in the open-ended questions and in interviews.

As Dörnyei (2003) points out, surveys have many advantages in that they are fairly easy to construct and administer, but also have limitations in that they can sometimes result in rather superficial data. To counter this, Gillham (2000) encourages survey researchers to conduct interviews to accompany questionnaires to illustrate and provide a more complete explanation of what the survey responses mean. For this reason, I decided to choose specific survey participants based on the content of their survey responses and interview them about their preparation to teach SLIFE.

Data Collection

Survey Participants

I conducted surveys and interviews with EL teachers who have between two to fifteen years of teaching ELs, specifically SLIFE, at the secondary level to find out their perceptions of their preparation to meet the unique needs of these students. It was my hope that by surveying and interviewing relatively new teachers regarding on this topic, I would be catching them at an opportune time in which their memories of their teacher education program are still fresh, but they have enough teaching experience to know what is most useful in a teacher education program and to be able to clearly articulate what kind of training they felt they were lacking when trying to meet the various needs of the SLIFE.

I chose not to survey teachers in a specific school district because my study is not intended to evaluate one particular school district. Likewise, I chose to survey teachers from a variety of teacher education programs since the question I am attempting to answer is whether or not EL teachers feel prepared to meet the needs of SLIFE overall, not “if teachers from teacher education program x” feel prepared to meet the needs of SLIFE. I invited teachers to participate through personal and professional networks that I am involved in. I also asked respondents to forward the survey to other teachers who fit the criteria for the survey, using what Dörnyei (2003) refers to as “snowball sampling” (p. 72).

Survey Setting

The surveys were distributed online using Google Forms, so the settings were varied. The sample size was limited by the parameters I had set of EL teachers working with SLIFE at the secondary level who had completed their EL teacher education program in the past fifteen years. Since the survey was distributed within my personal and professional networks, most of the respondents likely came from the Upper Midwest; however, I did have one respondent from the East Coast who I became acquainted with through my professional network.

Surveys

According to Brown (2001), surveys or questionnaires are written instruments that provide respondents with a list of questions, which respondents answer in writing or by selecting among a list of answers. I chose a survey because I felt that it would be the easiest and most convenient way to gather information from teachers on their preparation to work with SLIFE, but would also give me accurate

information on their answers to my questions. Surveys elicit three types of information: factual, behavioral, attitudinal (Dörnyei, 2003). Factual questions elicit background information of respondents; for example, age or gender. Behavioral questions ask about respondents' actions, lifestyles, or personal habits. Attitudinal questions are used to elicit what respondents think; in other words, their "attitudes, opinions, beliefs, interests, and values" (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 8). On my survey, I asked a few factual questions related to respondents' number of years teaching and years since they had received their teaching license. However, most of the questions on my survey were attitudinal because they were asking EL teachers to state their perceptions and opinions of their preparation to meet the needs of SLIFE at the secondary level.

Reliability and Validity

According to Fink (2009), reliability is when a survey "results in consistent information" (p. 8). I took several measures to improve the reliability of my survey. For example, in addition to asking respondents, "After completing your teacher education program, how prepared were you to teach SLIFE?" I also asked them more specific questions related to their preparation to meet the academic, physical, emotional, and cultural needs of students. Another measure I took to improve reliability of my survey was to pilot the survey with four teacher colleagues who work with SLIFE at the secondary level. I received positive feedback from these teachers that the questions were clear and easy to understand. Fink (2009) states that a valid survey produces accurate information. When considering validity, it is important to reflect on the instrument you are using to ask questions and what you want to find out. To improve the validity of my questions, I considered the various areas of teacher preparation to meet the needs of SLIFE and tried to include a question related to each of those areas. The pilot study also helped to improve the

validity of my study because I could look at the pilot responses to see if the responses were answering questions in the ways I had anticipated, or if perhaps they had misunderstood a question.

Survey Procedures

After conducting the pilot study, reflecting on the results, consulting with my colleagues and committee, and making a few revisions to my survey questions, I was ready to administer the survey. I also waited to receive approval from the university human subjects board. After putting a lot of time and thought into the questions, I set them up in Google Forms, sent out the survey, and waited for the results. Since I was eliciting information from a very specific portion of the population of EL teachers (less than 15 years teaching SLIFE at the secondary level) I was not expecting a large sample. I was happy to receive a total of 16 responses to my survey.

On the survey, I began by asking participants about their background, including their years of teaching experience. These were asked in multiple choice questions (see Appendix E). Next, I included Likert scale questions in which I asked participants to rate their preparation to meet the various needs of SLIFE in their classroom. The next section included open-ended questions asking teachers to comment on what their teacher education program did to prepare them to work with SLIFE, and what they wished they would have known or received training on before they entered the classroom. Finally I asked respondents how they have sought out information on teaching SLIFE, and what kind of information has been helpful to them in teaching SLIFE. As mentioned previously, after administering the survey, I chose four participants for more in-depth interviews related to their survey responses.

After I collected my data, I compiled and analyzed it to look for trends in teacher responses. Mackey and Gass (2005) discuss the use of quantification in qualitative studies in which the researcher examines patterns of occurrence in responses and data and uses them to draw inferences. I looked for patterns in the free response portions of the survey and used those patterns to draw inferences and to generate and test hypotheses. In Chapter Four I will chart data based on Likert scale responses and will include narratives and comments shared by teachers in the open-response questions and interviews. I used all of this data and information to determine to what extent these teachers feel prepared to work with SLIFE and to make recommendations for improvements to the ways that teachers are prepared to meet the specific needs of these students.

Interviews

Interview Participants

After administering the surveys via email, I followed up with in-person interviews with a few select respondents, whom I chose based on their responses to the survey. In determining whom to interview, I looked for respondents who had strong comments, either positive or negative, about their preparation to address the needs of SLIFE in their classroom. In the interviews, I asked them to elaborate on their survey responses. This strategy is an example of Dörnyei's (2003) two-phase design, which assists the process of selecting respondents for interviews by first administering a questionnaire to a larger sample of respondents, then inviting participants for interviews based on their responses to the survey.

Interviews

According to Hatch (2002), qualitative interviews are used to uncover meaning structures that participants use to organize information and make sense of their worlds. Interviews can be a useful tool in revealing and explaining those meaning structures. He includes a quote from Spradley (1979), which sums up the approach that the qualitative researcher takes in relation to respondents:

By word and by action, in subtle ways and in direct statements, [researchers] say, “I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experiences, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you would explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (Spradley, as cited in Hatch, 2002, p. 34)

In conducting my interviews, I wanted to understand my participants’ point of view on their preparation to meet the needs of SLIFE in their classrooms, to know what experiences with students shaped their perceptions on this topic, and to be able to give them a voice by explaining their point of view in an effective way.

Hatch (2002) explains that there are three types of interviews: *informal*, *formal*, and *standardized*. For the purposes of my study, I chose to conduct semi-structured formal interviews. These are interviews that are led by the interviewer, have a set of guiding questions, and are typically recorded. They are semi-structured in that the interviewer is free to ask other questions that arise from one of the participant’s responses. I liked this approach to my interviews because it allowed me to be structured and flexible at the same time.

In constructing my interview questions, I wanted to keep things fairly open-ended in order to capture my participants’ perspectives on their preparation to meet the needs of SLIFE. I wanted to build on information that they had already given in the survey responses, but go more in-depth with this information

and keep the focus on teacher education programs. For example, several respondents commented on how they felt underprepared to address SLIFE students' lack of academic background knowledge, so one of the interview questions I included was, "*Do you think that ESL teacher education programs should address ways to build academic background for SLIFE? What suggestions do you have for ways to address this?*" (See Appendix G). These types of question are mostly *structural* (Hatch, 2002) because they are asking the informants to put their knowledge into domains and to explain why they think the way they do.

Interview Settings

Once I had gone through the process of selecting whom to interview, it was time to set up the interviews. Most of the participants were local, so I was able to conduct the interviews in local libraries or in participants' classrooms with doors closed. I had one participant who was out of state, so I conducted my interview with her over Skype.

Interview Procedures

I recorded my interviews using the Garage Band application on my computer. I provided participants with a list of questions beforehand, but let them know that the interviews would be semi-structured, which would allow for us to steer the discussion into other areas or lines of questioning where it was appropriate.

Analysis of Data

According to Scott, (2009), the researcher should open code data while the data is being collected to ascertain core categories. After the core categories are determined, the researcher then conducts selective

coding and codes only for the core category and related categories. After administering the survey, I looked at my data to determine key issues and to determine who might be good candidates for an interview. I also used the information from the survey responses to help guide my questions in the interviews.

Surveys

Once I had the results of my survey, I used the analysis function on Google Forms to help me add up and analyze the multiple choice and Likert scale questions on the survey. To analyze the open-ended questions on the survey, I used what Dörnyei (2003) describes as “content analysis” whereby a pool of diverse responses to open-ended questions is organized into a handful of key issues (p. 117). Content analysis involves two phases, 1) taking each person’s response and marking them for key elements and content, and 2) forming broader categories to describe the content of the response in a way that allows for comparisons with other responses. In order to do this, I read through the open responses several times to look for themes in the responses. After determining a number of themes, I coded each group of responses for these themes and then counted how many times they appeared in the pool of responses.

Interviews

After completing my interviews, I listened to the recordings of them and transcribed them to find trends in the responses of the four people that I interviewed. I also wrote summaries of each interview to sum up key points in the responses of each interviewee. There were some trends, but it was interesting to

observe what points the interviewees chose to focus on in these semi-structured interviews. I will describe the results and finding in Chapter Four.

Ethics

Since my research involved some potentially sensitive issues and I was asking participants to provide feedback that could be deemed critical of their teacher education program and their school district, I took several precautions to ensure that participants' anonymity was preserved throughout each step of my study. First, I obtained permission from the human subjects review board at Hamline University. On the first page of my survey, I included an informed consent letter that my participants read and agreed to before beginning the survey. I kept the survey responses in a password protected computer and a locked file cabinet and will destroy them one year after the publication of my capstone. I also provided pseudonyms for interview participants, school districts, teacher education programs, and any other individuals or organizations they may have mentioned.

Conclusion

In summary, the methodology of this study ascertained teacher perceptions of their preparation to meet the needs of SLIFE. I provided a rationale for using a mixed method approach of both quantitative and qualitative items in my survey and interviews, and to analyze and present the results of these responses. Chapter Four will describe the results of my analysis and summarize the data.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of my study is to investigate teacher perceptions of their preparation to meet the various needs of students with limited or interrupted education (SLIFE) because I want to find out if EL teachers feel adequately prepared to meet the academic, literacy, emotional, physical, and cultural needs of SLIFE. The primary research questions that I aim to answer are the following: *1) What perceptions do teachers have of their preparation to teach secondary EL SLIFE, and 2) What do they wish their teacher education program had addressed related to teaching SLIFE?* I would like to use the results of my survey to propose ways to improve teacher education programs so that they integrate preparation for teaching SLIFE at the secondary level.

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter details the results of the study. First, survey results are presented. The survey was administered to teachers who have between two and fifteen years of experience working with SLIFE at the secondary level. The survey questions detail teacher perceptions of how well their teacher education programs prepared them to meet the various needs of SLIFE, and include both Likert scale rating questions and open-ended questions. The survey also asks respondents to describe what types of information and training on SLIFE they have sought since finishing their degrees, and what types of information and training have been the most helpful to them. Following the survey results are the interview data. Four teachers with between six and fifteen years of teaching experience with SLIFE at the secondary level were

chosen for interviews based on their survey responses. A summary of each teacher's account of his or her preparation to meet the needs of SLIFE is included, along with teacher suggestions for improving ESL teacher preparation programs to make them more inclusive of SLIFE student needs.

Survey Results

The following sections outline the survey data, which have been broken into the following categories: Respondent Background and Experience, Teacher Perceptions of Teacher Education Programs (Likert scale and open-ended questions), Challenges of Teaching SLIFE, and Training Related to SLIFE.

Respondent Background and Experience

The first question asked respondents how many years it had been since they received their ESL teaching license. Two respondents (13%) received their licenses two years ago, four respondents (25%) received their licenses between three and five years ago, four respondents (25%) received their licenses between six and eight years ago, and eight respondents (50%) received their ESL teaching licenses between nine and fifteen years ago.

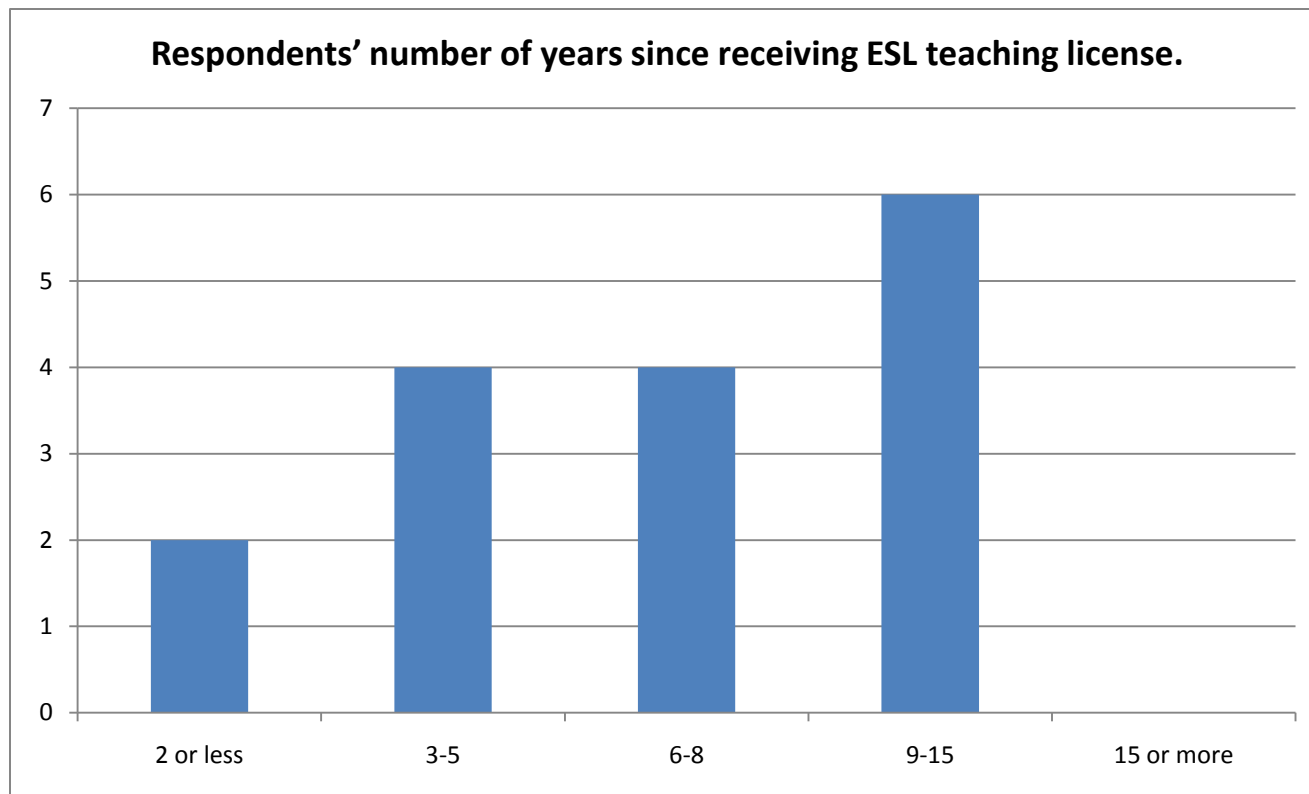


Figure 1. Respondents' number of years since receiving ESL teaching license.

The next question asked respondents about their number of years of experience teaching SLIFE at the secondary level. Two respondents (13%) had two years of experience, two respondents (13%) had between three and five years of experience, four respondents (25%) had between six and eight years of experience, and eight respondents (50%) had between nine and fifteen years of experience.

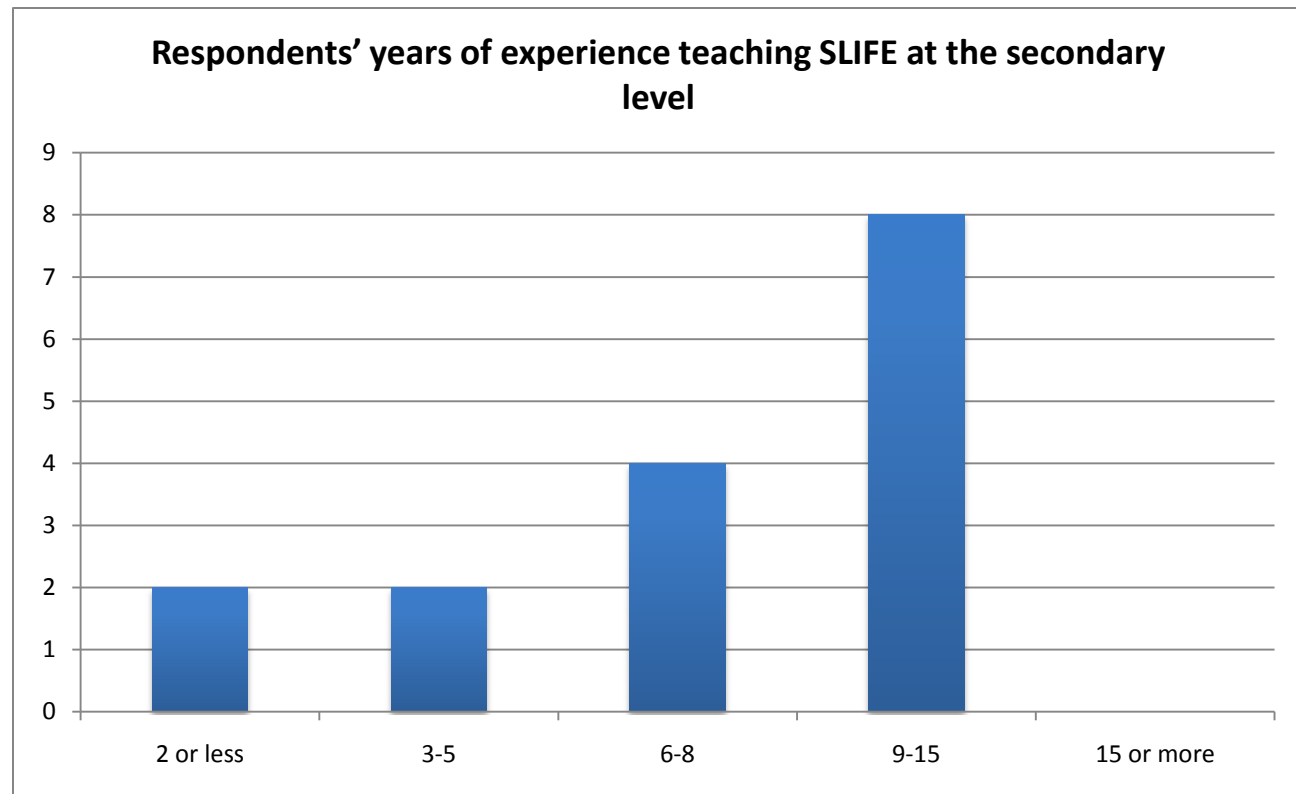


Figure 2. Respondents' years of experience teaching SLIFE at the secondary level.

The following questions asked respondents to estimate (to the best of their knowledge) the percentage of students in their classes who had limited or interrupted formal education. For the purposes of this survey, I used the Freeman and Freeman (2003) definition of SLIFE as students who secondary aged, are two or more years behind their age group in academic content knowledge, and may or may not be literate in their first language. This is a rough estimate since most schools and school districts do not identify and document SLIFE. One respondent (6%) reported to have had less than 10% SLIFE in his/her classes, two respondents (13%) reported having 10-25% SLIFE in their classes, four respondents (25%)

reported having 25-50% SLIFE in their classes, five respondents (31%) reported having 50-75% SLIFE in their classes, and four respondents (25%) reported having 75-100% SLIFE in their classes.

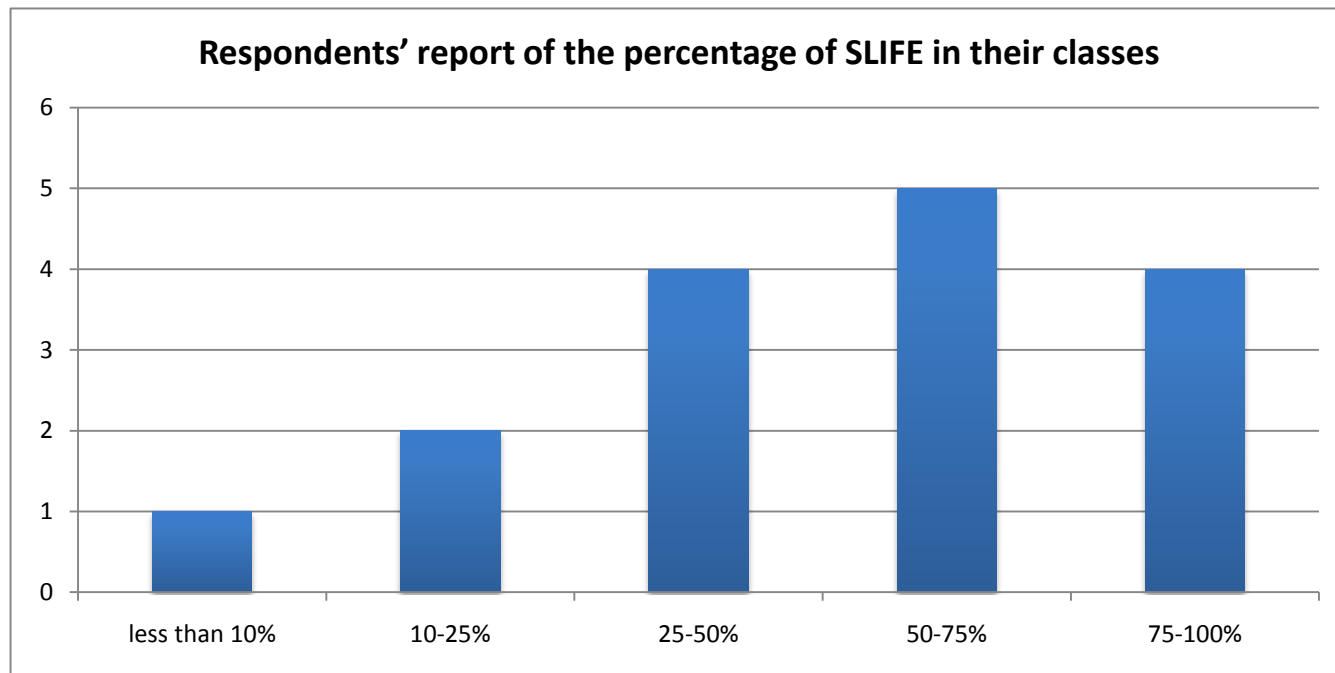


Figure 3. Respondents' report of the percentage of SLIFE in their classes.

I was pleased to find respondents who had received their ESL teaching licenses recently enough to be able to recall the content of their program and how it addressed the needs of SLIFE. In addition, the respondents also had enough years of experience teaching SLIFE at the secondary level to be able to reflect on what was helpful to their instruction, and what kind of training and information could have prepared them better in order to meet the needs of their SLIFE. I was also happy to see the relatively high percentage of SLIFE in respondents' classes, which shows that SLIFE have a strong presence in many

secondary ESL teachers' classrooms and ought to have their needs addressed along with the needs of highly-schooled newcomers and long-term English Learners.

Teacher Perceptions of Teacher Education Programs (Likert scale questions)

The next set of questions asked teachers to describe how well their teacher education program addressed the presence of SLIFE and the academic, cultural, literacy, emotional, and physical needs of SLIFE. The first question addressed whether respondents were aware of the existence and numbers of SLIFE in U.S. and Minnesota classrooms. When asked how much information they received regarding the presence of SLIFE, one respondent (6%) received no information, nine respondents (56%) received very little information, four respondents (25%) received some information, one respondent (6%) received just enough information, and no respondents received a full understanding of the presence of SLIFE in U.S. and Minnesota classrooms.

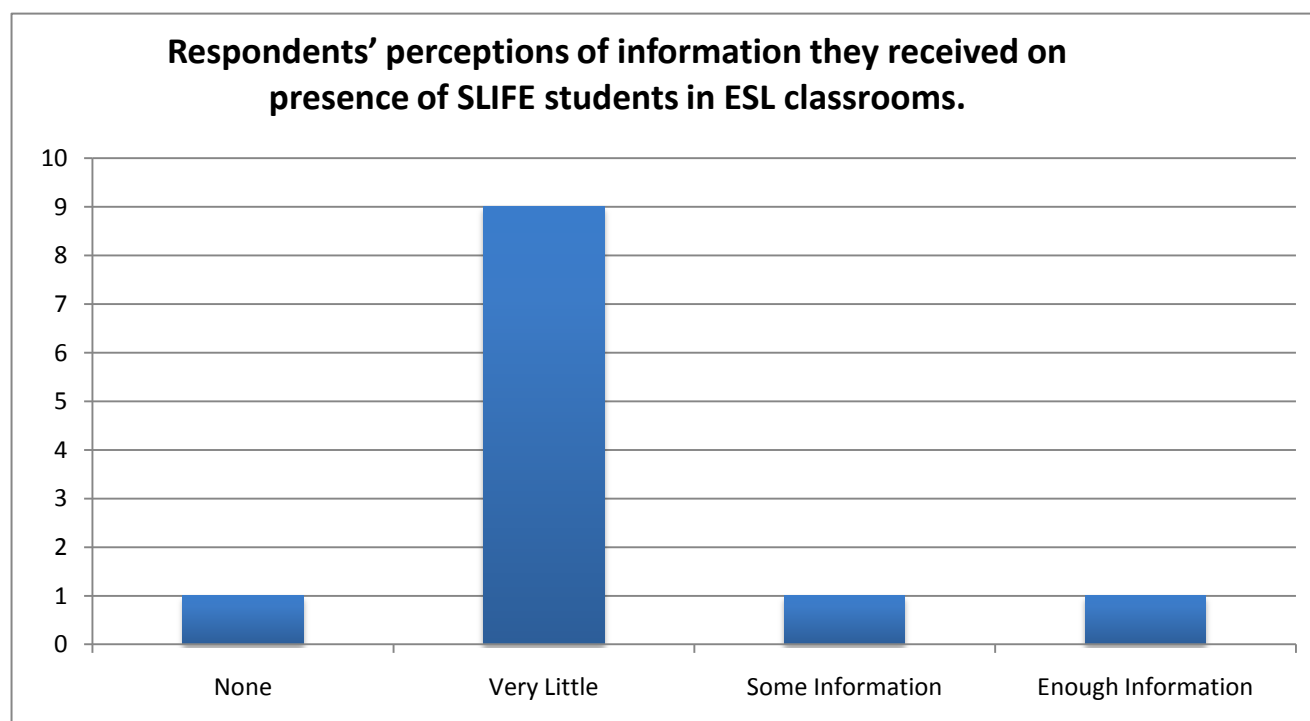


Figure 4. Respondents' perceptions of information they received on presence of SLIFE in ESL classrooms.

The next set of questions asked respondents to rate how well their ESL teacher education program prepared them to address the emotional, physical, academic, cultural, and literacy needs of SLIFE in their classes. As I explained in Chapter Two, many SLIFE suffer long-term mental health effects from trauma and may also have developmental delays and long-term health issues due to malnutrition and inadequate health care in refugee camps. Regarding how well their programs' assignments, readings, and course activities covered ways to address the emotional and physical needs of SLIFE, three respondents (19%) reported that this topic was not addressed at all, twelve respondents (75%) reported that it was not addressed enough, one respondent (6%) reported that it was addressed OK, and no respondents reported that it was covered well or very well.

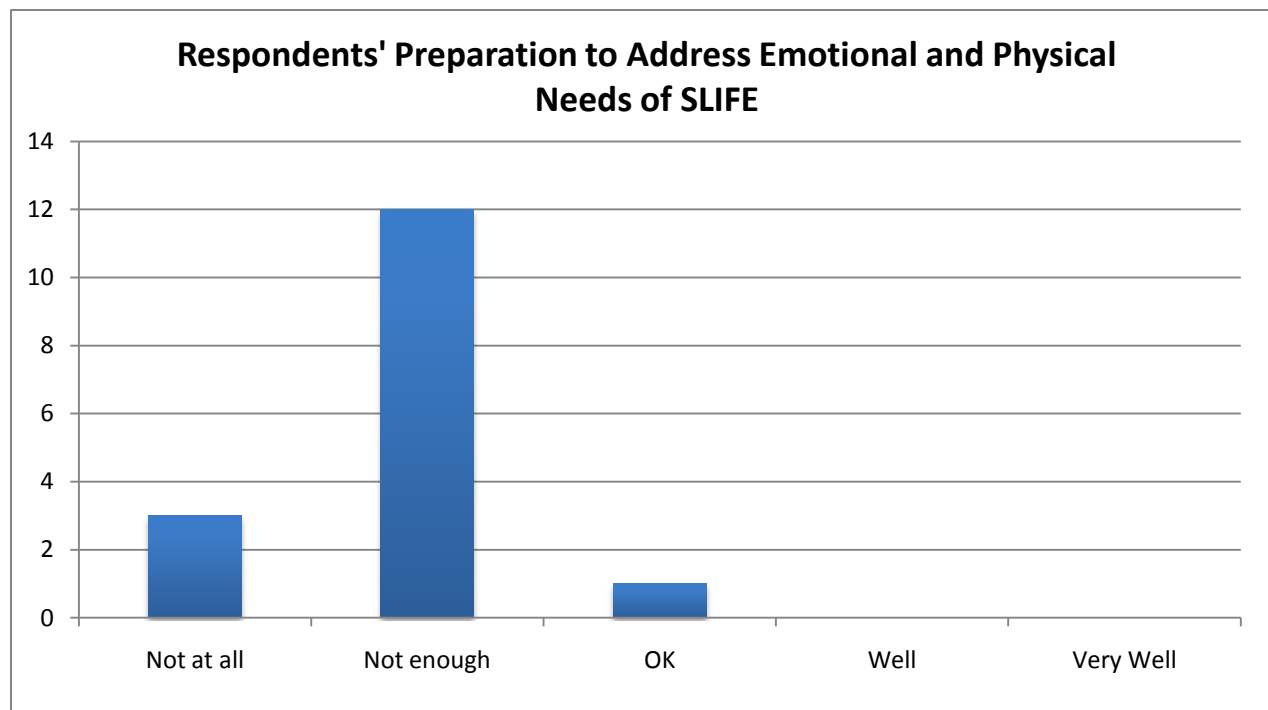


Figure 5. Respondents' perceptions of their preparation to address the emotional and physical needs of SLIFE.

As referenced in Chapter Two, one of the main challenges with teaching SLIFE at the secondary level is that they often have no or low literacy in their first language and interruptions in schooling have left them with gaps in their academic background knowledge. Regarding how well their program covered ways to address the academic needs of SLIFE, two respondents (13%) reported that this was not covered at all, twelve respondents (75%) reported that it was not covered enough, two respondents reported that it was covered OK, and no respondents reported that it was covered well or very well.

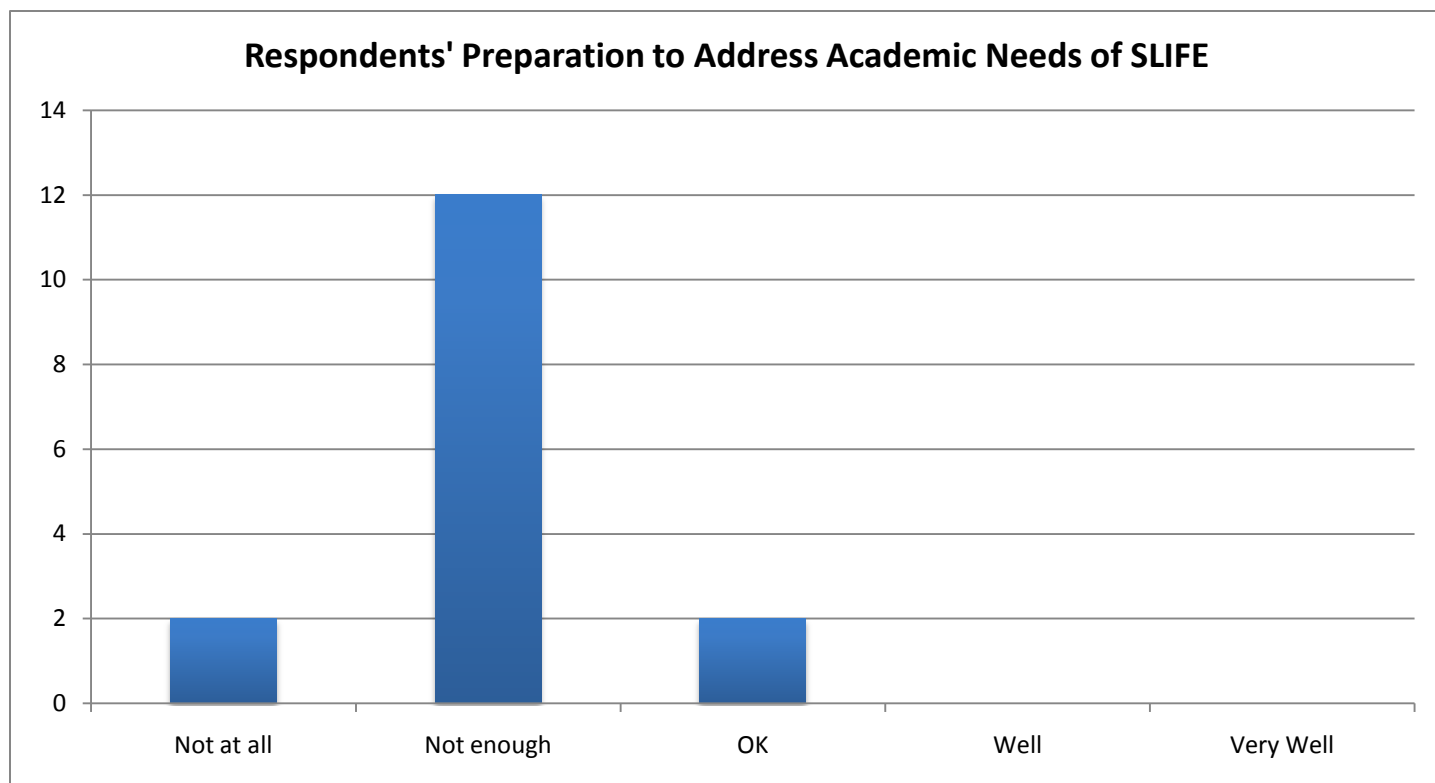


Figure 6. Respondents' perceptions of their preparation to meet the academic needs of SLIFE.

Regarding how well their program covered ways to teach literacy to SLIFE, six respondents (38%) reported that this was not covered at all, seven respondents (44%) reported that it was not covered enough, three respondents (19%) reported that it was covered OK, and zero respondents reported that it was covered well or very well.

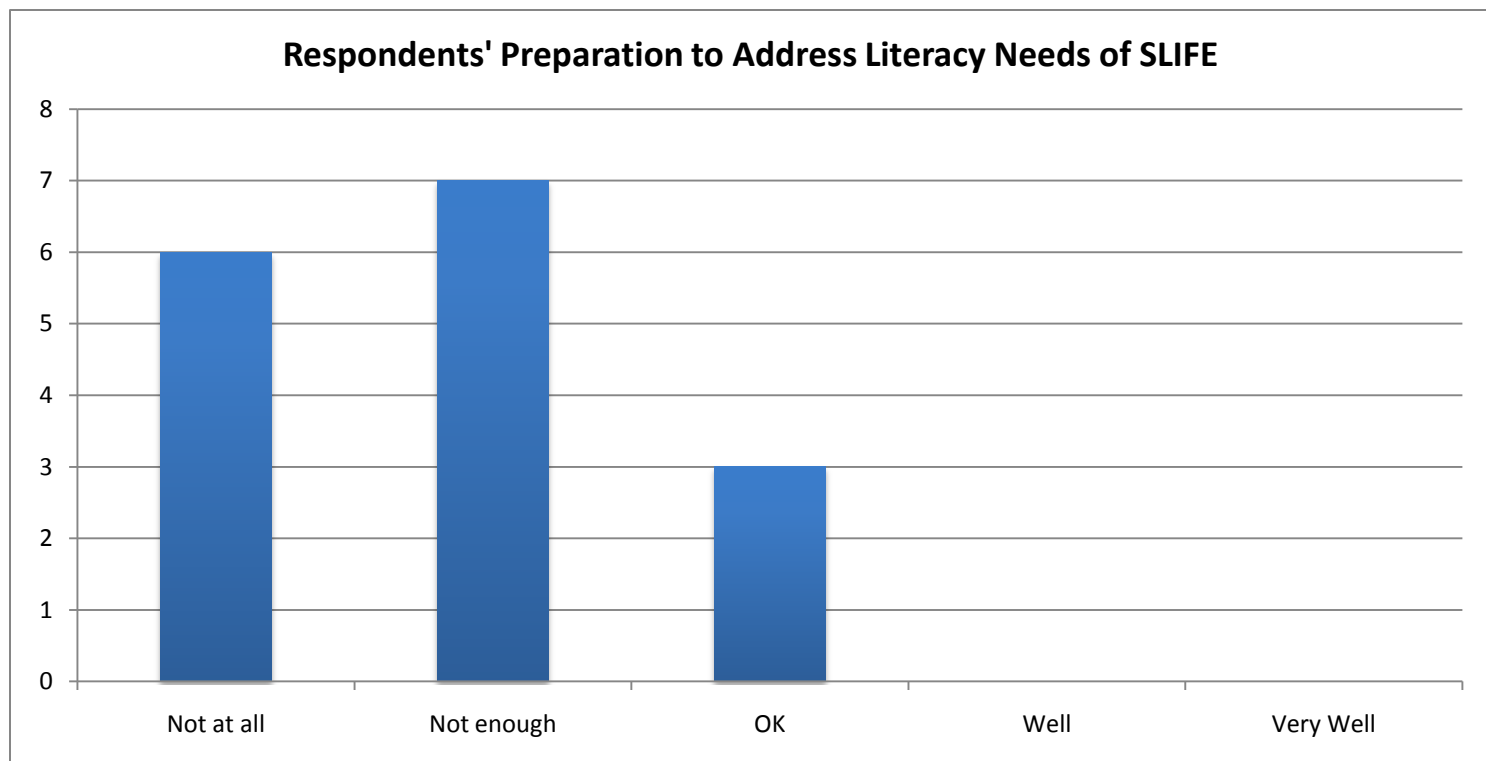


Figure 7. Respondents' perceptions of their preparation to meet the literacy needs of SLIFE.

As referenced in Chapter Two, SLIFE come to school with a different set of cultural norms that influenced their learning in their home country and that educators in the U.S. need to address in order to provide effective instruction for them (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Regarding how well their programs' assignments, readings, and course activities covered ways to design culturally-responsive lessons for

SLIFE, five respondents (31%) reported that this was not covered at all, six respondents (38%) reported that this was not covered enough, and five respondents (31%) reported that this was covered OK. Zero respondents reported that this was covered well or very well.

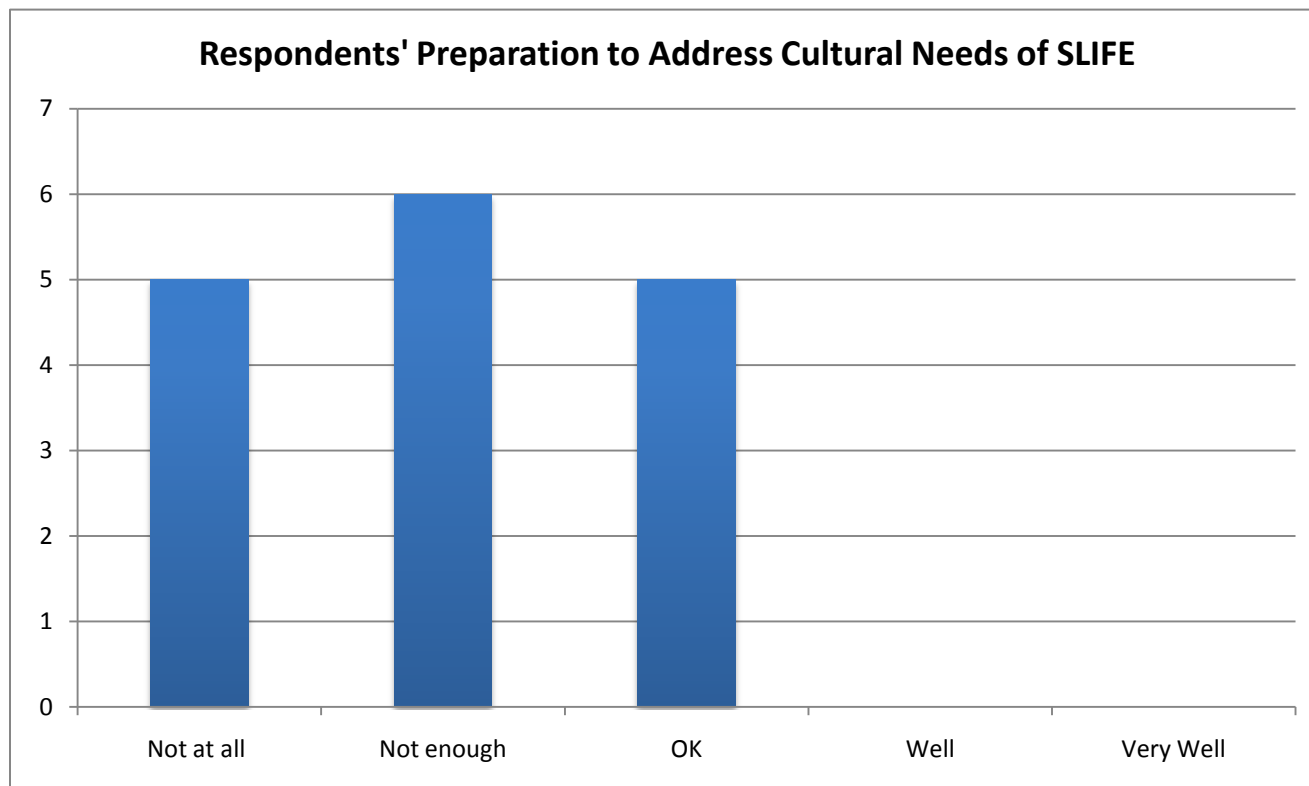


Figure 8. Respondents' perceptions of their preparation to design culturally-responsive lessons for SLIFE.

The final Likert-scale question asked respondents to rate how prepared they were to teach SLIFE after completing their ESL teacher education program. Four respondents (25%) reported that they were not prepared, nine respondents (56%) reported that they were a little prepared, and three respondents (19%) reported that they were somewhat prepared. Zero respondents reported that they were prepared or very well prepared to meet the needs of SLIFE in their classes.

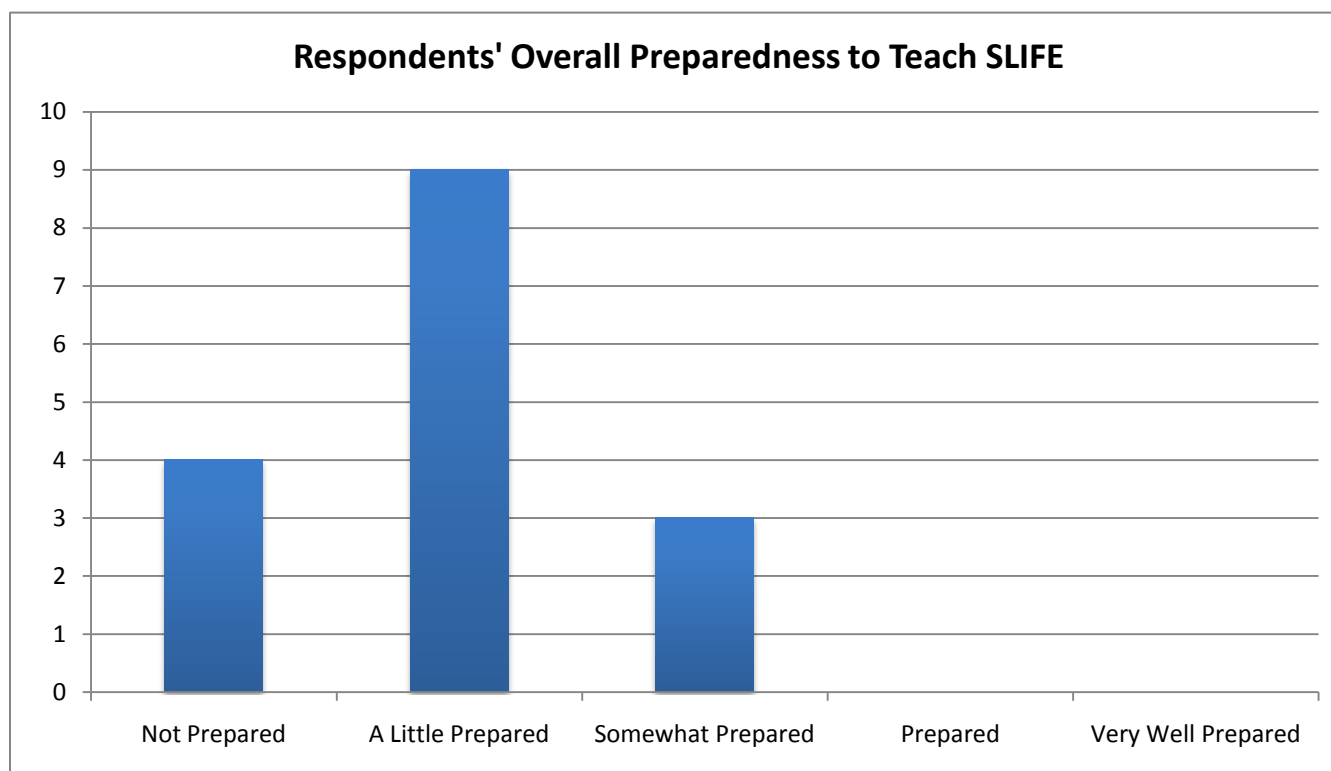


Figure 9. Respondent's perceptions of how prepared they were to teach SLIFE after completing their teacher education program.

Teacher Perceptions of Teacher Education Programs (open-ended questions)

I asked a series of open-ended questions in my survey to get a clearer and more accurate picture of what challenges teachers of SLIFE face at the secondary level, what kinds of training they wish they would have had in their teacher education program, and what type of training they have sought out on their own to assist in their teaching of SLIFE. In my interpretation of the data of the open-ended questions, I first looked for trends in the answers that respondents gave (Dörnyei, 2003). I read over the responses several times to get a full understanding of what the respondents were saying. I then looked for key words and phrases that were repeated across several responses. After identifying trends, I read back through the answers and counted the number of times a respondent referenced that trend.

Challenges of teaching SLIFE at the secondary level The first open-ended question on the survey was, “What are some of the biggest challenges that you have encountered in teaching SLIFE at the secondary level?” There were a variety of responses to this question, but as I interpreted the data, several trends arose. The most common challenge that was referenced by ten out of sixteen (63%) respondents was that SLIFE do not fit into traditional high school models, and that most high school administrations and administrative policies are not effective to meet SLIFE needs. One quote that summarizes this sentiment quite well is from a respondent who said,

The graduation pathways are very restrictive and do not account for the literacy and content skills that one must build in such a short amount of time. The system just was not built for SLIFE and they very much are a square peg in a round hole.

This quote resonated with me and affirmed my own experiences and perceptions as a secondary teacher of SLIFE. In my experience, I have to help my SLIFE students navigate a high school system that expects them to learn not only to speak English, but become fully literate in English, fill in gaps in academic content that they never got when they were elementary-aged, and learn high school academic content. Many of my students came to the country at fifteen or sixteen years old and only attended school through fourth or fifth grade in their refugee camps, and many of my SLIFE students are illiterate or semi-literate in their native languages. So, expecting SLIFE to master all of the tasks above in four years amounts to a nearly impossible task for these students. Another quote that illustrates the problem of inappropriate administrative policies for SLIFE is from a respondent who said,

I still feel like the administration wouldn't be able to tell you what SLIFE means, although I think they are beginning to understand the varying needs of our refugee populations. That process has taken a long time. The system doesn't work for SLIFE students and all their needs, and it will be a long time before it does. I advocate as much as I can, but it is a marathon, not a sprint. When the system starts recognizing that the system needs to take care of each of our SLIFE students as individuals, then it will be working. Each SLIFE student comes in with unique circumstances and it takes a lot of time and effort to service them appropriately.

Additional Trends

As I drilled down on the question regarding challenges of teaching SLIFE at the secondary level, I observed several other trends that help to shed some light on the above data that many teachers of SLIFE feel that the traditional high school system does not fit their needs well. Seven out of sixteen (44%) of respondents referenced SLIFE students' lack of content knowledge as a major challenge. Five respondents (31%) cited a lack of appropriate instructional materials as a challenge. Several respondents referenced the fact that there is a lack of age-appropriate reading materials for adolescent emergent readers. Several also

noted that there is a lack of materials that fit SLIFE students' academic level, which results in teachers having to create many of their own teaching materials. Three respondents (19%) described having to teach SLIFE to "do school" and help them understand and navigate the school system.

Preparation to Teach Literacy to SLIFE

The next open-ended question on the survey asked, "How would you describe the way that your teacher education program addressed the specific literacy needs of SLIFE in the ESL classroom?" The most substantial trend that I noticed in the responses to this question was that some literacy was covered in respondents' teacher education programs, but twelve respondents (75%) said that SLIFE were not mentioned in their literacy classes. Two respondents (12%) said that SLIFE were mentioned in their literacy classes. One particularly powerful statement was from a respondent who said,

My teacher ed program assumed that ELLs sitting in my class would be literate in home language, meaning they have already learned to read and can read to learn in home language. My course work assumed kids would arrive with a huge arsenal of skills to transfer to the US classroom context, and that their learning paradigms were similar in the home contexts. In other words, my coursework assumed that ELLs in my class would be like me if I moved to a new country and had to learn a new language... I was not taught that some students in my class would be learning to read for the first time in a language they do not yet speak.

In other responses to this question, three respondents (19%) said that their literacy classes included some activities that addressed low-level literacy strategies. One respondent described an activity where they adapted an assessment to make it accessible for newcomer EL students and that professors encouraged them to present information in both spoken and written form. Another respondent said that learning academic language functions was helpful and that she learned to give students academic language through skills-based instruction along with the language and content.

Preparation to Meet Academic Needs of SLIFE

The next open-ended question asked, “What type of training do you wish you had received to meet the specific academic needs of SLIFE at the secondary level?” The most common response to this question was that several teachers of SLIFE wish they had received more information on meaningful curriculum for SLIFE. This connects back to the question about the challenges of teaching SLIFE and respondents’ statements that lack of resources and instructional materials for SLIFE are a big challenge. Four respondents (25%) said that they wished they had received more training on the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm[®], or MALP[®] in their programs. Another common trend was that eight respondents (50%) said that they wished they had received more information on what to expect from their SLIFE students. They described wanting to know what kind of academic skills their students would be lacking, and what to expect for progress with these students. One respondent suggested reading a few case studies about SLIFE so that EL teachers would have some examples to go to when they get into situations where they can’t figure a student out.

Preparation to Create Culturally Relevant Lessons for SLIFE

The following open-ended question asked, “What type of training do you wish you had received to understand the specific cultural norms of SLIFE at the secondary level?” It was difficult to discern a theme in the responses to this question; in fact, the most common response was “I’m not sure” or “Any.” Three respondents mentioned that training on MALP[®] would have been helpful to training them to create culturally-relevant lessons for SLIFE. Two respondents said that they wished for more information on helping students who have experienced trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder and two others wished for

more information on how to connect their SLIFE students to community services that would help them with issues such as mental health needs. Two respondents said they would have liked more information on the specific cultural groups that are present in our schools and one respondent suggested that having more information on life and education in refugee camps would be helpful. One quote that sums up this issue well was from a respondent who wrote,

Any sort of training would have been useful. I was not prepared to work with the students I faced upon earning my license in ways that were most effective. I had to develop skills over time and investigate students' cultures and previous experiences in school.

Other Professional Development on SLIFE

The following open-ended questions asked, “How have you pursued other opportunities to learn about teaching SLIFE?” I asked this question to understand what kinds of information and training teachers sought after they started working with SLIFE and to get more ideas on what SLIFE teachers felt they were lacking. The most common response that respondents gave to this question was that ten of them (63%) attended conferences and joined professional organizations such as a state organization of EL teachers that has a specific committee devoted to providing professional development and discussion around SLIFE issues. Other common responses included reading articles and taking classes on teaching literacy (25%), researching about SLIFE and different cultures (31%), and collaborating with colleagues who also worked with SLIFE (19%).

Another open-ended question that was asked in tandem with this question was, “What kind of information and training has been helpful to you in addressing the needs of SLIFE at the secondary level?” In response to this question, seven respondents (44%) reported that networking with colleagues and

attending conferences geared toward SLIFE issues were helpful. Five respondents (31%) reported that having MALP[®] training was helpful to them. Three respondents (19%) reported that it was helpful for them to read the research from prominent SLIFE scholars such as Andrea DeCapua, Helaine Marshall, Martha Bigelow, Elaine Tarone, and Patsy Vinogradov. Three respondents (19%) said that it was helpful to learn about other instructional models and programs that serve SLIFE and take ideas from them about instructional practices. Two respondents (13%) mentioned that it was helpful to learn about the students' backgrounds and cultures. One particular quote that resonated with me was from a respondent who wrote,

The information I have acquired has been through my own students. I would like a lot more training and information in how to appropriately and effectively serve our SLIFEs. Ideas for taking a grad standard and creating assessments and lesson plans that are personally and culturally meaningful to SLIFE students. General information on how to use WIDA data to shape instruction and inform PLC teams.

At the end of my survey, I thanked participants and asked them to provide any additional comments related to their training to teach SLIFE. Two commented that they were glad to see this type of research being done, one said that her district and Minnesota have a long way to go in addressing SLIFE needs and that the legislature and districts need to give more time and funding for these students, and another stated that she generally felt well prepared by her teaching program until she started teaching SLIFE. Another respondent said that his responses pertained to “extremely” SLIFE students; that is, students with little or no education as opposed to students who were two years behind their counterparts as mentioned in the state law. Another teacher commented that most ESL websites are not geared toward SLIFE and we need to have a website where teachers can post successful lessons they have taught and materials they wish to share.

Interview Results

I conducted four interviews with teachers of SLIFE who work at the secondary level. I chose these interviewees based on their survey responses because they provided insightful responses to the survey questions and I thought they would have more insights and ideas to share through an interview. I also chose them because they taught in a variety of settings: some taught in traditional high schools, while others were in alternative schools. Fortunately, the first four people that I invited for interviews accepted and it did not take long to move to the next step of setting up and conducting the interviews. All four interviews were recorded and transcribed. I used a set of interview questions (see Appendix E) but occasionally strayed from these questions since the interviews were semi-structured. All of the names listed in these results have been changed to pseudonyms.

Interview with Sarah

The first interview that I conducted was with an EL teacher from an alternative high school in a first-ring suburb in a large Midwest metropolitan area. I will call her Sarah. Sarah works at a school that serves mostly newcomer EL students in levels one and two. Her students are mostly Karen refugees, but she also has refugee students from Nepal/Bhutan, East Africa, and some Latino students who are not refugees. Sarah's school does not document their numbers of SLIFE, but she reports that almost all of them would be considered SLIFE if you go by the definition of two years or more behind their peers in literacy and academics.

When asked to describe a “typical SLIFE student” at her school, Sarah first said that it’s difficult to define a “typical” SLIFE because they are all so different and unique. She mentioned that one quality that many of her SLIFE bring is a lot of practical knowledge, for example, being able to build a house out of bamboo. She went on to describe a Karen student of hers who did not attend school in the refugee camp because he did not like getting hit. This student is now seventeen years old and in his fifth year in the country, but is still in newcomer classes and struggles with literacy. She also pointed out that she has other students who come in with seven or eight years of education and that these students have more school skills and can progress through the levels more quickly. She said that while both of these students would be considered “SLIFE” there is a huge difference between them.

When I asked Sarah what she felt the most prepared for related to SLIFE when she finished her teacher education program, she said that she had a class where they had to take activities and assessments and adapt them for level one students. She said this was helpful because it got her thinking of low literacy students. When asked what she felt the least prepared for related to SLIFE after completing her program, she said,

I didn’t understand how huge the cultural piece was... I knew about cultural bias on tests, but I didn’t understand how important oral culture was in learning. Now looking at Karen and Somali, they don’t have centuries of written culture like Western cultures have. They might think they have a lot of books, but not really. I have to remind myself of how difficult things are... Teachers don’t understand how small their (the students’) frame of reference is. For a kid in a refugee camp, they don’t have jobs to go to in the morning. In the morning, they line up for water, then they line up for their rice, and their fish paste, and their oil and beans every day. Then they land here, and we wonder why they’re scared to take the bus. So, even if I think I’m prepared, I’m not.

My next set of questions involved how to improve teacher education programs as they relate to SLIFE learning and addressing SLIFE needs. My first question asked if teacher programs should address

teaching basic literacy to SLIFE, and Sarah said yes, and that even with a reading license she still did not feel prepared and still does not. When asked for suggestions on how programs could address this, Sarah suggested looking at both elementary literacy programs and adult education literacy programs and taking ideas and strategies from both of them. She also said that new teachers of SLIFE need to know what not to use, for example, using a phonics program designed for native English speakers. She explained that this was not appropriate for SLIFE because these programs use a lot of words that students don't know in their oral English and if students don't understand the words, they will not remember how to read or write them.

When I asked Sarah if she thought teacher education programs should address ways to build academic background for students, she said yes, and gave a number of suggestions to improve this. She said,

We need to build academic background through experiences. Movies are really helpful, doing things, experiential learning, service learning, lots of pictures when you have to be in the classroom, trying to do things orally before thinking you have to write it down. Everything you write you should get them to say. We are so print-oriented that when I write on the board I think, "This doesn't mean anything to these kids. Why am I giving them all these words?" The students need basic English and we jump straight into the academic. We don't give them enough of the hands-on.

When I asked Sarah if ESL teacher education programs should address ways to make lessons culturally relevant for SLIFE, she said yes, and again had several suggestions for ways to approach this. She said that culturally relevant teacher training needs to be given to all teachers, not just teachers of SLIFE. She said that teacher programs should address ways that SLIFE cultures are different. She suggested MALP® as a good place to start because it is focused on oral language and begins with what is familiar to a student and builds language and academic concepts from there. She also suggested that we try to relate everything to something tangible in their world and get students to teach us things at the same time so they feel valued.

I asked Sarah if she felt that teacher education programs should address meeting the needs of SLIFE who are victims of trauma. She said yes, but that the burden should not be placed on the teachers to take care of trauma issues. She said that teacher education programs should make teachers aware of the issues, and give teachers the tools to put students in touch with resources who can help them. She said that a big piece of that relates to advocacy for students.

I asked Sarah if she thought that teacher education programs should address appropriate placement and paths to graduation for SLIFE, and she said yes, but that is also a matter of greater district and statewide policy. She suggested that teacher education programs make new teachers aware of programs and models that have been successful for SLIFE in other states or other countries so that teachers can more effectively advocate for changes in programming for SLIFE.

At the end of our interview, I asked Sarah if there was anything else that she wished her teacher education program had addressed that had not already been mentioned, and she said that not only did she wish that there was more attention paid to SLIFE in teacher education programs, but that a distinction should be made between students who have no schooling and those who have limited schooling or interrupted schooling. She said that there are big differences between these students and it's sometimes inappropriate to have them in the same classes. She also said that teachers of SLIFE need to look not just at the academics, but come to terms with the fact that many of these students are not going to go to college. She said that within teacher education programs there should be some discussion around how to give students vocational and job skill training along with academic work.

Interview with Katherine

My next interview was with a teacher on the East Coast who works at a newcomer high school that serves a high number of SLIFE. I will call her Katherine. Most of the students in her school would be considered SLIFE, but like Sarah, she said there was a huge range of experience and ability within that group of students. She has many years of experience working with SLIFE (or SIFE, as they are called in her state) and has recently been involved in writing a SLIFE English Language Arts and Foundational Literacy curriculum with her state's Department of Education. Katherine shared that she was excited to see the topic of this study because she felt very underprepared to work with SLIFE when she finished her Master's program and said that in her state, when she attends professional conferences it often turns into a "support group" for teachers of SLIFE.

When I asked Katherine to reflect on what she felt the most prepared for related to meeting SLIFE needs, she said all the theory she learned around bilingualism and cultural relevancy are applicable because SLIFE are ELs, so they are not a completely different group; they're just a subgroup. When asked what she felt least prepared for related to meeting SLIFE needs, she said she felt like she was not prepared for a lot. She said that nothing in her teacher education program related to teaching emergent literacy and that it would have helped to spend some time with SLIFE through a practicum experience. She said she was not prepared to work with students with no alphabet or handwriting skills, and that she didn't know where or how to start when she began working with these students. She also gave a great example of her students' lack of academic background when she said,

I was in a social studies class with a student from Togo, and the teacher showed a map. Teachers assume that students know how to read maps. These students hadn't seen maps before and had no concept that the whole country of the United States was represented in a picture and that the dots on

the map were supposed to mean something. It was just such a huge gap in her academic background and thinking skills that we take for granted that students should take to the classroom when they're 15.

When I asked Katherine if she thought that ESL teacher education programs should address ways to teach basic literacy to SLIFE, she said yes, and that ESL teacher programs should all have a section about how to approach students who do not read in their first language. She said that new teachers need to understand the major differences between these students and literate students and how their lack of literacy affects their learning. She suggested that literacy programs should not necessarily begin with the alphabet and instead begin with whole language and build some ways for students to name themselves and the immediate world around them, and then attach the phonics and discrete skills to that bigger language context. Like Sarah, she also cautioned against using phonics programs that are designed for native English speakers and said that teachers of SLIFE need to be very discerning about the reading programs they choose for their students. She said that another challenge of teaching SLIFE is that many of the curricular materials for newcomer students are not appropriate for SLIFE because they are too print-heavy. As a result, many teachers of SLIFE have to create their own materials, and she said, "We reinvent lots of wheels in my program."

When I asked Katherine if she felt that ESL teacher education programs should address understanding the needs of SLIFE who were victims of trauma, she said yes, but also said that that training should be given to all new teachers, not just teachers of SLIFE. She said that it's very important to zoom out beyond trauma and for teachers to understand the cultural, political, linguistic, and historic backgrounds that students are coming from. She suggested that new teachers be trained on recognizing trauma, but also

on how to involve guidance counselors, social workers, and the students' families. She also noted that teachers need to advocate to give students electives, like art or gym, where they can have a chance to feel successful. She said that this is connected to the trauma piece because giving students an outlet to feel successful can help kids manage their mental health and sense of self in this new place.

When we began discussing the issue of SLIFE getting discouraged and dropping out of high school, Katherine shared a powerful statement when she said,

We've definitely seen it where kids, after a few years of not feeling successful, not grasping content, haven't gotten the intense services that they need. They've just been floundering in these grade level classes, and eventually they just don't graduate, or they drop out earlier and they go to work. That's sad. These are kids that I lose sleep over, because it's like, "What are we doing to them?"

Interview with Melissa

My next interview was with an EL teacher who works in a large traditional high school in a first ring suburb of a large Midwest metropolitan area. I will call her Melissa. She is in her seventh year of teaching there. Of the roughly 2,200 students at her school, 40% are students of color, and 10% are English Learners. The majority of the ELs are Karen refugees, but they also have students who are Hmong, Nepali/Bhutanese, Latino, and East African. They also have a smattering of highly educated students from China and India, many whose parents are working at a local university. At Melissa's school, the SLIFE are placed in the same EL classes with highly educated ELs, which she said makes things very difficult.

I began by asking Melissa to describe a typical SLIFE student in her class and to describe her SLIFE students' strengths and weaknesses. For strengths, she said that SLIFE bring a rich life history and some have a high level of motivation and gratitude for the education they are getting. However, she said

other SLIFE are not as motivated simply because they are not used to being in school and they don't understand the school system. She also pointed to a lack of literacy as a big weakness of her students. She summed up this challenges of teaching SLIFE when she said,

If they're not literate in their first language, which most SLIFE students are not or minimal, everything is so hard. Where to begin with them, retention is low. They need everything. They need background knowledge. Teaching reading to those students is a very slow process. Their grammar is atrocious, and it's not their fault. They don't know the concept of verb tense. With a student who is literate in Spanish, you can compare what it looks like in their language. With SLIFE kids it's hard to get them to recognize that in their language.

I then asked Melissa what she felt the most prepared for and the least prepared for when it came to teaching SLIFE students. She said that one thing that prepared her was the work that she did in a literacy course related to academic language functions and teaching students not just the meaning of academic vocabulary, but also how to perform an academic language function, such as seeking information. She also mentioned that she was introduced to the importance of advocating for EL students in her program, but she was not prepared for the high level of advocacy that she would have to do when she started teaching. As she said, "This is an advocacy job," and she reports that she was not prepared to have to advocate for students on so many levels, from helping them to meet their daily needs, to educating everyone in her building and district about who SLIFE are and what their needs are.

In addition to the advocacy piece, Melissa said that she did not feel prepared to address many academic needs of her students. She said her SLIFE students enter school with so many needs that she didn't know how to prioritize or where to begin. Like Sarah, she also felt unprepared to talk to students about realistic options for their future beyond high school. She describes feeling like a "dream squasher" when she tells students that it is unlikely they will be able to become a doctor when they are in tenth grade

and reading at a first grade reading level. She said, “I wasn’t prepared for those real conversations with students about life plans. I had no idea.”

When I asked Melissa if she thought that ESL teacher education programs should address teaching basic literacy to SLIFE, she said, “Yes, absolutely because I have no idea how to teach literacy. I just make it up as I go. The only thing that’s helping me right now is that I have a kindergartner who is learning how to read.” She suggests having a SLIFE component in each literacy class of a teacher education program and that lessons should be presented on a spectrum of how they would look for a highly educated student, and how they would look for a SLIFE student. She suggests adding a SLIFE component not just to literacy courses, but also to all courses in the ESL teacher education program.

Next, I asked Melissa if she thought ESL teacher education programs should address ways to build academic background for SLIFE. She said yes, and that while ways to access students’ background knowledge was covered in her program, it was not addressed related to SLIFE. She said with SLIFE you have to go much more slowly and start from the ground up. She also remarked on how much time she needs to spend building academic background for her SLIFE students, and it’s difficult to balance that with all the other academic demands that are being placed on students. She said,

One thing I really struggle with at my school is that teachers are so attached to standards and content, but what’s the point if the students, particularly SLIFE students, don’t understand any of it? If you’re flying through content, they won’t remember anything. How do you go deeper? That’s the advocacy part of the job where you have to convince other teachers and administrators to slow down, and that it’s ok to slow down.

Next I asked Melissa if she thought that ESL teacher programs should address making lessons culturally relevant for SLIFE, and like Sarah, she said that culturally relevant teaching should be given to

all new teachers, not just teachers of SLIFE. She said that having an influx of SLIFE was a shock to her entire school and everyone could use more strategies on adapting things for these students. Also related to culture, she said that it's very important that professors in ESL teacher education programs are familiar with and can educate future teachers about major cultural groups in the area. She shared that she was very disappointed when she spoke with an ESL professor at a local university who did not know who Karen people were, and that while professors can't be all knowing, they should be familiar with the major cultural communities in the Metro area.

When I asked Melissa if she thought that ESL teacher education programs should address ways to help SLIFE who are victims of trauma, she said yes, but that it goes beyond just the ESL teachers. She said that our entire school system in our state needs to work on figuring out how to better address the needs of trauma victims. She shared that she has had several student who had experienced war in their countries and came to the United States with post-traumatic stress disorder. She described how difficult it was to get mental health services for these students and that one of them has now dropped out and sits at home and drinks beer. She said, "What could I have done for that student? This is the kind of stuff that keeps me up at night."

Next, I asked Melissa if she thought that ESL teacher education programs should address appropriate placement and paths to graduation for SLIFE, and she said yes, but again that education on SLIFE issues should not involve just ESL teachers, but everyone in the education system. She said,

If you have one recommendation to take away from me, it would be that all of this needs to be addressed in ESL teacher programs, but it needs to be addressed in ALL education programs. Do they talk about this in counseling programs? Do they talk about this in administrative programs? Do they talk about SLIFE when you become a school social worker? We're all learning on the job here. Any awareness, case studies and practical experience with this is necessary.

Finally, I asked Melissa if there was anything else that she wished that her teacher education program had addressed related to SLIFE that had not already been mentioned, and she said that knowing when and how to refer her EL students for special education is very difficult. She mentioned having students who did not have their nutritional and health needs met when they were young and that these students now have learning delays and other issues. She said that the process of getting SLIFE referred for special education is very difficult and “Someone needs to write their PhD on the EL/special ed issue and share it with the rest of us.”

Interview with Tom

My final interview was with Tom, an EL teacher in his tenth year of teaching at an alternative high school with a 100% EL population in a large Upper Midwest urban setting. He estimates that roughly two-thirds of the students at his school are SLIFE. They have between twenty and twenty-five different languages spoken at the school. Their largest population is Karen students, and they also have a growing number of East African and Latino students.

Tom described his SLIFE students’ strengths as a willingness to learn and a high level of participation. He said that his students will often try their best and want to achieve high marks. He described their biggest weakness as not knowing how the school system works, for example, how to study and when to study. He says that they are open to learning a new way, but it takes a long time, and sometimes takes more time than they have.

When I asked Tom what he felt the most prepared and least prepared for regarding teaching SLIFE, he said that he felt the most prepared to create language objectives. He said that he left his program with a

strong grounding in writing good objectives and an understanding that it was his job to do that. Regarding what he felt the least prepared for, he said,

Teaching reading. Teaching students without any literacy. I was not prepared for that. How I worked with my own children when they were learning to read was not necessarily helpful in teaching young adults to develop their literacy. They did not have access to materials. They were not exposed to the same environment as most American students. I didn't know where to begin. What was I standing in the middle of? I didn't really know.

Tom also mentioned that he was not prepared to teach pronunciation, and that it was only after a few years of teaching that he realized the importance of teaching oral skills.

When I asked Tom if he thought that ESL teacher programs should address teaching basic literacy to SLIFE, he said yes. Like Melissa, he said that this should be covered not only in the literacy classes, but that all the ESL courses should cover what that subject material looks like through a "SLIFE lens."

On the question of if ESL teacher education programs should address ways to build academic background for SLIFE, Tom had several good insights to share. He said that yes, this should be covered, but that as a state we need to look at high school standards and whether they are appropriate for students without any literacy. He describes the issue of gaps in students' background knowledge very well when he says,

Social studies, for instance. You can't expect them to understand certain scenarios from history without understanding what came before, and how things are connected. You always hear, "They should have had that in x grade." But they didn't have that grade. If you just consider the average student and what they build through their elementary years, especially 4th, 5th, and 6th grade where the rigor is really stepping up. If they miss that, they don't really have a foundation.

To address this issue, Tom suggests making all teachers aware of gaps in students' background knowledge and working as a team to give students some building blocks of knowledge. He also suggests fostering peer

mentoring relationships between SLIFE students and mainstream students who might be able to tutor students to help fill in some of the gaps in their education.

When I asked Tom if he thought that teacher education programs should address ways to create culturally relevant lessons for SLIFE, he said yes, and like other interviewees thought that this should be part of all teacher education programs. He said that teachers need to work to understand the background of the populations that they work with in order to understand some of the sensitivities of those cultures. He also suggested that teacher examine some of their own biases with expectations that they place on students. In order to help new ESL teachers understand SLIFE, he suggested providing short field experiences for them and said,

Not necessarily a ten week thing or a three week thing. Maybe some shorter experiences where it could be more manageable for the cooperating teacher, where it wasn't this big commitment. But if it was an opportunity to share what you know about this group and to get exposure. Maybe they could write a lesson plan together.

Tom had a lot to say to the question of whether ESL teacher education programs should address ways to help students who are victims of trauma. He agreed with his counterparts that teacher education programs should address the effects of trauma on students and the warning signs of trauma and PTSD, but he also said that more of an effort needs to be made to educate new ESL teachers on resources in the community that are available for new immigrant families. He also suggested having ESL teacher candidates spend some time in refugee resettlement agencies to understand the process. He said that teachers need to understand the issues affecting SLIFE, because those issues often pull them out of the classroom. He connected this to advocacy for students, and said,

I had one course on advocacy as a grad student, but there should be more on that from the beginning, that you WILL be an advocate, so how are you going to do that? In a bureaucracy-laden environment, especially for people who are going to be in small programs where they may be the only one. How will they fight for their students and involve families? I often ask myself, what are we doing for families? Do families know more about this process and this system than they did six months ago?

Next I asked Tom if he thought that ESL teacher education programs should address paths to graduation and post-secondary options for SLIFE, and he said yes, that was important. He said that talking to students early and individually is key, but that it takes manpower to do that. He said that teachers need to know what to tell students to put them on the right path right away in order to retain students in school. He also talks to students about employment options and about finding work that can help them support a family, but will also put them on a good path. He tries to connect students to employment resources in the community in order to help build their confidence and see that there are many options for them. He told a story about how teachers shared their personal stories about college at this school, saying,

We have been sharing personal stories from the staff at (school name). (Guidance counselor) has done an amazing job of putting up posters about why teachers went to college. Some of us made presentations and everyone's path was different. My path took years and years. It doesn't just take four years like they (the students) have heard about. Sometimes it takes 13 years. And, you can have a family and still go after what you want. What you're doing is perfectly okay for you. You have to help them understand that they don't have to stop or settle.

When I asked Tom what else he wished his teacher education program should have covered that had not already been mentioned, and he said that he wasn't prepared for the high level of differentiation that he would have to do in his classes. He said, "I've got students who have had eight years of school in the same class with students who are just learning how to use a pencil. I wasn't prepared for those gaps between students." Like the other interviewees before him, he said he also was not prepared for the lack of

instructional materials available for his SLIFE students and for having to create so many instructional materials on his own.

Conclusion

The teachers of SLIFE that I surveyed generally did not feel prepared by their teacher education program to meet the academic, literacy, emotional and physical, and cultural needs of the SLIFE students in their classes. Many teachers have sought and are still searching for continued training on how to better serve these students, and many feel that the traditional high school model does not provide a proper learning path for SLIFE students.

In this chapter, I presented the results of my survey and interviews. In Chapter Five, I will discuss my findings, limitations, and implications of my research study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In this research project, I attempted to answer these questions: 1) *What perceptions do teachers have of their preparation to teach secondary EL SLIFE?* and 2) *What do they wish their teacher education program had addressed related to teaching SLIFE?* This chapter will include a discussion of the study's findings, limitations, implications for educators, and suggestions for further research.

Findings

Through the administration of my survey, I was able to answer most of my research questions, but my interviews provided more depth and personal stories about the issues affecting ELL teachers of SLIFE. My first research question was: *What perceptions do teachers have of their preparation to teach secondary EL SLIFE?* My second research question was: *What do they wish their teacher education program had addressed related to teaching SLIFE?* This question goes hand-in-hand with my first research question, so many of the things that teachers felt unprepared for were things that they wished would have been addressed in their teacher education program.

In general, the teachers that I surveyed did not feel adequately prepared to address the various needs of SLIFE in their classes. Many described feeling overwhelmed when they first started teaching SLIFE and felt that their ESL teacher education program did not prepare them to work with students who had low literacy and limited schooling.

Many teachers said that they were not prepared to teach basic literacy and fill in gaps in students' academic background knowledge. Many of them described the difficulty of having to teach students to “do school” and they felt that they did not have the tools and resources to do this properly. Several teachers also pointed to a lack of appropriate curriculum and instructional resources for SLIFE as a major challenge. Teachers did not feel that their teacher education program addressed different learning styles of SLIFE and ways to create culturally relevant lessons for these students.

Many teachers of SLIFE also reported that they were not prepared to confront issues of emotional trauma that many of their students were dealing with, and did not know how to put students in touch with community resources that could help them. Finally, the teachers that I surveyed did not feel prepared to advocate for their students and reported that they did not realize that advocacy was such a big part of the job of teaching SLIFE.

Limitations

One of the biggest limitations of my study was the small sample size. I surveyed sixteen teachers and interviewed four. So, it is difficult to generalize these findings to all EL teachers who work with SLIFE. I also did not ask any questions about specific teacher education programs, so it is hard to say if these findings are limited to just a few ESL teacher education programs, or many programs. Also, several of my participants finished their teacher education program more than ten years ago, so it is possible that teacher education programs made some changes to incorporate SLIFE needs into their program. It is also possible that the greater the time elapsed since they were students in a teacher preparation program, the lower the degree of accurate recall teachers may have regarding what exactly took place in that program.

Finally, the participants in my study were limited mostly to Minnesota, so their experiences with SLIFE were limited to the dominant cultural groups in this area, primarily Karen, East African, and Nepali students, among others.

Another limitation of my research study is that my participants were all teachers in secondary education programs. This was intentional since I wanted to address the specific challenges of teaching SLIFE in a secondary setting. However, SLIFE are present in many middle school and adult education programs as well, and those teachers' voices and perceptions were not represented in my study. Also, the questions in my survey and interviews were primarily focused on coursework in ESL teacher education programs, and did not relate to practicum or student teaching experiences. It would be helpful to ask specific questions about how these experiences may have helped to prepare new teachers of SLIFE.

Implications

There were several recommendations and implications that arose as I interpreted the survey responses and listened to my interviewees. One recommendation that I heard repeatedly from respondents was that attention to SLIFE needs should be included in every aspect of ESL teacher education programs. Many respondents recommended taking what is normally taught in an ESL program and asking, "What does this look like for a SLIFE student?" or "How does what and how we teach change when we have students with limited formal education or low/no literacy?" This should be done in courses on literacy, cultural diversity, second language acquisition, advocacy, and ESL methods, among others. Another recommendation from respondents is that SLIFE issues be addressed not just in ESL teacher education programs, but in all teacher education programs. EL teachers need to understand SLIFE needs, but many

others do as well, including mainstream teachers, school administrators, school social workers, guidance counselors, and school nurses. I would also add educational policy makers to the list of people who need to be educated on SLIFE issues. Just as I did in Chapter Two, I will break these implications and recommendations into the areas of ways that teacher education programs can prepare new teachers to address academic, literacy, emotional, and physical needs of SLIFE.

Addressing Academic and Literacy Needs of SLIFE in Teacher Education Programs

There were a few suggestions of how teacher education programs could better address the academic needs of SLIFE. One was to provide case studies on SLIFE for teacher candidates to study. This could help them understand what kinds of skills SLIFE may be lacking when they enter U.S. classrooms. It could also help teacher candidates understand what to expect for typical progress from a SLIFE student versus a long-term learner or a highly school newcomer EL. Respondents also recommended giving teacher candidates field experiences with SLIFE. Efforts should be made to place them in settings where they can meet SLIFE students and understand their educational needs up close. It would also be helpful for them to speak with teachers of SLIFE and understand what challenges they are facing. This is supported by Hones' (2002) work in dialogic teacher research in which teacher candidates were required to complete field experiences with refugee students. The study found that these new teachers became more compassionate and willing to work with refugee students when they became knowledgeable about their backgrounds.

Another recommendation from respondents was that teacher education programs address how to differentiate for SLIFE within a mixed ability EL class. As referenced in Chapter Two, SLIFE who are non-literate or semiliterate in their first language need specialized literacy programs, not just language

programs (Woods, 2002). EL teachers need to advocate for newcomer SLIFE to be grouped into a separate class where they could have their academic and literacy needs met. As Montero, Newmaster, and Ledger (2014) have shown, SLIFE can acquire literacy and potentially make a successful transition to mainstream classes and postsecondary education when they have a specific reading program like guided reading that targets instruction at their level. However, the reality of most secondary schools is that these students are placed in the same classes with highly schooled newcomer students and sometimes with long-term English learners, and are often placed in mainstream classes prematurely. So, it is important for new EL teachers to understand the unique needs of each of these groups of students and how to differentiate for them in an EL class.

There is also a recommendation that ESL teacher education programs provide teacher candidates with curriculum and resources for teaching SLIFE. Many respondents reported having to create all of their own curricula, which took time away from providing more refined instruction for their students. Another issue raised by respondents is that the traditional high school model does not adequately meet SLIFE needs, and students are often rushed through ELL classes and pushed into mainstream classes before they are ready. It is often a race against time when educating SLIFE due to increased pressure on students to finish high school in four years, and with the time constraint of students ageing out of high school at 21 years old. However, educators need to be aware of the research that shows that SLIFE with limited print literacy require seven to ten years to achieve academic language proficiency (Collier, 1995). So, for schools to expect a semiliterate or non-literate SLIFE student who comes to the United States at age 14 or 15 to achieve the literacy and academic skills to reach grade level parity and graduate high school in four years is a total disservice to that student. This is a reminder of the one-size-fits-all curriculum that I mentioned in

Chapter One that results in SLIFE receiving only a superficial understanding of material and often dropping out as a result (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Secondary schools that serve SLIFE must allow these students more time to graduate from high school and must allow for alternative academic programming for these students that is tailored to their academic and literacy needs. EL teacher preparation programs are often viewed as experts in their field and should make recommendations to school districts and state policy makers to allow more time and alternative programming for these students. They also need to make future EL teachers aware of this issue so they can become stronger advocates for appropriate programming for SLIFE.

Addressing Emotional Needs of SLIFE in Teacher Education Programs

In my analysis of survey responses and conversations with interviewees, it was highly evident that many of my respondents were concerned about their students who were victims of trauma, and they were looking for ways to help these students. Several respondents commented on wanting a better understanding of the experiences of students who had survived war and violence, and the impact that it has on them. Teacher educators should educate themselves on the major cultural groups that are immigrating to their area and educate themselves on issues of war and violence that affected these groups in their home countries. It would be unrealistic to expect an ESL teacher educator to be an expert on things like post-traumatic stress disorder, but it would be advisable for them to consider inviting a guest speaker from a place like the Center for Victims of Torture to discuss trauma issues in one of their ESL teacher education classes (Johnson, 2005). This person could provide teacher candidates with the tools on what warning signs to look for with trauma victims, and what community resources to connect these students to when they

encounter mental health issues. School social workers and administrators also need to be educated on the effects of trauma and need to be aware of trauma experiences from war that are common with cultural groups like the Karen. These students' mental health needs should be a priority, and schools should value electives such as art and physical education as possible places of emotional healing for victims of trauma (Johnson, 2005). As I explained in Chapter Two, trauma issues have a huge impact on language learning (Watson & Bigelow, 2012), but when teachers and schools receive adequate training on the effects of trauma and how to support students in culturally sensitive ways, schools can become places of emotional healing for students (Eisenbruch, 1988).

Addressing Cultural Needs of SLIFE in Teacher Education Programs

As I described in Chapter Two, SLIFE students often experience a loss of cultural identity as they transition to a new life in the United States (Eisenbruch, 1988). When SLIFE are placed in school environments that are culturally insensitive or discriminatory, the psychological results can be devastating for them (Carter, 1999). ESL teacher education programs need to educate future EL teachers on the cultures of immigrant and refugee students and prepare them to help their students successfully acculturate in the United States. Several respondents recommended that teacher education programs provide teacher candidates training on models such as MALP[®] to give them some tools on creating culturally relevant lessons for SLIFE. This would provide a solid framework to adapt lessons to integrate many of the cultural values of SLIFE (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Another recommendation is to integrate bilingual education as much as possible (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). This would improve students' language and literacy acquisition, and would also enable them to maintain part of their home language and cultural identity.

In addition, the cultural norms and needs of SLIFE and refugee students need to be addressed in all teacher education programs, not only ESL teacher education programs. As McBrien (2005) states, teachers need to confront their own attitudes toward immigrant and refugee children and create classrooms in which there is multicultural education and respect for children of all backgrounds and cultures. Without training on how to do this, U.S. classrooms and schools run the risk of becoming places of cultural misunderstanding and discrimination for SLIFE.

Addressing the Need to Advocate for SLIFE in Teacher Education Programs

A final recommendation from my research study can be summed up in one word: advocacy. SLIFE have a wide variety of needs, and they need a strong advocate in their school to help meet those needs. Since the EL teachers are usually their first and most solid contact in the school, it usually falls to them to be that advocate. Advocacy for SLIFE happens in several different areas of the school, and EL teacher candidates need training on how to navigate and advocate in each area. First, SLIFE often need advocacy in meeting daily needs, such as knowing how to take the bus or understanding a letter about their social security benefits. Furthermore, teachers of SLIFE need to advocate for their students at placement offices and with counselors to ensure that their students are placed in appropriate classes. Finally, teachers of SLIFE often have to educate their colleagues and administration on who SLIFE are and how their needs differ from a typical English learner. Having someone in their corner can sometimes make all the difference for SLIFE. As McBrien (2005) states, “I have often found that positive teachers (who were often ESL teachers), parental support, refugee peer support, and a welcoming refugee youth center helped students to stay in school in spite of unwelcoming situations from school staff and U.S. peers” (p. 354).

Further Research

This was a very small research study, so it would be useful to conduct a similar study with a wider sampling of teachers from a variety of teacher education programs. It may also help to survey teachers of SLIFE in different areas of the country to see if their perceptions were different from those of my respondents who were primarily from the Upper Midwest and who worked with primarily Karen and East African students. As I mentioned in the Limitations section, this survey was only conducted with teachers of SLIFE at the secondary level, so it would also be useful to survey teachers of middle school and adult settings.

Another useful study to expand on this subject would be to survey ESL teacher educators about their knowledge of SLIFE issues and to ask them how they address teaching SLIFE in their programs. It would also be valuable to incorporate students' voices as well. Further research could include surveying SLIFE and their families about their school experience and ask them for suggestions on how educators could better meet their needs.

Conclusion

Clearly, helping SLIFE make the transition and experience success in U.S. classrooms is no easy task. These are often students who have already experienced a lifetime's worth of hardship and trauma and to whom fate has not been kind. They have been uprooted from their home country and culture and are struggling to find a new sense of self in a place that is completely foreign to them. They are placed in high school because of their age, yet their academic and literacy needs match those of an elementary student. They are frequently placed in "English only" programs where they are expected to learn English and leave

their native language behind. When their language, academics, and literacy don't progress fast enough for them to keep up in their mainstream high school classes, they are tempted to drop out, and some of them do. But, many of them persist. When I look at the above list of challenges, I wonder who would want to take on the extremely difficult task of educating these students. I and many other teachers take this on, and I love my job because of those students who persist. Their resilience is an inspiration to me, and their ability to persist in the face of countless challenges is nothing short of amazing. SLIFE students are fighting for a better life in the United States, and they know that education is the key to a better life. We owe it to these students to give them the best education possible that meets them where they are at, addresses their academic, literacy, emotional, and cultural needs, and puts them on a path to postsecondary success. It is my sincere hope that all teacher educators will educate themselves on the profile and needs of SLIFE and integrate the education of SLIFE into their teacher education programs.

APPENDIX A

Checklist for Identifying SLIFE

DeCapua, A., Smathers, W. & Tang, L.F. (2009). *Meeting the needs of students with limited or interrupted schooling: A guide for educators*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

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Checklist for Identifying Potential SLIFE

Student's Name _____

Evaluator _____

Interpreter's Name _____

Date of Evaluation _____

1. _____ English is not the primary language of the home.
2. _____ came to the U.S. after Grade 2
3. _____ upon enrollment, has had at least two years less schooling than peers
4. _____ functions at least two years below expected grade level in reading
5. _____ functions at least two years below expected grade level in math
6. _____ is pre-literate in native language
7. _____ low literacy level in the native language
8. _____ lack of complete educational records
9. _____ Parent/guardian reports student has missed schooling.
10. _____ poor attendance records from prior schools
11. _____ consistent absences in the current school
12. _____ consistent lateness in the current school
13. _____ poor grades
14. _____ weak grasp of academic content
15. _____ limited experiences in content area classes in English
16. _____ poor performance on standardized tests

APPENDIX B

MALP[®] Teacher Planning Checklist

DeCapua, A. & Marshall, H. (2011). *Breaking new ground: Teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education in U.S. secondary schools*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

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MALP Teacher Planning Checklist[©]

A. Accept Conditions for Learning
A1. I am making this lesson/project immediately relevant to my students.
A2. I am helping students develop and maintain interconnectedness.
B. Combine Processes for Learning
B1. I am incorporating both shared responsibility and individual accountability.
B2. I am scaffolding the written word through oral interaction.
C. Focus on New Activities for Learning
C1. I am focusing on tasks requiring academic ways of thinking.
C2. I am making these tasks accessible to my students with familiar language and content.

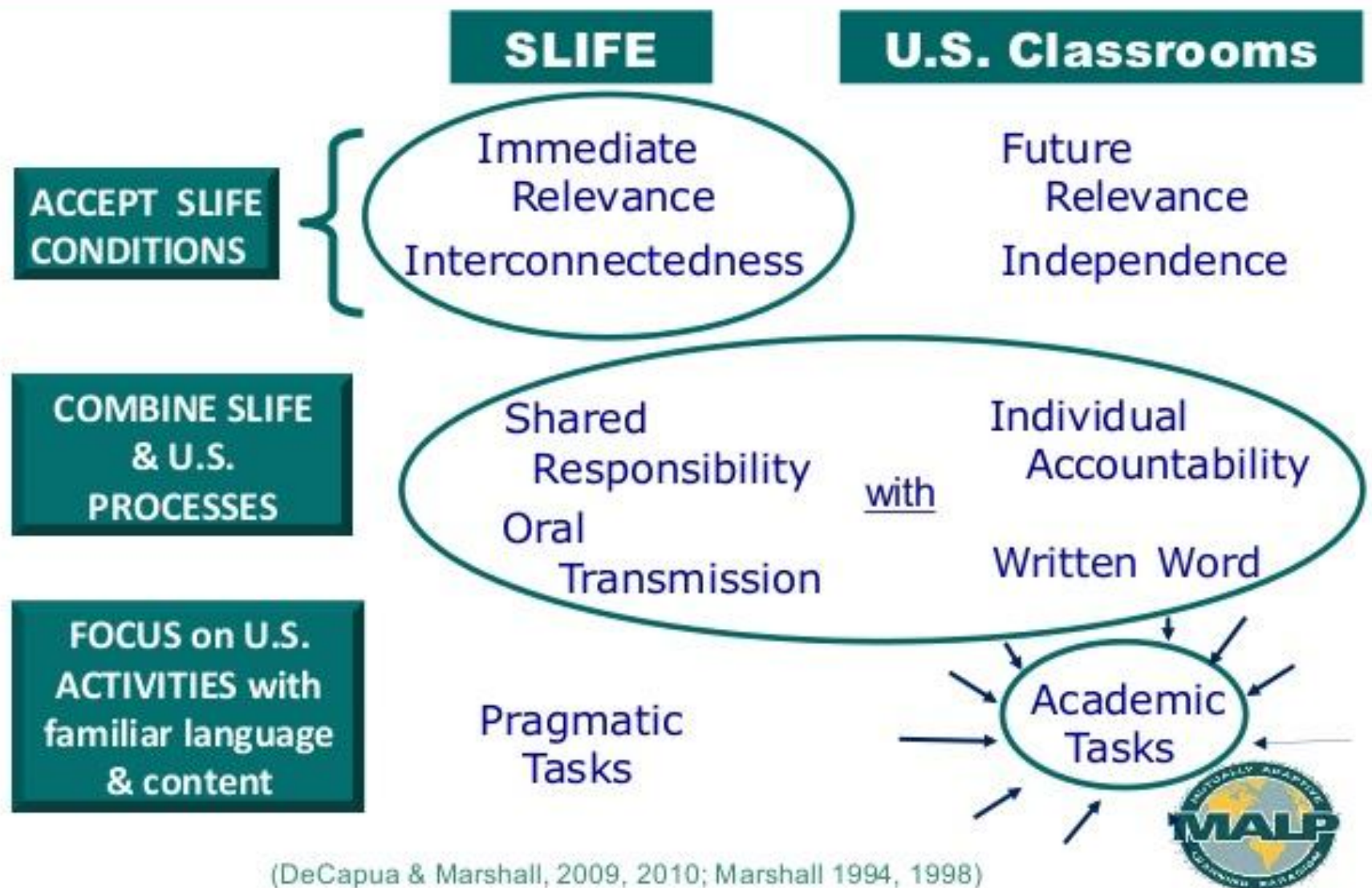
APPENDIX C

MALP[®] Instructional Model

DeCapua, A. & Marshall, H. (2013). *Making the transition to classroom success: Culturally responsive teaching for struggling language learners*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

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Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm - MALP Instructional Model



APPENDIX D

SLIFE Teacher Preparation Survey Questions

Introduction: Please reflect on your experience working with English Learners who, to the best of your knowledge, are Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE). According to Freeman and Freeman (2003), SLIFE are described as students who are secondary aged, who are two or more years behind their age group in academic content knowledge, and who may or may not be literate in their first language.

Your Background

1. Your name:
2. Your email address:

3. How many years of experience do you have teaching at the secondary level?
 - a. 2 or less
 - b. 3-5
 - c. 6-8
 - d. 9-15
 - e. 15 or more

4. How many years has it been since you received your ESL teaching license?
 - a. 2 or less
 - b. 3-5
 - c. 6-8
 - d. 9-15
 - e. 15 or more

5. During your years teaching at the secondary level, please estimate the percentage of students in your class who have limited formal education.
 - a. less than 10%
 - b. 10-25%
 - c. 25-50%
 - d. 50-75%
 - e. 75-100%

7. How much information did you receive regarding the presence of students with limited formal education in U.S. and Minnesota classrooms?
 - a. None
 - b. Very little
 - c. Some
 - d. Just enough
 - e. A full understanding

5. How well did assignments, readings, and course activities address ways to address the emotional and physical needs of students with limited formal education?
 - a. Not at all
 - b. Not enough
 - c. OK
 - d. Well
 - e. Very well

6. How well did assignments, readings, and course activities address ways to meet the academic needs of students with limited formal education?
 - a. Not at all
 - b. Not enough
 - c. OK
 - d. Well
 - e. Very well

7. How well did assignments, readings, and course activities address ways to meet the cultural needs of students with limited formal education?
 - a. Not at all
 - b. Not enough
 - c. OK
 - d. Well
 - e. Very well

8. After completing your teacher education program, how prepared were you to teach students with limited formal education?

- a. Not prepared b. A little prepared c. Somewhat prepared d. Prepared e. Very prepared

Free Response

9. How would you describe the way that your teacher education program addressed the needs of SLIFE in the ESL classroom?

10. What do you wish you would have received more training on to meet the needs of SLIFE at the secondary level?

11. What type of training do you wish you had received to understand the specific cultural norms of SLIFE at the secondary level?

12. How have you pursued other opportunities to learn about teaching SLIFE?

13. What kind of information and training has been helpful to you in addressing the need of SLIFE at the secondary level?

16. Comments:

APPENDIX E

SLIFE Teacher Preparation Interview Questions

1. Could you tell me about your teaching background (your school, student population)?
2. Please describe the typical SLIFE student in your classroom. What are this student's strengths and weaknesses?
3. What did you feel the most prepared for when you started teaching SLIFE?
4. What did you feel the least prepared for when you started teaching SLIFE?
5. Do you think that ESL teacher education programs should address teaching basic literacy to SLIFE?
What suggestions do you have for ways to address this?
6. Do you think that ESL teacher education programs should address ways to build academic background for SLIFE? What suggestions do you have for ways to address this?
7. Do you think that ESL teacher education programs should address ways to create culturally relevant lessons for SLIFE? What suggestions do you have for ways to address this?
8. Do you think that ESL teacher education programs should address understanding the needs of SLIFE who are victims of trauma? What suggestions do you have for ways to address this?
9. Do you think that ESL teacher education programs should address appropriate placement and paths to graduation for SLIFE? What suggestions do you have for ways to address this?
10. Is there anything else that you wish that your teacher education program had addressed related to SLIFE that has not already been mentioned?

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