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Teacher Knowledge, Dispositions, and English Language Learner
Performance on a Standardized Mathematics Test**

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EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF ACQUIRING THE ESL ENDORSEMENT ON TEACHER
KNOWLEDGE, DISPOSITIONS, AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER
PERFORMANCE ON A STANDARDIZED MATHEMATICS TEST

Fawzia Boctor

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

National College of Education

National Louis University

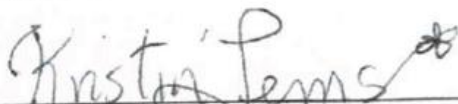
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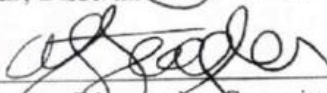
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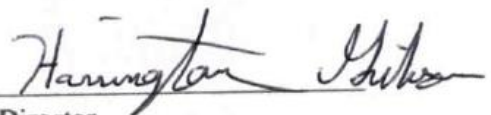
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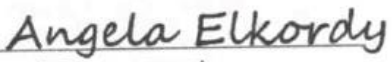
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ABSTRACT

Rising immigration to the United States has changed the demographic make-up of students in general education classrooms. Data from the 2000 Census establish that more than 14 million immigrants entered the United States during the 1990s. The percentage of English language learners (ELLs) in U.S. public schools increased from 8% (3.8 million students) in the year 2000 to 10% (5.0 million students) in 2017. Given this change, classroom teachers are expected to meet the needs of students in mainstream classrooms who are non-native speakers of English.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of teachers acquiring the ESL endorsement on the ESL outcomes of the ELL populations in elementary school and to compare classroom teachers with and without the ESL endorsement in terms of their ELL-related knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward the ELL students in their classrooms. A *t*-test, a questionnaire, and interviews were the three tools utilized to collect data to compare teachers' dispositions and level of knowledge in second-language-acquisition with and without the ESL endorsement. The findings showed that ESL-endorsed classroom teachers acquired better knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward ELL populations.

KEYWORDS: English language learners (ELLs), English learners (ELs), English as a second language (ESL), English as a second language endorsement (ESL endorsement), academic achievement for English language learners, general education teachers, mainstream teachers, content teachers, and grade level teachers.

PREFACE

This dissertation you are about to read is my personal story, professional insights, and research interest. The first lesson that Professor Harrington Gibson, the director of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program at National Louis University, taught me was:

Doctoral candidates serving in leadership roles must highlight their voices, experiences, and commitment to solving challenges in their educational environments. This requires that their personal stories, professional insights, and research interests come together in ways that inform inquiry that is used to improve policies and practices occurring in a variety of learning environments. (personal communication, 2018)

While I am in my fourth year as a bilingual district leader, my experience comprises 16 years as an ESL resource teacher in the United States and six years as an English as a foreign language teacher abroad. Teaching and working with bilingual students has been my professional passion. I completed a master's degree in applied linguistics in 2007 and another master's degree in school leadership in 2014. When I was asked to choose a topic for my dissertation, I chose English language learners.

My role as a district leader plays a critical role in this writing. I have witnessed the negative impact of some general education teachers lacking the foundational knowledge and understanding of second language acquisition. I also had seen the frustration some classroom teachers experienced when an ELL newcomer was placed in their classrooms. I have met and worked with teachers who believed in one-size instruction fits all students. Ethically, it is up to educators at all levels not only to value culturally and linguistically diverse students but also to ensure they receive a quality education. By no means does this study intend to blame classroom teachers for lacking ELL-related foundational knowledge. Without being prepared, many

teachers find themselves in a classroom facing the challenges of teaching language and academic content to both native and non-native English-speaking students in the same classroom.

The leadership lesson that has resonated the most from conducting this study is that leaders at district and building levels should not assume that general education teachers have the essential knowledge and skills to effectively meet the linguistic and cultural needs of ELLs. For ELL students to succeed, teachers need to receive explicit coursework and ongoing professional development in the fields of second language acquisition, ELL-related methodology, and assessments. Conducting interviews with teachers with and without ESL endorsement made me realize how it is critical to ensure that ELLs are taught by teachers who fully understand bilingualism and bilingual students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I give thanks to the beneficent God for allowing me to accomplish this aspiration and assigning the right people to contribute to my success. The completion of this project could not have been possible without the support of very distinguished professors whose efforts are sincerely appreciated and gratefully acknowledged. I would like to express my special thanks and gratitude to Professor Kristin Lems, my chairperson, and my dissertation committee members, Professor Angela Elkordy and Professor Jason Stegemoller. Thank you for the learning opportunities you provided me to grow personally and professionally.

My gratitude is also extended to Professor Elizabeth Minor and Professor Harrington Gibson, the director of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program. Thank you, Dr. Minor, for your ongoing support and guidance. Thank you, Dr. Gibson, for coordinating this excellent program at National Louis University.

DEDICATION

“This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24).

This research study is dedicated to my spiritual fathers, Father Mina Aboud, the Martyr, and Father Angelos-Ava Anthony. I thank them for their ongoing prayers and blessings.

I dedicate this work to my beloved husband, Michael, who motivated, supported, and believed in me when I doubted myself. Michael, I would not be the person I am today if it were not for you. A special shout out to my daughter, Marina. Thank you for your continuous support, encouragement, and motivation! I love you both so much.

Last but not least, I dedicate my doctoral degree to my parents, who always instilled in me the desire to pursue my academic dreams but parted to live in the paradise of joy before seeing this accomplishment. I know that their prayers have always strengthened me.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The rapid and ongoing increase in immigration in the United States has led to an immense presence in public schools of English language learners (ELLs), or students who speak languages other than English, and a change in the demographic makeup of classrooms. At present, mainstream classrooms have been increasingly filled with linguistically and culturally diverse students (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2016). It was estimated that 25% of K-12 students in America were from immigrant families (Samson & Collins, 2012). A more recent report discloses that one out of every ten students in public schools in the United States is English Language Learner (Sanchez, 2017). Numbers of ELL students have been growing persistently. Data show that during the ten years between 1996 and 2006, the K-12 ELL population in public schools throughout the United States grew by 60 percent (Working Group on ELL Policy, 2009). Data also show that the percentage of ELLs in public schools increased from 3.8 million students in the fall of 2000 to 5 million students in the fall of 2017 (NCES, 2020). In 2019, 12% of students in Illinois public schools were identified as ELLs (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018).

Demographic reports indicate that Spanish is the native language for most ELL students and that most ELLs were born in the United States. For example, 86% of ELL populations in preschool to 5th grade were born in the United States (Sanchez, 2017). Generally, classroom teachers in the state of Illinois public schools may or may not have ELL students in their classrooms. However, with the significant increase in the number of immigrant families, teachers increasingly encounter diverse populations in their classrooms.

Unfortunately, general education teachers “have had little or no preparation for providing this type of assistance that such learners need” (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008, p. 36). Sanchez (2017) states that even though 90% of ELL students are enrolled in ELL programs and receive language support, they academically struggle because they have little access to quality instruction that fits their needs. Sanchez (2017) adds that ELLs are mostly enrolled in low-performing schools with poorly trained teachers.

In most cases, native English speakers develop the basic foundational understanding of English before they enter schools. Unlike native English speakers, ELL students enter schools at different ages and stages of language proficiency and academic knowledge backgrounds, which means that those ELL students must acquire both language and content at the same time. If classroom teachers lack the necessary pedagogical skills to provide the ELL students with adequate instruction that can fill the linguistic and academic gap, the ELLs will unlikely meet the academic standards that were established for all learners (Working Group on ELL Policy, 2009).

The identified problem that calls for change is those classroom teachers with ELLs in their classrooms who have little or no knowledge of essential pedagogy to efficiently meet the ELL students’ needs (Lucas et al., 2008). Research suggests, “The vast majority of general education teachers have had very little if any training related to teaching ELs” (Hopkins, Lowenhaupt, & Sweet, 2015, p. 411). By no means should classroom teachers be blamed for this lack of pedagogy for ELL. Teaching side by side both non-native speakers of English who enter the system with different language proficiency levels and native English-speaking students in the same classroom is a great challenge, especially if teachers are not equipped with the needed skills and knowledge to fulfill this role. Without the pedagogy for ELLs, general education

teachers struggle to meet the ELL students' linguistic and cultural needs (Samson & Collins, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to explore whether elementary general education classroom teachers with ESL endorsement could provide promising, responsive, cultural, and linguistic support for their diverse learners, which leads to better ELL outcomes. In this paper, the term "ESL endorsement" refers to an ESL certification or add-on endorsement to teachers with valid Illinois teaching certification.

The context of this study is a large urban school district, given the pseudonym River Valley School District. River Valley is located in a metropolitan community in northern Illinois and serves between 25,000 to 30,000 students enrolled in grades K through 12. River Valley strives to provide diverse students with learning opportunities and prepare them to be successful community members. The school district serves a large and diverse population. Seventy-one percent of the district students, including students of two or more races, are students of color. Seven percent of the families are homeless, and 54% of the families residing within the school district's boundaries qualify for the federal free lunch program. Data from the Illinois Report Card for the school year 2018-2019 inform that 16% of River Valley (K-12) populations are identified as ELLs or students who are not yet proficient in the English language. Student demographic data retrieved from the student information system, which is run by a software called PowerSchool, establish that during the school year of 2018-2019, about 14% of the ELL populations came to the United States through refugee agencies. A refugee is defined as:

A person outside the country of his or her nationality, who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution based

on his or her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. (“Fact sheet: U.S. refugee resettlement,” 2019)

District demographic data retrieved from PowerSchool also reveal that about 70 different languages and dialects are spoken by diverse students in the school district. However, the majority of bilingual students speak Spanish.

Purpose

According to the Illinois School Code (105 IL SC5/14C-3), school districts serve K-12 linguistically and culturally diverse students through two major models; one model is called transitional bilingual education (TBE), and the other is called a transitional program of instruction (TPI). If 20 or more ELL students who speak the same native language other than English are enrolled in the same school building, they must be offered the TBE program. The TBE program must provide instruction in both English and students’ native languages. If 19 or fewer ELL students speak the same native language other than English or when ELL students in a school building speak different native languages other than English, the TPI program (also known as an English as a second language /ESL program) can be offered to help students become proficient in English (Ruiz & Koch, 2010).

This research study evaluates the quality of education provided by general education teachers to ELL students in the TPI program. To recapitulate, the TPI program is designed for ELLs who are placed in grade-level mainstream classrooms. In this research, the usage of the term *ELL* referred to students identified as linguistically and culturally diverse. Those students who have been identified by the school district as ELLs and are entitled to receive the ESL services from an ESL-endorsed teacher for a certain amount of time during the school day while

being placed in (all English) grade-level classrooms for the remainder of the school day (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Most children who belong to immigrant families with different language backgrounds and needs enroll in (all English) grade-level classrooms, where general education teachers teach both native and non-native English speakers. This study used the phrases *general education teachers*, mainstream teachers, grade-level teachers, and *content teachers* interchangeably. All of the listed terms refer to classroom teachers who teach native and non-native English speakers in the same classroom.

Some states realized the crucial need to prepare classroom teachers to serve multicultural and diverse students better. In the state of California, all teachers with one or more ELLs in their classrooms must have an English learner certificate or authorization. In Florida, general education teachers must take at least three semester hours of teaching ESL. If teachers teach primary literacy, they must take 15 semester hours in ESL. In New York, teachers must take six semester hours in language acquisition and literacy (Samson & Collins, 2012).

As of this writing, compared to the other states mentioned, Illinois does not require specific courses to prepare teachers to support the ELL populations (Education Commission of the States, 2014). It is important to note that in the state of Illinois, general education classroom teachers who provide instruction to both native and non-native English speakers are not required by federal or state regulations to take a specific course or acquire a particular endorsement that would qualify them to deliver effective and equitable instruction to students who speak one or more languages at home other than English. Yet, it is fair to note that beginning July 1, 2013, the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards issued a subset of standards regarding teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. The subset of standards requires teacher candidates

to develop an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of culturally and linguistically diverse students to create instructional opportunities based on students' needs (Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, 2013). Still, since there are no required specific courses that can ensure the delivery of those standards, an argument could be made that this subset of existing standards may or may not be met. It is important to note that according to Section 21B-35 of the School Code, while all approved teacher preparation programs in the state of Illinois are required to include the ESL subset of standards to be infused in the preparation program when they are approved, Illinois rule does not currently include the ESL coursework as a requirement. Only those who have completed an out-of-state program would need to take a course in instructional strategies for ELLs (Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, 2019).

Rationale

Due to the increasing numbers of ELL populations in mainstream classrooms, all teachers need to be prepared to meet these populations' needs (de Oliveira & Burke, 2015). Several scholars argued that educators of linguistically and culturally diverse students are considered language education teachers, and as such, they should be held accountable for teaching language skills and prepared to meet the needs of ELLs (de Jong & Harper, 2005; de Oliveira & Burke, 2015; Samson & Collins, 2012; Wagner & King, 2012).

The purpose of this research was to examine the benefits of equipping grade-level elementary classroom teachers with the coursework of the essential principles and best practices of supporting ELLs. Depending on the study findings, a recommendation of a new district policy will be made to assure the qualification of general education teachers assigned to teach ELL populations in their mainstream classrooms.

In the state of Illinois, licensed general education teachers can become ESL-endorsed by completing 18 semester hours of credit with coursework that includes linguistics, theoretical foundations of teaching ESL, assessment of the bilingual student, methods, and materials for teaching ESL, cross-cultural studies for teaching limited-English-proficient students, one elective (an additional ESL or bilingual course), and 100 clock hours in an ESL setting (“Illinois State Board of Education,” n.d.).

These general education teachers are expected to provide differentiated instruction to ELL students with diverse needs. Professional observation and research indicate, “Teacher quality is critical to student learning; teacher preparation and expertise are part of the quality equation, but teachers of EL students often lack that preparation and expertise” (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005, p. 3). Samson and Collins (2012) stated, “Unfortunately, the rapid growth in the ELL population has not been matched by sufficient growth in teachers’ understanding of how to best educate these students” (p. 5).

As a bilingual administrator and a former ESL resource teacher, I provide guidance and support to general education and ESL resource teachers to ensure high quality and equitable teaching instruction delivered to linguistically and culturally diverse students in elementary schools at River Valley School District. Also, in my role, I ensure compliance with federal and state mandates and regulations regarding bilingual services. In addition to the study data, throughout this study, I share some related personal observations that support my argument, as I visit school buildings and interact with general education and ESL resource teachers, building administrators, community members, and parents. During my visits to school buildings, I listen to concerns and questions, making efforts to connect schools, parents, and the bilingual department.

Goals

The goal of my research is to investigate the significance and value of the ESL endorsement and its impact on both the outcomes of elementary ELL populations and teacher knowledge and dispositions. In other words, this study assessed whether general education classroom teachers need to complete an ESL-endorsement program to serve the ELL populations better. As a bilingual administrator, I value ESL endorsement coursework because it provides what teachers need to know about second language acquisition and strategies that teachers must use to scaffold instruction for ELLs. However, my confidence in the significance of the ESL endorsement needs to be tested. In the next chapter, we learn that misinterpreting ELL students' linguistic skills as learning disability has been the most common misconception among classroom teachers.

Furthermore, general education teachers frequently expect ELL students with high conversational skills to have already mastered academic English language. It is a misconception to consider students who can model social language fluently as proficient in the academic language. This misapprehension leads general education teachers to assume that low-achieving ELL students deal with a learning disability (Gil & Bardack, 2010). De Jong and Harper (2005) clarified, "In order to meet the needs of ELLs effectively, we have argued, teachers need to acquire specific knowledge and skills related to language and culture" (p. 116). One might wonder why general education grade-level teachers misinterpret their ELL students' needs. In my professional opinion, a better question would be: How do non-ESL-endorsed general education teachers know what they do not know or what they have not been taught about ELLs? As we journey together through this study, we will discover what general education teachers with no ESL endorsement might or might not be missing in the field of ELL pedagogy. What I

hoped to accomplish with this study, based on the study results, was to use data to establish a new district policy in teacher hiring. ELL populations deserve equitable education by adequately prepared teachers.

Research Questions

This study investigated the impact on ELL populations of having grade-level classroom teachers acquire the ESL endorsement. Placing numerous ELL students in classrooms taught by monolingual non-ESL-endorsed teachers, who know little or nothing about second language acquisition pedagogies, is concerning. Given this, this study investigated two questions; One was to examine whether the ESL endorsement had an impact on ELL academic outcomes. For this component, the ELLs were evaluated in mathematics. Two, the study examined how the ESL endorsement might impact teachers' knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward ELLs. The rationale for choosing the term *dispositions* was that it carries profound aspects that were explored throughout the journey of this program evaluation. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2008) defined professional dispositions as "Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities" (p.90). As discussed, this study answered the following questions:

1. What value (if any) is added to the outcomes of ELLs whose elementary classroom teachers have ESL endorsement?
2. In what ways does ESL endorsement impact elementary teachers' knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward their ELLs?

Conclusion

One out of every ten students in public schools in the U.S.A is an English Language Learner. ELLs have little or no access to quality instruction that addresses their needs. This chapter has expressed my rationale for choosing the topic of this dissertation. For the past 18 years, I have been working with English learners outside and inside the United States as an ESL resource teacher and a bilingual administrator. The question that I have never been able to answer is: if ESL resource teachers, who are assigned to provide instruction to help ELLs develop English language literacy and content skills for a certain number of minutes per day (30-45 minutes, in my school district), must obtain the ESL endorsement, should not the classroom teachers who teach ELLs for the remainder of the day also be required to acquire this endorsement? This study explored the connection between the ESL endorsement and the outcomes of ELLs and examined the impact of the ESL endorsement on the dispositions of the classroom teachers who have ELL students in their classrooms. My intention by conducting this study was to find answers, or perhaps solutions, that might be added to the body of the research that addresses the needs of the ELL populations. In the next chapter, I review the literature that pertains to my research investigation.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

In Chapter One, I explained how the ongoing increase in the presence of ELL populations in the U.S. public schools had changed the demographic makeup of classrooms. This change of the demographic makeup has not been matched with a change in teacher preparation programs (Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011). My role as a district leader plays a critical part in this evaluation program. I witness the negative impacts of the lack of the necessary knowledge for teaching ELLs. The ESL endorsement coursework would provide this knowledge to teachers with ELL populations. In an attempt to explore what scholars found about the implication of preparing mainstream teachers to meet the specific needs of ELLs, I found a large body of research that directly and indirectly draws attention to the imperative, specific skills and knowledge that mainstream teachers must acquire to provide equity and adequate education.

Given this, the purpose of this section is to highlight and review the research that explicitly and implicitly discussed the effects of preparing mainstream teachers. In this review of the literature section, I investigate an overarching question that I consider my driving force. The question is: Why is it necessary for teachers to be prepared for the ELL populations? To find a profound and meaningful answer to this question, this chapter explores literature discussing the overarching question, as well as some other specific emergent questions, including:

- Is a good teacher a good teacher for all?
- What dispositions do general education teachers have toward their ELLs?
- What do general education teachers do to close the achievement gap?

- Do general education teachers acquire the fundamental knowledge of how to differentiate between language development and learning disability or the difference between social and academic language?
- Do general education teachers teach both language and content in mathematics?

Preparing Mainstream Teachers for ELLs

Research that specifically addresses the significance of preparing mainstream teachers for English learners is scarce. De Jong and Harper (2005) wrote the article “Preparing mainstream teachers for English learners: Is being a good teacher good enough?” This article is one of a few that advocate for preparing mainstream teachers for English learners and argues good teachers are not good enough to deliver instruction to ELLs.

De Jong and Harper (2005) explained that the achievement gap between native speakers of English and the ELL population demands the need for general education teachers to go through a preparation program that provides these teachers with specific ELL-related knowledge and skills to enable them to meet ELL needs. The authors disagreed that teaching ELLs is a matter of applying just “good teaching” strategies as they believed that applying pedagogical adaptations such as activating prior knowledge, using visual aids, planning for hands-on activities, utilizing graphic organizers, and implementing cooperative learning are great strategies. However, classroom teachers need to develop a full understanding of language development, culture, and the relationship between the first and second languages to serve non-native speakers of English better.

De Jong and Harper explained why what classroom teachers call “good teaching” does not always work with ELL students. ELL performance should not be measured in the same way as native speakers of English. For example, compared to ELL students, native English speakers

know about 6,000 words and practice using present, past, and future tenses before they even enter the first grade. In contrast, ELL students need scaffolded and differentiated instruction to “fully participate in reading-based discussions and to develop their oral and literacy skills in English” (de Jong, & Harper, 2005, p. 106).

In addition, the authors continue to argue that most teacher preparation programs lack attention to the cultural and linguistic needs of ELLs. The regular teacher preparation coursework designed to prepare mainstream teachers focuses on good teaching practices for monolingual students but lacks an explanation of the essential characteristics of second language development. Mainstream teachers need to understand the relationship between the first and second languages. When English learners have had formal education in their native language, they are more cognitively mature and understand more than what they can articulate.

In the same article, de Jong and Harper highlighted the fact that mainstream teachers need to model explicit instruction to help ELLs make gains in academic language. The authors also pointed out that teachers might not realize that when they use idioms, phrasal verbs, and colloquial language in the classroom. They might confuse ELLs who are not yet familiar with idioms. Challenges that ELL students face in learning a second language include, but are not limited to sentence structure, word and sentence order, and discourse levels. Cross-linguistic differences become a barrier to students who transfer their first language features to the second language.

De Jong and Harper (2005) believed that the results of reading assessments, such as the “Running Record Assessment,” may mislead mainstream teachers to an inaccurate conclusion. Moreover, literacy approaches designed for monolingual students, such as Guided Reading, assume that learners have strong oral skills, vocabulary, and English discourse. However, this

assumption does not apply to many ELLs. The authors observed that most of the time, classroom teachers rely on ELL students' oral skills to evaluate their understanding when they should find different ways and forms to assess ELLs.

Another significant aspect de Jong and Harper (2005) brought to light in their article was the essential knowledge mainstream teachers must develop to understand the struggles that ELLs go through in acquiring reading and writing skills, given that some languages are not Romance-based languages, such as Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic. These languages have completely different writing systems. This does not mean that students whose first language is a Romance language do not struggle to learn English. On the contrary, Spanish-speaking students deal with language differences as well. For example, Spanish vowels are pronounced differently in English, and the letter "J" represents a different sound than it does in English. De Jong and Harper (2005) warned, "If mainstream teachers base their writing instruction on the language and literacy needs of native English speakers, they may fail to provide appropriate and adequate feedback for ELLs" (p. 109).

De Jong and Harper (2005) underscored that the lack of preparing teachers to understand second language acquisition might lead them to misinterpret the silent phase that ELL students go through before they gain a higher proficiency level of language as "language delay." Without understanding the concepts of the "silent phase," mainstream teachers judge ELL retention of information and comprehension skills. Teachers might also misinterpret students' usage of their first language as "language confusion." In fact, effective literacy instruction in both first and second languages have much in common, and oral skills gained in the primary language play a role as the foundation of building literacy skills in a second language.

Thus far, de Jong and Harper's biggest idea in their research is that mainstream teachers may move from just good teaching to good teaching for all students, including their ELLs when they acquire a three-dimensional type of knowledge that includes understanding the process of second language acquisition and acculturation, building an understanding of the challenges ELLs face, learning academic language, and integrating language and content objectives, and implementing sociocultural aspects in their planned instruction. Correspondingly, Samson, and Collins (2012) developed a similar conclusion. They argued that general education teachers need specific skills to adjust their instruction to ELL in the areas of oral language development, supporting academic language, and addressing students' cultural backgrounds. Samson and Collins (2012) pointed out that these areas of knowledge must be integrated into the preparation, certification, and evaluation of all teachers to improve the outcomes of ELLs.

Another significant study that addressed the need for preparing mainstream teachers was conducted by De Oliveira and Burke (2015). De Oliveira and Burke (2015) conducted a study to investigate the perspectives of elementary teachers on what mainstream elementary teachers of ELLs should know and be able to do. Four elementary general education teachers who worked at three elementary schools with growing Hispanic populations participated in interviews. Three types of contextual knowledge; knowledge of school, knowledge of parents, and knowledge of learners, were identified as the most solid contextual knowledge to participants. Participating teachers believed they needed to know about them. They thought they needed to know more about the process of second language acquisition and how language works. The study concluded that the rapid increase in the number of ELLs in the United States requires that all teachers be prepared to address ELL needs in mainstream classrooms.

Is a good teacher a good teacher for all? Loeb, Soland, and Fox (2014) conducted a study investigating whether teachers who were effective with the group of English learners (ELs) were also effective with native speakers of English students. In their study, the authors used data from the Miami-Dade County Public Schools district, where the majority of ELL students spoke Spanish. The study found that in the contents of mathematics and reading, bilingual (Spanish-speaking) and certified bilingual teachers were more effective with the ELs than with the non-ELs. This finding confirms other research findings that the practice of using students' native language supports bilingual students' comprehension and helps students make connections to what they understand in both their native language and English. Loeb et al. believed that the findings of this study should be considered by administrators when they hire teachers to teach ELs.

In the state of California, where ELLs represent 25% of all students, Gándara et al. (2005) conducted a study to investigate (a) the most difficult challenges teachers face day to day in teaching ELLs, (b) how teachers view their preparation and knowledge in meeting the needs of ELLs, and (c) teachers' views on the professional development offered from the school district and policymakers that would help ease these challenges. The research was conducted in 2004. A survey and four focus groups were conducted to collect data. Almost 5,300 teachers from 22 different-sized school districts participated in the study. The K-12 participating teachers included general education classroom teachers with ELL populations (58%), resource teachers (12%), bilingual and dual immersion teachers (7%), teachers in structured English immersion classrooms (15%), and those who did not indicate what type of teachers they were (8%).

The findings of the study conducted by Gándara et al. (2005) show that teachers with the highest levels of preparation were assigned to each classroom with a higher number of ELLs

than other teachers. Results suggest that those highly prepared teachers could communicate easily with students, and their help was sought more than other teachers. According to the study, teachers with bilingual, cross-cultural, language, and academic development (BCLAD) felt the most confident of all teachers. In the survey, teachers were asked to rate themselves. The more competent teachers felt more successful than the less qualified ones. They rated themselves as “good teachers” compared to others. However, those teachers still had challenges. Challenges that teachers mostly faced included: (a) difficulty reaching out to parents because of the language barrier, (b) lack of sufficient time to teach ELL language and content, especially since ELLs are pulled out for language services, and (c) lack of appropriate materials that can be used to teach ELLs with a wide range of language proficiency levels.

Regarding professional development, the study indicated that during the interviews, most teachers complained that within the last five years, they had little or no professional development that could help them teach ELLs. Furthermore, some teachers who received in-service about how to adapt the curriculum to the needs of ELLs explained that the presenters of the in-service had little knowledge and were not experts in the topic. The study also showed that teachers with BCLAD or equivalent certifications were more likely than others to identify the needs of ELLs. They expressed their need for better materials in English and the primary language of their students. They also expressed the need for more time to collaborate with their colleagues and more support from their administrators.

Another study conducted by Hopkins et al. (2015) investigated how a rural school district in the Midwestern United States developed an infrastructure to support their ELL populations and how that infrastructure shaped teachers’ work practice in terms of collaboration, professional interaction, and learning opportunities. Hopkins et al. (2015) used the term *EL* to refer to English

learners. The authors used pseudonyms for the state and the school district where the study was conducted. General education teachers, ESL teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators participating in this study belonged to 14 elementary schools with high ELL populations. This study used a survey and interviews to collect data. The state where this study was conducted developed English language proficiency guidelines and assessments. However, the school districts in that state have the autonomy to design the curriculum and select the resources.

The results of the study conducted by Hopkins et al. indicated that newcomers in grades K-1 spent half of the school day receiving ESL instruction in an ESL classroom, and in the second half of the day, they joined their monolingual peers in general education classrooms. Newcomers in grades 2-5 spent a full day receiving ESL instruction and only joined their peers from general education classrooms during physical education and music classes. Intermediate students in grades 2-5 spent about 180 minutes receiving ESL instruction and joined their non-ELL peers during the instruction in mathematics in general education classrooms. Pull-out intermediate students spent from 60-90 minutes receiving ESL instruction in the ESL room. The nearly proficient students in grades K-5 are only monitored by ESL teachers.

Results of the study showed that general education teachers were frustrated with the ESL pull-out model because their time with the ELL students was fragmented since ELLs left the classroom for a period of time to get ESL instruction in the ESL room. In the meantime, ESL teachers were viewed as teachers of language arts, as they focused their instruction on literacy skills, reading, and writing. In addition, there was only minimal alignment between the ESL and general education curriculum. The curriculum in mathematics, science, and social studies in general education classrooms was not aligned with the curriculum used by ESL teachers.

Similar to other research findings, the findings of the study conducted by Hopkins et al. (2015) show that there was an overall belief that English language instruction was just a matter of “good teaching.” The researchers of this study believed that this mindset indicated that EL support was only focused on language arts and not the other contents. For example, mathematics was always taught in general education classrooms with no EL support. Overall, there was a disconnect between ESL and general education teachers. The study found that general education teachers did not seek out ESL teachers’ advice, and there was no professional interaction where teachers had the chance to establish their learning community.

I believe this research’s findings are relevant because River Valley School District, the context of this research, has similar issues and concerns, such as the lack of collaboration between classroom teachers and the ESL resource teachers. As we discover in the data section, there was a disconnect between the ESL and general education teachers in terms of curriculum, resources, and planning. What also made this study relatively similar to the case of River Valley is that through the collected data, the authors concluded, “The vast majority of general education teachers have had very little if any, training related to teaching ELs” (Hopkins et al., 2015, p. 411). It is worth noting Hopkins et al. (2015) recommended that administrators must support establishing learning communities between the ESL resource and general education teachers. The co-teaching model should be considered to ensure that ELs have access to the same curriculum as their monolingual peers.

DelliCarpini and Alonso (2014) conducted a study to investigate the impact of ESL coursework on mainstream mathematics, science, and ESL teachers’ dispositions regarding the current practices related to the inclusion of ELLs in the secondary content classroom and what they think about those ELLs’ ability to engage in content-driven instruction. The research also

intended to investigate how ESL coursework can build the foundational skills needed to engage in effective ESL/mainstream teachers' collaboration. To collect data, a 25-item, 4-point Likert-scale pre- and post-course survey was implemented to address and investigate the impact of the ESL coursework on both content and ESL teachers. Reflective writing, reflective teaching journals, focus group discussions, and curriculum materials were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to investigate data regarding the question of how ESL coursework can build the skill of collaboration between ESL and content teachers.

The data results collected from the study found that initially, mainstream teachers blamed ELL students for not being able to achieve high academic status. These teachers also believed that students' families, who lack academic literacy skills in their native language, are responsible for students' academic failure. Results also indicate that mainstream teachers initially had little understanding of the role language plays in the classrooms. Generally, mainstream teachers also had limited knowledge about the needs of ELLs, but they were willing to learn more about their students' linguistic needs. Content teachers were under the impression that their primary responsibility was to teach content, and they had nothing to do with developing language skills.

However, after the first semester of going through ESL coursework, teachers changed their beliefs and practices. They developed a more positive understanding of the shared responsibility to meet the linguistic needs of ELLs in content classrooms. Content teachers realized how important it is to modify ELLs' courses by providing vocabulary in the native language and allowing extra time to finish assignments.

The findings of the study conducted by DelliCarpini and Alonso (2014) suggest that unless mainstream teachers go through structured ESL coursework that explicitly offers the necessary knowledge about ELL needs and how to integrate language and content, students

continue to struggle in mainstream classrooms. As research indicates, some content teachers do not consider cooperating with ESL teachers. This happens when content teachers lack trust in ESL teachers' proficiency in the content they are teaching.

As we are still navigating research directly discussing the significance of preparing mainstream teachers, McGraner and Saenz (2009) designed what they called "innovation configuration" to improve teacher preparation. The components of the innovation configuration sprung from a literature review related to mainstream teacher education, preparation for ELL teachers, and the sociocultural and sociopolitical context of ELL teaching and learning. The purpose of creating this model is to improve ELL achievement in the core content areas such as science, mathematics, and social studies. The critical components designed by the authors included a sociocultural and political foundation for teaching ELL students, second language acquisition, effective instructional practices of teaching academic content, and assessment practices and accommodations for ELL students.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Dispositions

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2008) defined professional dispositions as "Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities" (p.89). NCATE's Standard 1 underscores the impact of a candidate's knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions. The significance of this standard is to ensure that teacher candidates must have adequate knowledge of content to help all students meet standards for P-12 education. NCATE expects teachers to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions to create learning environments modified for diverse learners. Teachers

are also expected to build a positive relationship with students, families, colleagues, and the larger community in support of students' learning.

Dunbar, Winship, and Harper (2019) explained that teacher dispositions include sensitivity to students' needs, attitudes toward learning and learners, and understanding cultural differences. The authors of this study asserted that teachers who have not had much exposure to cultures other than their own might have anxiety when they teach students with different cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. The authors also recommended that teacher preparation programs may need to take responsibility to train teacher candidates to be sensitive to the needs of their students. To reach this goal, the authors recommended that teacher candidates must first examine their personal dispositions toward their culturally and linguistically diverse populations in their classrooms. Other scholars have agreed that preservice teachers need to examine their own views of linguistic diversity and added that linguistically responsive teachers consider their linguistically diverse students as valuable resources and that they must advocate for them. Unfortunately, many classroom teachers believe ELL students are someone else's responsibility, most likely the ESL resource teachers (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

Meineke and DeVasto (2020) found that the knowledge, skills, and dispositions found in teacher preservice course models shape the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of preservice teachers and lead to transformational implementation in the classroom. Language subjectivity reflects whether teachers view students' native language as a privilege, right, or deficit. The authors explained, "Preservice teachers exposed to the notion of language subjectivity likely had a better grasp on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions (KSDs) that value home language" (Meineke & DeVasto, 2020, p. 68). This study also found that teaching clinically in diverse classrooms led to rooting cultural competence.

To have a further understanding of how teachers must be sensitive to ELL needs, de Jong and Harper (2005) believed that for teachers to respond to their students' cross-cultural differences, they must learn about their students' cultural backgrounds and avoid making stereotypical assumptions. For example, when activating students' prior experience and background knowledge, teachers should not expect that all ELL students volunteer to speak publicly about their background knowledge and experience. De Jong and Harper advised teachers to weigh their expectations with a few factors, such as speaking in front of other fluent English speakers, sharing an experience that might sound very strange to other students, and discussing a topic that it might be inappropriate for them to discuss in their home cultures, which would make them feel uncomfortable. In addition to being sensitive to their ELL needs, de Jong and Harper (2005) expected good teachers to know their students at a personal level by tapping into their individual students' favorite sports, food, subjects, and hobbies. The authors added that those good teachers could use the information they gather about their students to get them access to "literacy events in multiple languages at home and in the community" (p. 113).

De Jong and Harper (2005) continued to address more aspects of teacher dispositions toward their ELLs. They explained that teachers must understand that their dispositions toward bilingualism and their bilingual students impact students' motivation to learn English. Teachers might not realize that some classroom rules can implicitly send a message to students that their teacher does not accept bilingualism. For example, setting up rules such as "Speak English. Be quiet. Do your work" (p. 115) might reflect a negative attitude toward students' native language, which will have a negative impact on bilingual students. From another perspective, classroom teachers can proactively support ELLs by minimizing students' anxiety. Being English learners in mainstream classrooms, students might experience potential anxiety and fear of being

embarrassed due to making linguistic oral or writing mistakes. It is up to teachers to support ELL students by setting up classroom rules that ensure respect for all students and by being patient with all ELL students, especially the newly arrived ones (Lucas et al., 2008).

Adequate Literacy and Language Instruction

As explained before, this section has attempted to summarize the literature relating to the fundamental need to prepare mainstream teachers with ELL populations as well as an explanation of what knowledge and skills mainstream teachers must acquire to be effective with ELLs. Having discussed the research that directly supports preparing mainstream teachers, the final section of this chapter reviews the literature that addresses what content teachers must understand and use to provide an equitable education to their ELLs.

Gersten et al. (2007) offered five recommendations to ensure adequate literacy and language instruction for ELLs. The first recommendation requires schools to conduct an early formative assessment to screen ELLs for reading comprehension issues. This recommendation is important because research shows that the absence of oral skills delays ELL students' reading skills. The second recommendation requires schools to provide reading intervention to first-grade ELL students identified as having reading fluency and comprehension problems. Teachers and staff working with ELL students must be highly trained to provide reading intervention. The third recommendation highlights the importance of teaching vocabulary in-depth as "English learners will benefit most from rich intensive vocabulary instruction that emphasizes student-friendly definitions" (Gersten et al., 2007, p. 13). According to the study, the fourth recommendation addresses the need to develop academic English. The authors of this study agreed with most scholars in the belief that exposure to academic language "can make a difference in English learners' ability to understand the core curriculum and that its importance

increases as children enter the upper grades” (Gersten et al., 2007, p. 16). The fifth and last recommendation given by the authors suggests that school districts with ELLs develop plans that allow mainstream teachers to dedicate 90 minutes per week to work with students on reading and language arts. During those 90 minutes, teachers train students on how to be engaged in peer-assisted learning activities. The purpose of these activities is to practice oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies.

Similar to other literature, this study valued the need for professional development that can prepare teachers to conduct such activities. The research also indicates that some teachers might think that the 90 minutes of instruction time will result in the instructional time taken away from the rest of the students. In fact, the peer-assisted activities that involve both ELL and non-ELL students “give teachers a way to structure learning opportunities that address some of the unique learning needs of English learners” (Gersten et al., 2007, p. 20). Other scholars who studied teaching literacy and language to ELLs found that early interventions with ELLs that deliver explicit instruction in phonological awareness, letter and sound recognition, and reading comprehension with ESL strategies were highly effective for teaching literacy skills. ELL students benefit from small-group instruction and the explicit teaching of reading skills (Kamps et al., 2007; Klingner, Artiles, & Barletta, 2006).

ELL Achievement Gap and High-Stakes Testing

Calderón et al. (2011) emphasized that there has been a clear indication of disparities in achievement between ELLs and English-proficient students. The authors argued that aside from the need for collaboration among parents and school staff, there is a critical need for teacher preparation to close this achievement gap. The authors also underlined the implication of preparing teachers to meet ELL needs by stating, “Closing the achievement gap means, in part,

closing similar gaps in teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development” (p. 107). Similarly, Samson and Collins (2012) drew a corresponding conclusion. They argued that inadequately trained teachers provide inadequate support to ELLs at school, which leads to poor academic outcomes for ELLs. Samson and Collins stated, “Research shows that a high- quality teacher can have a significant effect on student outcomes” (p. 7).

Furthermore, Calderón et al. (2011) believed that mainstream teachers who serve ELLs need a comprehensive school reform program that provides practical strategies that can be implemented by teachers and other school district stakeholders. The authors also suggested that Federal regulations guarantee school districts must provide language support to ELLs. The authors added that mainstream teachers need the structure and support from their school districts to meet the needs of ELLs, as they alone are not capable of bringing forth changes in instruction, and that, “without better support for teachers, we cannot expect better student outcomes” (p. 119). However, from a different perspective, Wolf, Herman, and Dietel (2010) considered that the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs was due to the lack of learning opportunities. Anecdotal evidence for this claim states that occasionally ELL students are not exposed to enough grade-level materials. Such practices prevent students from reaching the standards expected to be taught to all students (Wolf et al., 2010). Furthermore, Sanchez (2017) states that compared to 7.3% of non-English language Learners, only 2% of ELL students are enrolled in gifted programs in public schools in the United States.

Solórzano (2008) believed that high-stakes test results impact ELL placement, retention, graduation, and other fundamental issues regarding ELLs. Retention and graduation problems are the outcomes of the decisions made with high-stakes tests. Solórzano added that between the years of 2000 and 2016, the percentage of retained Hispanic and Black students was twice the

rate of retained White students. Solórzano also argued that there is a need to examine the validity of the testing accommodations that are given to ELLs in terms of appropriateness, context, and use. Other scholars agreed with Solórzano that before providing accommodations, test administrators should consider some factors such as the student's level of English proficiency, the literacy level of his or her native language, cultural issues, and accommodations used in the classroom as a part of the instruction (DelliCarpini & Guler, 2013; Solórzano, 2008).

With regard to the validity of testing ELLs, DelliCarpini and Guler (2013) and Solórzano (2008) suggested that the question is whether assessments (designed for monolingual students) truly measure ELL students' knowledge. The authors suggested that the lack of cultural or language proficiency has become a barrier in measuring the success of ELL students. The second challenge has to deal with the reliability of test results. The question is whether students' results would look different if students had received accommodations. However, the authors also considered that other studies expressed the concern that the accommodations that were given to ELLs have initially been designed for students with special needs, and those needs are not necessarily the same as ELLs.

Therefore, DelliCarpini and Guler (2013) suggested that to make assessments reliable, mainstream teachers should learn about students' literacy background to define students' strengths and weaknesses, give students extra time to think about the meaning of questions and attach a list of glossaries to help students with new vocabulary on the test that students might not be familiar with. DelliCarpini and Guler (2013) encouraged teachers to use different kinds of assessment tools because "It is hard to reach a valid and reliable assessment score by using just one assessment technique" (DelliCarpini & Guler, 2013, p. 128). According to the same authors, teachers may use journals, quizzes, and projects to define areas of strengths and weaknesses of

their ELL students. Some students can express their knowledge better in writing, while others perform better verbally. In addition to recommending the listed accommodations, the authors reminded teachers that the purpose of the assessment was not just to pass or fail students but rather to know what students need to develop academically.

As this section continues to address what researchers expect to be understood and done by content teachers to improve ELL learning and outcomes, I use the content of mathematics as an example of what is expected from content teachers when they teach content to ELLs. The reason I reviewed literature that addressed strategies of teaching ELLs the content of math was, as I will explain in the next chapter, that data collected for the purpose of this study included ELL students' mathematics scores. These data were used to compare the growth made by students taught by teachers with and without ESL endorsement.

Teaching Language and Content of Math

Many educators are under the impression that mathematics has symbols, and thus, does not require language. Is the subject of mathematics universal or language-specific? ELL students need adequate language skills to be successful in any content area, including mathematics. This means that language becomes a barrier for ELL students to show their knowledge in a subject matter (Wolf et al., 2010). In this article, the authors recommended that standardized test developers avoid linguistic complexity on test items. The authors also suggested that test developers must be careful when creating culturally biased questions. The authors stated, "ELL students miss at a substantially higher rate than non-ELL students of the same ability level" (Wolf et al., 2010, p. 6). Case studies conducted by Wolf and others imply that although ELL accommodations' national guidelines are widely spread, guidelines and practices vary from state to state. In addition to this variability, some schools do not have ELL teachers, nor do they have

coordinators who can ensure the implementation of policies and procedures. Thus, teachers do not know which students are eligible for accommodations. A recommendation given by the same group of authors suggested that to make sure ELL accommodation guidelines are clear and consistent, clear definitions and implementations of each accommodation should be included. One example given by the authors shows that the “read aloud” accommodation is being interpreted differently; some teachers only read aloud directions, and others read aloud the whole test.

Furthermore, mathematical learning researchers have argued that when students use language to talk and reflect on their ideas, it helps them to reason logically (Chapin & Johnson, 2006). Bresser, Melanese, and Sphar (2009) agreed with this notion and added that students process mathematics through developing connections to their prior knowledge and the abstract symbolism of mathematical concepts. For this to happen, communication leads students to interact with the teacher and other students to verify and reflect on their understanding. This notion leads to two conclusions. One is that communication is essential to learning mathematics. The second is that ELLs will not have equal access to instruction and class discussion unless teachers provide extra support to those students. Focusing on speaking skills during mathematics instruction was also addressed by Moschkovich (2012), as she confirmed that ELLs need to use language to communicate their thought processes and to justify their reasoning while learning mathematics. Moschkovich (2012) also noted that to fulfill the demands of the mathematics Common Core State Standards, students must focus on logic and sense-making. For this to happen, teachers must focus on speaking skills to build on everyday language as well as the academic mathematical language.

Furthermore, Bresser et al. (2009) explained that equitable instruction in mathematics does not mean that everyone receives the same mathematics lesson. Still, it means that ELLs should be granted the opportunity to be as successful as their non-ELL peers who grew up speaking English. Research recommends that since language and thought are connected, effective mathematics teachers need to plan content goals as well as language development goals. This means that teachers need to frontload ELL students with the necessary vocabulary and language structure to provide them with comprehensible academic input. In other words, when teachers teach mathematics to ELLs, they teach English, not “just teach in English” (Bresser et al., 2009, p. 4). The authors argued that the best way to avoid having students need intervention is to provide differentiated instruction in the classroom because mathematics can be challenging to ELLs in many ways. Unknown or multiple meaning vocabulary could create a barrier of understanding. For example, words such as *even*, *odd*, and *function* have different meanings when they are in a mathematical context compared to everyday life. A word such as *left* as in “how many are left” is confusing because it is in the past tense, which requires learning verb tenses in syntax, and because in everyday language, the word *left* also means no longer here. Mathematical words that are homophones could be confusing as well. For example, mathematical terms such as *sum* and *whole* could be confused with the homophones *some* and *hole*.

In addition to the challenge of dealing with homophones and words with multiple meanings, other scholars added that students whose native languages have different orthographies need differentiated instruction. For example, the Arabic alphabet and numeric system are completely different from English. Arabic letters and numbers are written from right to left. Number three in English looks like a backward number four in Arabic, and number zero

in English looks like number five in Arabic. According to Lems, Miller, and Soro (2017), “Arabic requires changing the directionality of reading and writing, as well as learning a new numbering system” (p. 101).

Academic Language Versus Social Language Proficiency

Frequently, content teachers expect ELL students with high conversational skills to master academic language. Classroom teachers with little or no knowledge of second language acquisition miss the concept that ELs master social language much earlier than they master textbook academic language. The problem is when ELLs sound like proficient speakers of English, content teachers assume that those students are capable of learning textbook language. This misconception leads content teachers to assume that low-achieving ELL students deal with learning disabilities (Gil & Bardack, 2010; Hamayan, Marler, Sánchez-López, & Damico, 2013; Zehler et al., 2003).

Samson and Collins (2012) asserted that academic language is difficult for English native speakers and more difficult for ELLs because it is not limited to one aspect of language, but “requires skills in multiple domains, including vocabulary, syntax/grammar, and phonology” (p. 11). One might wonder why content teachers are unclear about their ELL students’ needs. Research shows that teachers need to be provided with information about second language acquisition and which methodologies to use to better serve those students who are not native speakers of English (Samson & Collins, 2012). Jim Cummins (1979) explained in his studies of second language acquisition that bilingual students begin their proficiency with surface fluency, which he calls basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS). As students continue to develop their language skills, they move into a new stage of language acquisition, called cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), where bilingual students shift from acquiring social

language to understanding academic language. Cummins confirmed that most bilingual students become fluent in social language within two years of their arrival in a new country. He noted, “In second language acquisition contexts, immigrant children often acquire peer-appropriate conversational fluency in English within about two years, but it requires considerably longer (5-10 years) to catch up academically in English” (Cummins, 1999, p. 2). Cummins added that if students have had formal education in their first language (L1), this will help them develop their second language (L2) faster.

Cummins (1999) explained the distinction between developing BICS and CALP. In earlier research conducted in 1979, Cummins explained that ELLs learn the conversational language, or what is also known as “playground language,” easier and quicker than learning academic language. Playground language, or “social language,” is what Cummins referred to as BICS. However, academic language requires a more complex, academic, and abstract vocabulary that focuses on subject content. In his research, Cummins argued that immigrant students learn conversational fluency within two years, but it takes 5-10 years to acquire academic language. Cummins (1999) explained that BICS and CALP are distinct but not separate, meaning that children acquire knowledge of the world through conversation with others. Early on, students deepen their understanding through social interactions. However, the assumption that conversational fluency indicates language proficiency is a misconception. This misconception leads countless bilingual students to be diagnosed with learning disabilities.

On the question of what content teachers need to know when it comes to differentiating social and academic language, Cummins recommended that to promote ELL students’ CALP, competent mainstream teachers must provide instruction that embeds three components: cognitive, academic, and language. Cummins encouraged teachers to implement cognitively

challenging tasks that require higher-order thinking rather than using computer programs or worksheets. He also recommended integrating language and content. For the language component, Cummins advised teachers to allow their students to use contrastive analysis to compare and contrast English grammar rules, phonics, and possibly vocabulary with their own native language. This activity creates linguistic awareness and makes them value their own native language. Cummins (1999) advocated, “We should work for transfer of conceptual knowledge and language awareness across the student’s two languages” (p. 5).

In accordance with Cummins’s (1999) recommendation, Short et al. (2018) believed that effective teachers who teach ELLs must have a clear understanding of the English language’s role in instruction. They must understand the difference between social and academic language and consider research that addresses different language development levels and the time students need to master proficiency.

Short et al. (2018) came up with six principles for exemplary teaching of ELs. These principles are considered to be guidelines drawn from the research of language acquisition and language pedagogy. The research requires mainstream teachers to know their learners better, create conditions for language learning lessons, design high-quality lessons for language development, adapt lesson delivery as needed, monitor and assess student language development, and engage and collaborate within the community of practice. The authors believed that efficient teachers who teach ELLs must have a good understanding of the English language’s role in instruction. They must understand the difference between social and academic language.

In summary, the research validates that effective teachers need to realize that teaching ELLs effectively is a three-part challenge: Teachers need to scaffold instruction by utilizing visuals, gestural, and linguistic supports. Teachers must help students draw on their own

knowledge. Teachers also must understand that they are responsible for teaching ELL students both language and content. Lems et al. (2017) strongly believed that mainstream teachers must understand the concepts of BICS and CALP because “ELLs have been misjudged to have high language proficiency just because they have developed BICS skills” (p. 47). They also agreed that language learners’ first language literacy skills have a foundational influence on their ability to learn and develop a second language. Lems et al. (2017) found great value in Cummins’ “interdependence hypothesis,” which suggests that the first language literacy level correlates with the second language literacy level. This concept recommends building ELL students’ native language rather than avoiding it.

Language Development Versus Learning Disability

A large body of research addressed both the over-identification and under-identification of ELLs as having disabilities (Zehler et al., 2003). In 2014-15, ELL students with disabilities represented 13.8% of the total ELL population enrolled in U.S. public elementary and secondary schools (Ramirez, 2018). Test scores of inappropriate assessments of the populations of ELs lead many classroom teachers to conclude that those students need to be referred to special education (Moschkovich, 2012). Hamayan et al. (2013) offered a deep understanding of the issue of identifying ELLs with disabilities. The authors started their book by stating, “More often than not when a teacher feels that an ELL is having greater than expected difficulty at school, there is an inclination to jump to the conclusion that the student has a special education need” (Hamayan et al., 2013, p. 1). Teachers must be careful not to confuse limited language proficiency and learning disabilities. The process of appropriate identification and decision making about assessments requires teacher training and instructional support. Research highly recommends that all teachers need to learn and implement research-based practices and must be prepared to be

able to address the needs of ELLs (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010). De Jong and Harper (2005) argued, “mainstream teachers often perceive a students’ apparent inability to learn English quickly as a sign of a learning disability” (p. 114).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; “Building the legacy: IDEA 2004,” n.d.) stipulates that states have the right to choose responses to intervention (RtI) data as part of the special education referral process for students who are struggling to learn academics. Students who do not respond to the RtI instruction within a certain period decided by the school district are considered eligible for special education. The question here is whether the RtI instruction, which was designed for monolingual students, was altered to support the ELL population. Researchers wonder how we know whether a struggling ELL, who has been receiving an intervention, has received culturally responsive quality instruction designed for ELLs. This shifts the focus onto the classroom teacher’s role in making sure that interventions are effective and “making sure that teachers know a variety of research-based instructional approaches designed explicitly for ELLs who show early signs of struggling to learn” (Klingner et al., 2006, p. 124).

Classroom teachers from both bilingual education and special education must collaborate to guide the ELL study team to determine whether the academic difficulties that an ELL student experiences in school are due to a learning disability, the process of second language acquisition, or a combination of these two. ELLs experience challenges learning academic content in English when they are in the process of developing language proficiency in English. Students in the early stages of learning a new language may, on the surface, present some characteristics that are very similar to those of students with learning disabilities but for very different reasons.

Hamayan et al. (2013) proposed a list of observed behaviors that can be explained from a bilingual learner perspective as well as from a special education perspective. A bilingual student who struggles during mathematics instruction in English, for example, might have difficulty because the symbols, algorithms, or numerals may be unfamiliar or because mathematics word problems are written in English and not accessible to students in the early stages of academic English development. Alternatively, possible learning disability explanations for difficulties in mathematics class might point to challenges with abstract reasoning or underlying comprehension difficulties that present across languages and contexts. Hamayan et al. (2013) questioned if every observable behavior can be interpreted by both explanations of language development and learning disability, then how can we decide the real reason for the academic challenges that an ELL student experiences? Because of the complexity inherent in this process, there is no single method to identify ELLs who may have learning disabilities. To help educators with this challenge, the authors developed a framework that includes seven integral factors that can be used to explain the obstacles ELL students experience in school: the learning environment created for the student, personal and family characteristics, physical and psychological factors, previous schooling/performance, proficiency in oral language and literacy in both languages, academic achievement, and cross-cultural aspects (Hamayan et al., 2013, p. 44).

Additionally, to avoid misinterpreting ELL student data, researchers recommend using alternate forms of assessment, including classroom observation and intervention sessions to build a complete profile of students' needs and strengths. According to Burr, Ed, Haas, and Ferriere (2015), "Research suggests that any student evaluation should include observations of students in different school settings, such as in multiple classes with different teachers, and in small-group instruction" (p. 9).

Conclusion

As explained in the introduction of this chapter, the literature reviewed here advocated explicitly and implicitly for the need to prepare mainstream teachers to work with ELLs. Most, if not all, of the literature reviewed in this section suggests that working with ELL populations requires specialized knowledge and skills to understand the unique linguistic and cultural needs of linguistically and culturally diverse ELL students. Studies in favor of general education preparation for ELLs, such as Calderón et al., (2011), Gándara et al. (2005), de Jong and Harper (2005), Loeb, Samson, and Collins, 2012), and Loeb et al. (2014), are still limited. However, other scholars and research included in this section supported the critical need for specialized knowledge that enables general education teachers to understand how to distinguish between language development and learning disability and between social and academic language. Aside from this, studies included in this section addressed the foundational knowledge for teaching ELLs language, literacy, and content.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Research Design Overview

In his book, *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*, Patton (2008) explained the qualitative-quantitative paradigms debate. While the quantitative methodology focuses on things that can be counted and subjected to statistical analysis and comparison, the qualitative methodology seeks to evaluate “personal meaning and portray the diversity of ways people express themselves” (Patton, 2008, p. 435). In his explanation of the debate, Patton clarified that most program evaluators used to prefer quantitative methods over qualitative ones because they believed that quantitative results were concrete, specific, clear, and precise, while qualitative methods were biased and subjective, relying on opinion rather than facts. Responding to this attack on qualitative methods, Patton argued that quantitative research can also be biased and added that, depending on the evaluation questions and what needs to be measured, each paradigm could contribute effectively to our evaluation and understating of the program. This explanation inspired me to choose the mixed-methods design as the tool of evaluation in this study. Patton encouraged researchers to use mixed methods, as he believed, “mixed methods are the solutions” (Patton, 2008, p. 466). For this study, quantitative and qualitative data were collected, and I followed Patton’s recommendation that each method should be assessed fairly and that I consider the significance of both types of data equally. After collecting data, I found that combining numbers with narratives brought a wealth of details and explanations. Data collected from the statistical analysis of the test scores and the standardized items on the questionnaire were supported and explained by data from the interviews and the open-ended question on the questionnaire.

Participants

Teachers who participated in both the questionnaire and interviews included elementary classroom teachers, special education resource teachers who taught both monolingual and bilingual students, and one school psychologist who was a member of a problem-solving team that evaluated students who were academically at risk. The participating teachers included those with and without the ESL endorsement. The most important criterion that was set for the teachers participating in this study was that they must be teaching content to both monolingual and ELL populations in the general education classroom. This means that bilingual self-contained, transitional bilingual education teachers and ESL resource teachers were not included in this study. As stated earlier, the purpose of this study was to measure the impact of the ESL endorsement on the general education teachers' quality of teaching in mainstream settings.

Student Sample

To answer the first research question, data collected in this study presented a comparison between ELL students taught by ESL-endorsed teachers and ELL students taught by non-ESL-endorsed teachers. The comparison analyzed the growth that the students made in the subject of mathematics between the fall of the 2018 school year and spring of the 2019 school year. Two schools were involved in this study. The two third-grade groups of ELLs were from one school building, and the two ELL groups in the fifth grade were from another school building. Since the study focused on the variable of ESL endorsement, the compared groups were selected from the same buildings to remove any other variables such as differences in building culture, leadership style, or socioeconomic status from playing a role in the comparison of students' outcomes. Students included in this study were identified as ELL based on demographics retrieved from the

school district information system, which in this context was run by a software called PowerSchool.

The total number of third- and fifth-grade ELL students taught by ESL-endorsed and non-ESL-endorsed teachers was 28 ELLs. Table 1 summarizes the student sample, and it is important to note that the sample size was not large enough to represent the ELL elementary populations in the school district. I could not include more participants in the study because the number of ESL-endorsed teachers in elementary schools was limited. The total number of ELL students in third grade in one elementary building, which I refer to as the school of “Cougars,” was 11. The classroom teacher who completed his ESL endorsement had six ELLs, and the other classroom teacher who did not hold an ESL endorsement had five ELLs. In another elementary school building that I refer to as the school of “Vikings,” the total number of ELL students in fifth grade was 17. The Vikings ELL fifth-grade students were placed unevenly in two classrooms. Seven ELLs were taught by an ESL-endorsed teacher, and ten were taught by a non-ESL-endorsed teacher.

Table 1

Summary of Student Sample

School 1: Cougars		School 2: Vikings	
Third-grade non-endorsed teacher	Third-grade ESL-endorsed teacher	Fifth-grade non-ESL-endorsed teacher	Fifth-grade ESL-endorsed teacher
ELL1	ELL1	ELL1	ELL1
ELL2	ELL2	ELL2	ELL2
ELL3	ELL3	ELL3	ELL3
ELL4	ELL4	ELL4	ELL4
ELL5	ELL5	ELL5	ELL5
	ELL6	ELL6	ELL6
		ELL7	ELL7
		ELL8	
		ELL9	
		ELL10	

Participating Teachers

Fifty-four teachers from eight elementary schools participated in the questionnaire and 22 took part in the interview. As we learn in the next chapter, data indicated that of the 54 participating teachers who took the questionnaire, 64% were non-ESL-endorsed, and 36% were ESL-endorsed. All teachers who took the questionnaire confirmed that they had ELLs in their classrooms. Student demographic data retrieved from PowerSchool software showed that 10% of elementary ELL populations are in special education programs. Again, involving the school psychologist and a few special education resource teachers in this study was by intention. It was important to collect data from teachers who teach ELL students with both linguistic and special education needs. Table 2 lists the characteristics of teachers who participated in the interviews. All the 22 interviewed teachers took the questionnaire. On the questionnaire, teachers responded to a question of whether they were willing to participate in the interviews. Teachers were instructed to write their names if they agreed to participate in the interviews. When I received responses to the questionnaire, I emailed the teachers who expressed their willingness to participate in the interviews individually to schedule with them.

Table 2

Characteristics of Interviewees

Teacher Pseudonym	Years of Experience	Teaching Assignment	ESL Endorsement	special education Endorsement	Speaking Another Language
Marlie	19	Classroom teacher	No	No	No
Selena	33	Classroom teacher	No	No	No
Alissa	30	Classroom teacher	No	No	No
Scarlet	29	Classroom teacher	No	No	No
Norah	15	Classroom teacher	No	No	No
Paige	15	Classroom teacher	No	No	No
Hanna	26	Classroom teacher	No	No	No
Christina	2	Classroom teacher	No	No	No
Gina	1	special education resource	No	Yes	No
Merna	32	Classroom teacher	No	Yes	No
Cynthia	20	Classroom teacher	No	No	No
Guiliana	14	School psychologist	No	Yes	Spanish
Lila	7	Classroom teacher	Yes	No	No
Sophia	10	Classroom teacher	Yes	Yes	No
Lucy	20	Classroom teacher	Yes	No	No
Maria	15	special education resource	Yes	Yes	Spanish
Mary	7	special education resource	Yes	Yes	No
Abigail	13	special education resource	Yes	Yes	No
Vanessa	25	Title 1 teacher	Yes	Yes	Spanish
Andrew	10	Classroom teacher	Yes	No	No
Madison	15	Classroom teacher	Yes	No	No
Rebecca	5	Classroom teacher	Yes	No	No

Notes. Total 22 interviewees. 12 non-ESL endorsed + 10 ESL-endorsed teachers. ($n = 22$).

Data Gathering Techniques

This research collected both qualitative and quantitative data. To answer the first research question on the ELL outcomes, I compared the mathematics test scores of ELL students taught by ESL-endorsed teachers with ELL students' scores taught by the non-ESL-endorsed teachers. I used data from the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) testing. Generally, all students in the school district take the MAP test in the areas of reading and mathematics three times per year to monitor the academic growth of students. MAP is a standardized computer adaptive test created by the Northwest Evaluation Association. I compared the mathematics scores using the *t-test* with a null hypothesis that there was no difference between the means of the two compared groups.

H_0 : The null hypothesis

H_a : The alternative hypothesis

The independent t -test is used to determine whether there is a significant difference between the means of the compared groups and whether the null hypothesis can be rejected. IBM SPSS software was used to conduct the t -test.

The second research question investigated whether the ESL-endorsed teachers had more effective strategies, as well as better knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward ELL students, compared to non-endorsed teachers.

Questionnaire

Teachers with ELL populations were identified through the school district information system, which in the study context was called PowerSchool. I shared information about my study with several teachers in eight elementary schools before I shared the questionnaire link. I found it easier to explain the purpose of my research in person. Then, a written explanation and invitation to participate in the study, along with a link to the questionnaire, were sent via email to teachers with ELL students in their classrooms in six elementary schools. Teachers who agreed to participate in the study gave their consent for participation by choosing “Yes” to the first question on the questionnaire that asked them if they agreed to participate. The reason I decided to embed the consent form in the questionnaire was to keep the anonymity of participants in a digitally safe format. Given this, communication in person and via emails was made before sending the questionnaire and asking for participation. Fifty-four teachers in eight elementary buildings expressed their willingness to participate and filled out the questionnaire.

To collect comprehensive and meaningful data, I found it important to include special education resource teachers with and without the ESL endorsement in this study to make sure I

collected various perspectives of teachers who taught ELL students with individualized education plans (IEPs). Participating teachers came from eight elementary schools with high ELL populations. It was important to include as many elementary schools as possible in order to measure responses from teachers who worked in different school cultural environments.

Questions on the questionnaire were reviewed to avoid both ambiguity and redundancy (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008). Questionnaire questions (see Appendix B) included some demographic questions such as years of experience, grade-level teaching, and if ESL endorsement has been acquired or in progress.

The Likert-scale questionnaire was designed to measure the participants' knowledge of second language acquisition, ELL pedagogy, and teachers' dispositions toward their ELL students. Participants were asked to respond to statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, to strongly disagree. The questionnaire included one open-ended question that allowed teachers to express their questions or concerns regarding teaching ELLs. I used Google Forms to create the questionnaire, and I emailed the link of the questionnaire to the participating teachers after they agreed to participate verbally or in writing.

Interviews

Conducting interviews was the third tool I used to collect data. Along with the questionnaire, I used the interviews to collect data for the second research question. Data from interviews were gathered to measure teachers' knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward their ELLs and pedagogical knowledge and practices. Twenty-two teachers who took the questionnaire agreed to be interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was to provide qualitative, one-on-one, detailed information on how ESL endorsement or its absence factored into teachers' pedagogy for the ELL population. The interviews were in person. I used an iPhone application

called Voice Dictation to transcribe teachers' responses during the interviews. Most interviewed teachers allowed me to use this application; however, a few preferred that I only took notes. The questionnaire responses were anonymous, and the identities of teachers were concealed. During interviews, teachers were asked open-ended questions that were formatted differently from the questionnaire, though the questions addressed the core topics dealt with in the questionnaire. I used both my notes and the transcription of teachers' responses to analyze data. The iPhone application Voice Dictation did not correctly transcribe the interviews, so spelling edits were performed manually.

Data Analysis Technique

This study investigated two primary questions: (a) What value (if any) is added to the outcomes of ELLs whose elementary classroom teachers have ESL endorsement? And (b) In what ways does the ESL endorsement impact elementary teachers' knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward ELLs?

Quantitative Data: Comparing Test Scores

As explained earlier, to answer the first research question, I compared the mean scores of ELL students' growth in the content of mathematics in MAP standardized test to examine whether students taught by ESL-endorsed teachers would have better outcomes than students taught by non-ESL-endorsed teachers. In an attempt to examine this variable, I compared two groups of ELL students in the third and fifth grades. One group in third and fifth grades was taught by ESL-endorsed teachers, and the other group in third and fifth grades was taught by non-ESL-endorsed teachers. The reason I combined the third and fifth grade-level students taught by ESL-endorsed versus the third and fifth grade-level students taught by the non-ESL-endorsed was to make the sample of students larger since the test independent variable was

whether ELL-compared students were taught by ESL-endorsed teachers. To explain, the goal of the comparison was to measure the overall growth from fall 2018 to spring 2019. I used SPSS software to conduct statistical analysis. The test was called the independent sample *t*-test.

The independent sample *t*-test compares the means of two independent groups to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the two compared groups (Kent State University Libraries, 2017). The data that were compared were the mean growth the ELL students made in the subject of mathematics from fall 2018 until spring 2019. First, I created an Excel sheet with students' scores in MAP math and calculated the growth each student made from fall 2018 to spring 2019. The total number of all students was 28 ($n = 28$). I coded the independent test variable, which was ESL-endorsement. Students taught by non-ESL endorsed teachers were coded with the number (0), and students taught by ESL-endorsed teachers were coded with the number (1). Next, I imported data from the excel sheet into SPSS and ran the test.

Questionnaire Data

Fifty-four teachers responded to the questionnaire data ($n = 54$). I used a Google Sheet to organize the collected data. Data were color-coded to differentiate responses of teachers who answered: "No" to the question of "acquired ESL endorsement" from responses of participants who answered "Yes" to the same question. Each row on the spreadsheet represented an anonymous participant, while each column held responses to a specific question on the questionnaire listed at the top of the page. Likert scale responses were coded with numbers. Strongly agree was coded as 1, agree was coded as 2, unsure was coded as 3, strongly disagree was coded as 4, disagree was coded as 5. To make data results concise and less spread out, responses of strongly agree and agree were combined, and responses of strongly disagree and

disagree were combined. This step eliminated the responses to the questionnaire to only three, which helped the interpretation of the responses to be concise. The Google Sheet enabled me to calculate the ratings into descriptive statistics.

Qualitative Data

Results from the questionnaire provided both quantitative and qualitative data. Results from the multiple-choice questions provided quantitative data, and results from the open-ended question provided qualitative data. In conjunction, data from the open-ended question and the interviews provided qualitative data. The one open-ended question on the questionnaire and the interviews allowed participants to express themselves in their own words (Patton, 2008).

Coding

According to Saldaña (2013), coding is “a method that enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or “families” because they share some characteristics” (p. 9). Saldaña also explained that coding is the connection between the collected data and the explanation of their meaning. It is important to note that the questionnaire and interview questions were aligned to collect participants’ responses to provide data that address the research’s second question. Saldaña (2013) stated, “Coding is not a precise science; it is primarily an interpretive act” (p. 4). I focused on the participants’ responses since analyzing specific knowledge and their dispositions toward their ELL students was targeted in this study. In addition to coding with short phrases or words, I was able to pre-code by highlighting powerful quotes, repeated phrases, and terminologies that reflect on the dispositions of participants.

In a Google document, I laid out the transcribed data and notes for each interviewed teacher to search for words or phrases, commonalities, and differences for codes. Since the

questions on both the questionnaire and interview were aligned and complemented each other, I manually coded the categories and subcategories that were mostly related to the research questions. I believe that Saldaña (2013) would have agreed with me in coding the questionnaire and interview questions and participants' responses into specific themes and subthemes. Saldaña agreed with methodologists who supported the concept of giving the researcher a choice of coding methods and to decide "beforehand to harmonize with your study's conceptual framework or paradigm and to enable an analysis that directly answers your research questions and goals" (p. 49).

To conclude, coding data manually gave me as researcher ownership of the work. As Saldaña (2013) described this ownership as "an act of personal" (p.39), Based on the participants' responses, I coded emerged themes and subthemes since I was mostly focused on the meaning of each datum and how each theme could contribute to providing an answer to the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

The most important ethical standard is to "do no harm." A researcher should be careful not to cause harm or damage to individuals in the research (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008). To make sure damage would not occur, I followed the consent protocol by requesting the research subjects' permission. Information on the consent form included research purpose, goals, benefits, risks, and who had access to the collected data. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study if they no longer felt comfortable. Integrity in analyzing and reporting data is crucial in any study. This means I must accept data As-Is without allowing my bias to alter or compromise the data to meet expected results.

Moreover, the personal information of the subjects was kept confidential and safe. Digital transcription and notes of interviews were saved on my personal computer drive, with a password not shared with anyone. Identities of teachers, their school districts, and students were kept concealed. Respect for participants was demonstrated at all times during interviews. There were never negating, disrespectful, or contemptuous comments or reactions exhibited to participants during the interview. It is worth noting that the study passed the university's Institutional Research Review Board.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to examine the impact of elementary school general education teachers' ESL endorsement on the quality and ability of those teachers to meet the linguistic, cultural, and academic needs of the ELLs in their classrooms. The mixed-methods approach allowed me to collect qualitative and quantitative data to measure both ELL students' academic outcomes and the quality and knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward general education teachers with ESL endorsement versus the teachers without ESL endorsement.

I employed three tools to gather the needed data: a questionnaire, interviews, and statistical indicators of outcomes. The statistical analysis of students' scores compared the scores of a total of 28 ELL students. Of the 54 teachers who took the questionnaire, 22 agreed to participate in the interviews. As noted earlier, the student sample was considered to be too small to be generalized. This was unavoidable since the number of ESL-endorsed teachers at the chosen elementary schools was, and, as of this writing continues to be, too limited to conduct a comparison of their students' growth in mathematics.

In the next chapter, I disclose the findings to both of the study questions:

1. What value (if any) is added to the outcomes of ELLs whose elementary classroom teachers have ESL endorsement?
2. In what ways does ESL endorsement impact elementary teachers' knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward their ELLs?

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

In this chapter, I report the findings of the study that I believe potentially provide answers to these two research questions: 1 What value (if any) is added to the outcomes of ELLs whose classroom teachers have ESL endorsement? 2 In what ways does ESL endorsement impact elementary teachers' knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward their ELLs?

Before I delve deeper into the study findings, I took two steps: first, I introduced Wagner et al.'s (2006) four arenas of change model. Second, I analyzed the study findings data in light of the four arenas of change. Since the ultimate goal of this study was to bring change to River Valley, it was fundamental to identify what, why, and how changes take place.

Assessing the 4Cs

To identify the contributors to an identified problem, Wagner et al. (2006) offered an approach that suggested a systematic understanding of the identified problem at River Valley. This diagnostic tool is called the 4Cs: competencies, conditions, culture, and context. The 4Cs approach helps analyze challenges and goals of change in the education field. The focus of my study was to investigate whether the presence or absence of teacher ESL endorsement had an impact on the outcomes of the ELLs in general education classrooms and on teachers' pedagogy and knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward ELLs. Wagner et al.'s (2006) 4Cs tool was used as a framework that illustrated the problem that called for a change in the context of the four arenas that surrounded the educational environment of the ELL population in River Valley School District.

Study Findings in the Light of the 4Cs

As I furnish the study findings using the 4Cs model, I evaluate some aspects under each of the 4Cs, comparing ESL-endorsed versus non-ESL-endorsed classroom teachers. For example, through the lens of “competencies,” I assess general education teachers’ ability to identify ELL students’ needs, what strategies they utilized to meet those needs, and gathered information about the frequencies and nature of participating in professional development that addressed ELL needs. To discuss the second “C,” which is “condition,” I examine general education teachers’ knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward being accountable for ELL outcomes and how well they understand and support their students while they are learning a new language and adjusting to a new culture. To scope out the third “C,” which is “culture,” I evaluated how well general education teachers perceived their ELLs and their parents and how they incorporated sociocultural elements in their daily instruction. Last, to reflect on the fourth and last “C,” which is “context,” I explored how well general education teachers provided ELLs with essential academic support that impacted their students’ outcomes and whether the ESL-endorsed teachers made a difference in the ELL outcomes, presenting the quantitative results that address the first research question.

The emerging themes from the quantitative and qualitative analyzed data that addressed the second research question were:

- identifying ELLs needs
- applying effective teaching strategies for ELL
- addressing ELL needs in the content of mathematics
- participating in the district-offered professional development that addresses ELL needs
- high-stakes tests and ELL data

- differentiating between language development and learning disability
- addressing the sociocultural needs elements across the curriculum, and
- parent engagement

As I explained, I aligned and knitted the study findings with each of the 4Cs contributors.

While we explored the As-Is of the 4Cs challenges and the gathered data, we observed how competencies, condition, culture, and context were interrelated, as they all impacted each other and impacted the teaching and learning of the ELL populations at River Valley.

Given this, before launching into the results of the collected data, it is essential to note that, while the findings of this study that addressed the second research question are discussed throughout the first three 4Cs arenas: competencies, condition, and culture, the results of the first research question are found under the focus of “context,” since I discuss the outcomes of the ELL students in that section. Also, it is important to note that Table 3 and Table 4 provide details on the study findings. Table 3 summarizes the responses of the participating teachers in the questionnaire. Table 4 summarizes the responses of the interviewed teachers.

Competencies

According to Wagner, competencies refer to the skills and knowledge that stakeholders need to acquire to impact students’ learning positively. As I evaluate teachers’ competencies in the As-Is picture of River Valley, I must note that the school district has a minimal number of elementary general education teachers who acquired ESL endorsement. Data from the school district informed that only 17% of all teachers who taught classrooms that included ELL students held an ESL endorsement. Aside from this, as we discover soon, interviewed teachers reported that the department of professional development in the district rarely offered professional

development sessions that address ELL needs. General education teachers with ELL populations in their classrooms are unaware of some expectations for their performance. For example, most general education classroom teachers are not aware of the standards of language development. Realistically, grade-level general education teachers teach both native and non-native English speakers, and they are held accountable for meeting College and Career Standards. Research and my observation suggest that classroom teachers seem to assume that teaching the language development standards, especially the standards developed by World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) must be the responsibility of the ESL resource teachers (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Regardless, no one ever can or should claim those classroom teachers are only responsible for the English native speakers' outcomes, and non-speakers can be left out. Also, no one can assume that those standards can be met within the limited number of minutes that ESL resource teachers use to serve their ELL caseloads.

Without a doubt, professional development is an essential ingredient for improving learning and teaching. However, as Wagner et al. (2006) recommended, professional development needs to be “focused, job-embedded, continuous, constructed, and collaborative” (p. 99). This notion leads me to believe that classroom teachers need condensed and foundational coursework to deepen teachers' knowledge of how to teach ELLs and improve their outcomes.

Wagner et al. (2006) recommended that in addition to providing ongoing training, identifying student learning needs is equally important. Next, I present the study findings from the questionnaire and interview data regarding the areas of identifying ELL needs, applying effective teaching strategies that meet those needs generally and specifically in teaching the subject of mathematics, and I also share the collected data that investigated the quantity and

quality of the theme of professional development offered by the district that addresses ELL needs.

Identifying ELL Needs

Interviewed teachers were asked to list three or more ELL students' learning needs. Non-ESL-endorsed teachers listed similar learning needs, including vocabulary reading, grammar rules, writing, comprehension, oral skills, and academic language as essential needs (see Table 4). Teachers of fourth- and fifth-grade students listed the most significant number of needs. They explained that as students in higher elementary grades were getting ready for middle school, the gap between non-native and native English speakers widened. Two fourth and fifth grades teachers explained that ELL students need to learn the figurative language and idioms. This insight aligns with research that recommends simplifying the oral language in a class by reducing the idiomatic expressions (Lucas et al., 2008).

One teacher emphasized that ELLs need to feel accepted in the classroom among native speakers of English. Second- and third-grade teachers listed similar needs and added that ELLs need to be provided with test accommodations. Unlike teachers of older students, kindergarten teachers did not give a long list of ELL needs. Instead, they focused on modeling language, repetition, and classroom management. One non-ESL-endorsed kindergarten teacher explained that ELL students catch up quickly and learn foundational literacy skills simultaneously as native English speakers. However, first-grade teachers responded differently from kindergarten teachers. Two first-grade teachers expressed concerns about ELLs' needs of language acquisition, reading comprehension, vocabulary, understanding idioms. They also added that it was difficult for them to communicate with families regarding students' progress. Although there

is only a one-year difference between kindergarten and first grade, first-grade teacher expectations were higher than those of kindergarten teachers, which shows that ELLs' expectations are higher as they grow older. A few teachers focused their attention on respecting the cultures of their ELL students.

It is worth noting that I interviewed a school psychologist who was not ESL-endorsed, but she was fluent in both English and Spanish. The school psychologist shared with me that of 35 other school psychologists at River Valley, she was the only bilingual, Spanish-speaking school psychologist. Her responses throughout the interview were impressively aligned with best-practice research for teaching ELLs. Responding to the question about ELL needs, she replied, "ELL kids need accessible and kind teachers. Sometimes, ELL kids are scared, especially the newcomers" (personal communication, 2019). She also added that ELLs need to feel loved by the classroom teachers, and she underlined how teachers' dispositions toward their ELLs could affect children's motivation to learn. This insight was confirmed by research (de Jong & Harper, 2005). The observed connection between what the school psychologist shared and ELL-related research can be explained by the fact that the school psychologist's personal experience as a bilingual person (herself) has impacted her profession.

Compared to responses of non-ESL-endorsed, ESL-endorsed teachers listed a similar list. However, the ESL-endorsed teachers added and emphasized the need to give extra time to students to process information. They also emphasized the newcomers' need to have a safe environment to become adjusted to the American culture and the English language. One fifth-grade teacher spoke about the socioeconomic status of ELL students and how both poverty and lack of academic background knowledge are considered barriers that hinder language and academic development. This disposition is supported by research, as research has shown that

many students of color who live in poverty suffer from housing instability, hunger, health problems, and emotional and psychological issues. Research also confirms that educators must be aware of the demographic information of their students to serve and support them better (Milner & Chapin, 2017).

Another ESL-endorsed teacher explained, “Students’ lack of expressive skills frustrates and shuts them down” (personal communication, 2019). A 2nd-grade ESL-endorsed teacher explained that teachers must learn about their students’ backgrounds. She said, “just because we have Spanish speaking kids, we assume that they are from Mexico. We must ask and learn about where our ELLs came from” (personal communication, 2019). This quote echoes what de Jong and Harper (2005) stated about teachers with stereotypes as they stressed, “Good teachers understand and accommodate differences, understanding that they must try to avoid stereotypes and inappropriate expectations or interpretations of student behavior” (p. 112).

Most ESL-endorsed teachers focused their attention on the need to communicate with ELL students’ parents. Regarding the relationship between classroom teachers and the ESL resource teachers, one ESL-endorsed first-grade classroom teacher stressed the importance of collaboration between ESL resource and classroom teachers. This finding broadly supports the work of other studies in this area as a study found:

This lack of interaction means that school staff members would have few opportunities to learn from ESL teachers or those teachers who are trained in EL education. Moreover, ESL teachers would have few opportunities to learn about the content instruction that ELs receive in the general education classroom. (Hopkins et al., 2015, p. 411)

Other ESL-endorsed teachers brought up the same issue when they talked about teaching strategies, but the first-grade teacher insisted that collaboration between the ESL resource and

classroom teachers was crucial. In her words, “There was no communication with the ESL teachers to even tell me what they did when they pulled my children. I would have no idea, so I think for me, I need to know what the students need from me when they are here in my classroom” (personal communication, 2019).

Thus far, the findings of the interview data regarding the theme of identifying ELL needs indicate that, while non-ESL-endorsed teachers were able to identify linguistic needs, ESL-endorsed teachers were able to identify the linguistic, socioeconomic, and sociocultural needs. As we continue exploring the study results regarding the theme of identifying ELL needs, an important finding suggests that non-ESL-endorsed teachers might not understand the role of the native language in learning a second language. Data from the questionnaire show that 78% of ESL-endorsed versus 56% of non-endorsed teachers believed that native language plays a role in helping students learn how to read and write in English. This evidence suggests that ESL-endorsed teachers have a higher level of understating of linguistic research. Research supports that this understanding will help the teachers, “to successfully scaffold learning for ELLs, classroom teachers must become familiar with the students’ native-language ability—especially, their literacy skills—and their academic preparation in their native language (Lucas et al., 2008, p. 361).

Data from the questionnaire also show 83% of ESL-endorsed teachers versus 52% of non-endorsed students disagreed that ELLs would take no more than three years to master academic English. This datum itself strongly suggests that ESL-endorsed teachers have a deeper knowledge of the field of second language acquisition.

Applying Effective Teaching Strategies for ELL

During the interviews, teachers were asked to list three or more strategies they utilized to differentiate instruction for their ELLs. Non-ESL teachers connected the needs they stated with teaching strategies. They spoke about using gestures, visuals, graphic organizers, teaching vocabulary, simplifying writing skills, and teaming up ELL students with others who can help them, modeling, plus collaborating with prior classroom teachers (see Table 4). A few teachers explained the importance of teaching explicit phonics and academic vocabulary. When ESL-endorsed teachers shared their teaching strategies, they doubled the list given by the non-ESL-endorsed teachers. Two ESL-endorsed teachers talked about the impact of collaborating with ESL teachers, who provided pull-out services to ELLs. Both classroom teachers expressed their concerns about the lack of aligning the teaching plans of the ESL resource teacher and the classroom teachers.

Almost every ESL-endorsed and non-ESL-endorsed teacher talked about the importance of utilizing visual materials, graphic organizers, modeling for students, working with small groups, and scaffolding instruction. All of the listed strategies were what research called *extra-linguistic supports* (Lucas et al., 2008). Teachers' input regarding teaching strategies became repetitive in every interview until I met with two ESL-endorsed teachers, one of them was a special education resource teacher, and the other one was a Title 1 teacher. Title 1 teachers are paid by federal funding to provide extra support to students who academically struggle with reading and math skills. The special education resource teacher emphasized two essential strategies; one is to understand and respect ELLs' cultures and build positive relationships with ELL students, and the other method is to allow students to use their native language to transfer their knowledge to English. The Title 1 teacher was fluent in both English and Spanish. She

covered the walls of her classroom with hand-written posters of vocabulary and English-Spanish cognates. This Title 1 teacher explained that using cognates of English and Spanish makes connections between what students speak, hear, and think of in both languages. She also explained that classroom teachers should utilize the total physical response (TPR) approach with ELL students to understand spoken language. Another distinctive strategy that the Title 1 teacher mentioned was dissecting vocabulary in terms of base-word, prefixes, and suffixes. She explained the importance of understanding the data given by the ELL state standardized test that is called Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS). She said, “I believe that ACCESS testing results should be analyzed better by the teachers, so the ACCESS scores should be used as main data to drive instruction in language” (personal communication, 2019). It is worth noting that the Title 1 teacher was passionate about the importance of understanding the second language acquisition research and that it takes from 5-10 years for ELLs to learn the academic language.

Addressing ELL Needs in the Content of Mathematics

Regarding the findings on the theme of addressing ELL needs in math, two questions on the questionnaire investigated whether teachers considered the content of mathematics a universal language and whether they front-loaded their students with mathematics vocabulary to differentiate instruction. In the section of the literature review, we explored how research proved that mathematics is not a universal language and that ELLs struggle with the embedded language in word problems and with the English numerical system if different from their native language. Data from the questionnaire demonstrated that 72% of the ESL-endorsed versus 58% of the non-endorsed teachers disagreed that mathematics is universal. Seventy-eight of the ESL-endorsed versus 67% of non-endorsed teachers agreed or highly agreed that they pre-teach mathematics

vocabulary. These results are momentous because large bodies of research recommend that teachers must provide extra support in the subject of mathematics by frontloading ELL students with vocabulary and language structure (Bresser et al., 2009). However, many content teachers believe that the subject of mathematics does not require language proficiency and that failing mathematics is due to a learning or processing disability. During the interviews, participating teachers were asked to list strategies on how they supported their ELLs in mathematics. Similar to what the questionnaire data suggested, some non-ESL teachers confirmed their belief that the content of mathematics is universal and should not challenge ELLs. One non-ESL-endorsed teacher said, “I do not think ELLs need any extra mathematics support. Math is the same for everyone” (personal communication, 2019). Another teacher said, “I think they get math quickly. Math does not have as much language, and I think it’s just more of a universe” (personal communication, 2019). Another teacher said, “Math is universal. Everyone in the class is comfortable with math. I use charts and visuals” (personal communication, 2019). Other non-ESL-endorsement teachers shared that during mathematics instruction, they used the same strategies with all students, including small groups, using manipulatives and visuals, teaching math vocabulary, counting backward to model subtraction (see Table 4).

The ESL-endorsed teachers provided a similar list but also added a deeper understanding of how mathematics can be challenging for ELLs. One teacher stated, “Numbers are universal, but then once we get into word problems, that’s where you could see it becomes hard. Kids could say the words, but then they had no understanding of the meaning of the words” (personal communication, 2019). Another teacher said:

We think of math as the international language and that numbers are international, but when you throw in words, like finding the “difference,” it’s important that you just say

what this means in the math context versus the reading context. The word “difference” in math means subtraction. (personal communication, 2019)

It is fascinating how the comments of the ESL-endorsed teachers align with research that was reviewed in Chapter Two. This finding is consistent with the research that found, “To acquire the language of mathematics requires communicative competence, which can be particularly challenging for ELs, who often come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds” (Hopkins et al., p. 413).

Most ESL-endorsed teachers expressed that they offered support to their students by providing small groups and pre-teaching mathematics vocabulary and expressions. They added that they also taught mathematics facts using visuals. One ESL-endorsed teacher said that she played music to make them concentrate during mathematics instruction time.

Professional Development Offered by the School District

Regarding professional development, most of the participating teachers shared in the interviews that the school district rarely or never offers professional development that addresses the area of ELL needs. One non-ESL-endorsement teacher shared that she always attended professional development sessions with topics related to ELLs. When I asked the teacher to name one of the offered topics, she said that she forgot and could not name any. As I asked teachers to list the topics they needed to learn about regarding ELL, one fifth-grade teacher who has been teaching for the past 32 years expressed her desire to attend sessions about ELL-related strategies. She added, “It is hard for me to teach language to ELLs in fifth grade. It is much easier to teach language in early grades, like in kindergarten” (personal communication, 2019). Another fifth-grade non-ESL-endorsed teacher who has been teaching for the past 26 years said:

I try to attend as often as I can, and when the district offers a workshop or a conference, I feel that is very beneficial, but the district does not offer very often, and last year we did something on our institute day, and it was not very good. I really want a research-based workshop. I want a PD about how to teach writing to ELLs. (personal communication, 2019)

A second-grade teacher with 29 years of experience said, “I would like to get some PD on SIOP [sheltered instruction observation protocol] and learn new strategies” (personal communication, 2019).

Most ESL-endorsed teachers expressed their appreciation for being ESL-endorsed. One special education resource teacher said, “I would say PDs about ELL needs are rarely offered by the district. Honestly, because I do not get that information, I got my ESL endorsement. This ESL endorsement made me a better teacher” (personal communication, 2019). With their ESL endorsement, teachers expressed their desire to continue learning strategies on engaging ELL generally and newcomers specifically.

Condition

The second arena of change is condition. Wagner et al. (2006) defined conditions as, “The external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources” (p. 101). Teaching and learning are highly affected by certain conditions such as accepting accountability for ELL achievement in standards-based assessments, providing ELLs with recommended testing accommodations, and most importantly, understanding how to interpret data from ELL outcomes, so ELL students would not be misjudged as having a learning disability, while they actually are still in the stages of developing language proficiency. Next, I

discuss the topics of accommodations and accountability as two subthemes emerged from the collected data.

Accommodations

The state Board of Education offers guidelines of the types of testing accessibility and accommodations that can be offered to ELLs, such as placing students in small groups, allowing extra testing time, reading test directions aloud, using text-to-speech accessibility in mathematics tests, and even allowing students whose first language is Spanish to be offered the choice of taking the mathematics test in Spanish (Illinois Assessment of Reading, 2019). However, it concerns that from my observation, ELLs are offered limited or no testing accommodations by classroom teachers across elementary schools at River Valley. Data from the questionnaire show that 100% of ESL-endorsed teachers versus 88% of non-endorsed teachers are willing to provide accommodations to ELL students when they take assessments. Similarly, 95% of ESL-endorsed versus 70% of the non-endorsed general education teachers express their desire to make their instructional program responsive to the needs of their ELL populations. One non-ESL-endorsed teacher mentioned test accommodation when she listed ELL learning needs. The three ESL-endorsed teachers mentioned assessing ELLs in Spanish as a method of providing accommodation.

Accountability

Challenging state standards and accountability manifested a bigger and more visible achievement gap, analyzing newcomers' test scores. According to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that was signed in 2015, newly arriving bilingual students are no longer exempted from taking the state standardized tests (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Even though newcomers are not held accountable during their first year, teachers and administrators feel

pressured about these students' low achievement. Many general education grade-level teachers are concerned about being held accountable for their ELL students' performance.

Data gathered from the questionnaire show that 50% of the ESL-endorsed teachers versus 46% of the non-endorsed agree that classroom teachers should be held accountable for their ELL outcomes. Forty percent of ESL-endorsed versus almost 50% of non-ESL-endorsed teachers agreed that having ELLs in a general education classroom was challenging. Seventy-two percent of the ESL-endorsed versus 61% of the non-endorsed teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that ELLs should be separated from the monolingual students in a different setting. Although it was not expected to see that 22% of ESL-endorsed teachers agreed with the statement of separating ELLs from the non-ELLs, I believe that some teachers still think that ELLs will have more resourceful instruction if they are taught in ESL-sheltered classrooms that used to be more common in the past. It is still a common practice that some school districts place ELL newcomers in a separate setting apart from mainstream classrooms.

The open-ended question on the questionnaire requested teachers list their questions and concerns that they wished to be answered. One ESL-non-endorsed teacher wrote, "Students with extremely limited or zero English are placed directly in my English-speaking classroom. Shouldn't provisions be made to help students with zero or almost?" My interpretation of this question is that this teacher struggled with meeting the needs of students with low language proficiency. The problem that I see in this concern is that this teacher requests provisions that need to come from outside rather than expressing the need to acquire skills and knowledge to meet ELL needs. This quote made me question teachers' dispositions toward their responsibility for the learning of their ELLs

Differentiating Between Language Development and Learning Disability

Due to accountability pressure, which is an observed lack of understanding of how to differentiate between the indicators of language development and learning disability, many teachers decide to refer ELLs to be tested to get special education eligibility. Sometimes, they refer ELL students to be tested within two or three years of students' arrival in the United States. Student demographic data retrieved from the district student information system indicates that at the time of the study, 10% of elementary ELL students also had IEPs. Of all elementary school students with IEPs, 20% are identified as ELL students. In addition to referring ELLs for special education, some teachers decide to request that low-achieving ELL children be retained in the same grade for another year.

The questionnaire-collected data found that 45% of the ESL-endorsed versus 18% of the non-endorsed teachers agreed that they understood the process of language development and that they could differentiate between ELL language development versus learning disability. A pattern of the way non-endorsed teachers respond to the questionnaire has been observed. Non-ESL-endorsed teachers tended to choose "unsure" rather than agreeing or disagreeing. Compared to ESL-endorsed teachers, the non-ESL-endorsed tended to be less certain. For example, 30% of non-endorsed versus 11% of endorsed teachers expressed uncertainty about whether they had the right tool to diagnose the reason their ELLs perform poorly in academics.

Due to the implication of the skill of distinguishing the lack of language proficiency versus learning disability, I gathered details from interviewed teachers on what data and tools they utilized to draw this distinction (see Table 4). Half of the number of the interviewed non-ESL-endorsed teachers decided they lacked the tools to differentiate between ELLs who academically struggled because of processing language versus the ELLs who experienced

academic difficulty due to learning disability. One teacher said, “Nothing is explicit,” Another teacher said, “I don’t know if there is a tool” (personal communication, 2019). Two teachers explained that they used Fountas and Pinnell’s benchmark assessment to assess ELLs’ reading comprehension and fluency skills. However, they still relied on ESL resource teachers to make decisions about whether certain ELL students needed to be tested for special education services.

Two veteran non-ESL-endorsed teachers, one with 32 years of teaching experience and the other with 20, explained that they asked ELLs to read aloud or to listen to oral reading, then teachers asked those students to verify their understanding. If the ELL students demonstrate correct understanding by paraphrasing what they understand, then this would be a sign that they process the language. The problem with this strategy is that if the ELL student does not have enough oral language to paraphrase what he or she reads, then the teacher would assume that the difficulty with comprehension is due to learning disability rather than the lack of oral language skill.

Another non-ESL endorsed teacher echoed the same idea of assessing ELLs in reading comprehension. However, this teacher stressed the necessity of utilizing a variety of assessment tools. She added that ELLs might not be able to verbally express their understanding, but they can point to or draw a picture as a non-verbal way to reflect on their understanding. Another teacher who taught for 15 years explained that if a teacher provides ELLs with visual materials and manipulatives and those ELLs still cannot make progress, that is a sign that those ELLs struggle with learning disabilities.

Once again, the non-ESL-endorsed school psychologist, who speaks Spanish, elaborated on the tools she had been using to distinguish language development from learning disability. The psychologist explained that when she assessed ELLs in reading, she used Spanish texts with

Spanish-speaking students. When I asked her what she did with the speakers of other languages, she said:

I read low level reading texts to them, and then I ask them different types of questions, some verbal and some non-verbal. For example, after reading a story, I ask students to retell the story using their own words, and then I give them picture cards and ask them to put the pictures in the story's sequence. (personal communication, 2019)

She added that in testing ELLs, she relied mainly on using manipulatives, charts, and pictures to test their ability to process their thinking without using verbal language. The school psychologist concluded, "I analyze the growth ELLs make through different types of assessment data, such as ACCESS, and MAP in both reading and math. Reading A-Z, Fountas and Pinnell, and DIBELS reading assessment" (personal communication, 2019). The insight gained from the school psychologist was the use of various data points of multiple assessments to better understand whether an ELL is still in the process of developing the English language or there is a possibility to also have difficulty processing learning. Burr et al. (2015) recommended that teachers must use different types of assessments before they decide if a student has a learning disability.

Interview data indicated that most ESL-endorsed teachers described the tools they utilized to differentiate between language development and learning disability. A teacher with certification in both ESL and special education sheds light on the importance of triangulating data when evaluating ELLs. This teacher underscored the significance of continuing to provide ELLs with intervention in decoding and comprehension. She gave an example of working with some ELL students. She shared that in six months of intervention, her ELL students gained three or four reading levels. This same teacher manifested her knowledge of second language acquisition by adding, "I understand that research said that academic language for ELLs takes

from 5 to 10 years” (personal communication, 2019). Here, she is referring to Cummins BICS and CALPS theory. Cummins (1979) pointed out that if students have had formal education in their first language (L1), this helps them develop their second language (L2) faster.

Similarly, all other ESL-endorsed teachers spoke about constant checking for ELLs’ comprehension skills. Most endorsed teachers affirmed that ELLs need time to show academic growth. One specific teacher warned comparing ELL outcomes with native speakers of English. This same teacher is the only one who spoke about the need to evaluate ELLs using WIDA standards.

Culture

The third influence of change was culture. Wagner et al. (2006) viewed culture as “the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school” (p. 102). To evaluate the As-Is culture of River Valley, I needed to evaluate the “quality of relationship within and beyond the school” In this context, I addressed questions such as whether classroom teachers understood ELL students’ cultures, how classroom teachers responded to and addressed students’ cultures within their instructional planning and to what degree they communicated with ESL resource teachers and bilingual parents.

With the endless increase of linguistic demands involved with academic expectations embedded in the state standards, and due to the accountability in the teacher evaluation system, some classroom teachers view ELL populations’ presence in their classrooms as a disadvantage. They also hold ESL resource teachers responsible for the outcomes of the ELLs, especially the newcomers. Many general grade-level teachers are still addressing the educational and academic problems of ELLs with a deficit approach. That means that due to the pressure of teachers and

schools' "accountability" system, many continue to shackle lower academic achievement in schools as being a problem with diverse students rather than the system itself. Unfortunately, this system continues to view diverse students based on their weaknesses instead of strengths. If we treat every student in the system the same way without acknowledging their different needs that require change, then we must recognize that we are culturally blind. Researchers believe that cultural blindness brings "Unhealthy values, behaviors, policies, and practices that emerge from the barriers to cultural proficiency" (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009, p. 6).

Classroom teachers need to acquire the knowledge and skills that could transform them to be culturally proficient teachers with a better understanding of ELL cultural needs. Culturally proficient teachers find ways to collaborate with ESL resource teachers and communicate with bilingual parents. As mentioned in discussing competencies, very few teachers articulated that collaboration with the ESL resource teachers should not be optional. Regarding communication with bilingual parents, we explore that classroom teachers find it difficult to engage bilingual parents, which leads to a disconnect between school and home.

Next, I will present data results gathered from both the questionnaire and the interview that show how general education teachers addressed ELL culture and what efforts they make to engage the ELL parents in their children's school lives.

Addressing the Sociocultural Elements Across the Curriculum

One of the questions on the questionnaire measures content teachers' understanding of the body language of students coming from different cultures. The question examined whether teachers correlated ELL students avoiding eye contact with them with having a low proficiency level of the English language. Unexpectedly, non-endorsed teachers did better than ESL-endorsed teachers in this question. Surprisingly, 45% of the non-endorsed versus 34% of

endorsed teachers disagree that when ELLs avoid eye contact with teachers, this is an indication that they lack proficiency in the English language. Nevertheless, data from the interviews suggested the ESL-endorsed teachers underlined the significance of understanding and respecting ELL students' cultures as critical components of ELL learning needs. Furthermore, responses given by ESL-endorsed teachers indicate that they have better practice embedding cross-cultural elements in their instruction than the non-ESL-endorsed teachers.

Data from interviews (see Table 4) suggest that most non-ESL-endorsed content teachers narrowed the practice of addressing sociocultural needs to discussing festivals, cultural celebrations, and ethnic food. Strikingly, one mainstream non-ESL-endorsed kindergarten teacher responded to the question of how she addressed the sociocultural needs of her ELL students in the classroom by saying, "Nothing different. You cannot separate nationalities. Kids will blend quickly, and you should not talk about different nationalities" (personal communication, 2019). This is an example of what researchers called "cultural blindness." The research defines cultural blindness as "The belief that color and culture make no difference and that all people are the same" (Lindsey et al., 2009, p. 117).

Most other non-endorsed teachers admitted their lack of knowledge of how to meet this sociocultural need. Responding to the question of how they meet ELL sociocultural needs, one non-ESL teacher said, "Sadly none. I need to get better" (personal communication, 2019). Another teacher said, "I need support in this area" (personal communication, 2019). Other teachers, who admitted their lack of knowledge but also shared their practices, explained that they read to students' books that addressed holidays around the world, customs and traditions of different countries during holidays, and ethnic foods (see Table 4). Responses were repetitive, but as explained earlier, the responses of the non-ESL-endorsed school psychologist were

unique. Explaining her perspective about how teachers should embed sociocultural elements in their day-to-day lesson planning, she said, “Learn about students backgrounds, encourage kids to talk about their home countries. You can use Google Maps to locate students’ countries in the class. You can embed these elements into lesson planning. When you do these things, kids feel recognized” (personal communication, 2019). The two ideas shared by the school psychologist are valuable. One idea is to embed sociocultural elements in the curriculum as an ongoing practice, not seasonal. The other idea is to make sure ELL students feel that what they bring to class is valuable.

ESL-endorsed teachers expressed a variety of ways to address cultural needs. Similar to non-ESL teachers, a few ESL teachers listed discussing ethnic food, Christmas around the world, and other celebrations as ways of acknowledging sociocultural elements. Two ESL-endorsed teachers (who requested to be interviewed together) shared that when they taught a certain content theme, they used online resources to find books written in other languages; in most cases, Spanish was the most available language. They added that they shared these books with Spanish-speaking students and instructed those students to read the books in Spanish but to discuss the main ideas with other classmates in the English language. One of the two teachers said, “If you use that, they do have Spanish translation on there, and you actually have Spanish cognates, but it’s only in Spanish” (personal communication, 2019). Excitingly, this is the first time I heard from a teacher that using cognates was one of the ways teachers could address sociocultural elements.

De Jong and Harper (2005) recommended that good teachers connect with bilingual students’ realities by getting them access to “literacy events in multiple languages at home and in the community” (p. 113). Likewise, Samson and Collins (2012) suggested different ways in

which teachers can acknowledge students' cultural diversity, such as using reading and multimedia materials, school assembly programs, and school traditions as opportunities to address diversity.

Compared to the practices of non-ESL-endorsed teachers, I believe that ESL-endorsed teachers go above and beyond to incorporate sociocultural elements in the district curriculum map. When teachers discovered ways to allow ELL students to use their first language to reinforce learning, they proved that they valued bilingualism (Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Wagner & King, 2012). One ESL-endorsed title 1 teacher said:

Classroom teachers must value what they bring into the classroom and even getting to know them, getting to respect them, and getting to acknowledge what they bring will be beneficial for our students and also for other students in the regular classrooms. (personal communication, 2019)

I believe that this teacher's response was valuable, and it aligned with research. Researchers have recommended that for educators to model cultural proficiency, they should value diversity in their classrooms. The message that Lindsey et al. (2009) sent to teachers was, "You are delighted that you have such a heterogeneous mix of students" (p. 128).

Parent Engagement

For the educators to learn about the worlds where ELLs come from, they need to have ongoing communication with the bilingual parents, and they also need to engage those parents in their children's school lives. The problem is that with the language barrier, it is very difficult for parents to communicate with their children's teachers, and mutually it is difficult for teachers to communicate with parents. However, do ESL-endorsed teachers find ways to have better

communication than non-ESL-endorsed teachers? Data from both questionnaires and interviews answered this question.

Due to the difficulty of communication, engaging bilingual parents, especially the newcomers, was one of the challenges classroom teachers faced. Two items on the questionnaire measured how teachers viewed parents' engagement as a key factor in the learning and teaching process. Although communicating with bilingual parents might be a challenging task, 100% of ESL-endorsed versus 86% of non-endorsed teachers agreed that they found ways to engage bilingual parents in the school lives of their children. Data from the questionnaire indicated that ESL-endorsed teachers demonstrated a better understanding of how to reach out to parents and how to find ways to help them become engaged in their children's school lives regardless of the language barrier.

Data from the interviews confirmed data from the questionnaire regarding ESL-endorsed teachers' distinguished ability to connect with bilingual parents. One non-ESL-endorsed teacher said, "I need to get much better at this. That language barrier makes it surely hard for me to connect with them" (personal communication, 2019). Interviewed teachers were asked about what they did to encourage bilingual parents to be engaged in their children's school lives. Non-ESL-endorsed teachers shared similar practices in which they engaged bilingual parents. Most of those teachers listed a few means of communication that they used to contact parents, such as newsletters, Seesaw, and Class Dojo (see Table 4). Class Dojo is an online tool that teachers use to connect with students and families. This application allows teachers to share photos, videos, and messages that can be translated into different languages. Seesaw is also a digital portfolio tool that has been designed for student engagement. Through this application, students take pictures, draw, and record videos to complete projects.

All interviewed teachers with and without endorsement agreed that when parents requested a translator during parent-teacher conferences, teachers contacted the bilingual department to request translators. So, what do ESL-endorsed teachers do differently? Samson and Collins (2012) assured that to demonstrate an appreciation of diversity, teachers must find meaningful ways to build a relationship with their students' parents. ESL-endorsed teachers use similar means of communication with parents, such as Class Dojo and Seesaw.

Many of the ESL-endorsed teachers stressed the importance of making parents feel comfortable and welcomed. One teacher said that she intentionally would go outside during the dismissal time to greet parents while they were picking up their children. Another teacher said that she sent a daily journal to establish ongoing communication with parents. Another teacher said:

I encourage them to come into the classroom and meet me. I have asked that they need things translated. I am trying to make my bilingual children and families feel comfortable. I think they've seen that the district is trying to encompass that a little bit more by sending translators to our parent-teacher conferences. (personal communication, 2019)

As I compared the ESL-endorsed versus the non-endorsed teachers in terms of their dispositions toward bilingual parents, I compared this last quote coming from an ESL-endorsed teacher who was committed to making parents feel comfortable with communication with her, with two other quotes from two non-ESL-endorsed teachers. One quote came from one non-ESL-endorsed teacher who said, "I call parents when I need to talk to them. If they need a translator, I request one" (personal communication, 2019). The other quote also came from the one open-ended question on the questionnaire. The open-ended question on the questionnaire

allowed teachers to express their questions or concerns. One non-ESL-endorsed teacher wrote, “If the students with intellectual disabilities are able to learn English, why can’t the parents at least try?” Taken together, I believe this quote sums up my argument about the dispositions of ESL-endorsed teachers toward bilingual parents. ESL-endorsed teachers have a better grasp on how to approach bilingual parents and support them to serve ELL students better.

As noted earlier, Table 3 summarizes the responses of the participating teachers to the questionnaire, and table 4 summarizes the responses of the interviewed teachers.

Table 3

Questionnaire Descriptive Data-Summary of Findings

Questions	Non-ESL-endorsed Teachers			ESL-Endorsed Teachers		
	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
1-I provide ELLs with responsive instruction	70%	9%	21%	95%	0	5%
2-Having ELLs in classrooms is a challenging task	48%	10%	42%	40%	13%	47%
3-I would rather place ELLs in a separate classroom	10%	29%	61%	22%	6%	72%
4-It is fair to hold teachers accountable for ELL outcomes	46%	37%	17%	50%	28%	22%
5-Students avoiding eye- contact indicate low language proficiency	23%	32%	45%	44%	22%	34%
6-language of math is universal	26%	16%	58%	17%	11%	72%
7-I pre-teach math vocabulary	67%	5%	28%	78%	11%	11%
8-I provide accommodations to ELLs	88%	9%	3%	100%	0	0
9- I can differentiate L2 from LD	18%	30%	52%	45%	11%	44%
10-Native and non-native English speakers have similar mistakes	55%	42%	3%	67%	5%	28%
11-I should not use native language with ELLs	9%	35%	56%	11%	11%	78%
12- ELL should master academic language in 3 years	13%	35%	52%	0	17%	83%
13-I find ways to engage bilingual parents	86%	7%	7%	100%	0	0
14-Bilingual parents are comfortable asking me questions	27%	10%	63%	33%	23%	44%
15-Learning to be effective with ELLs is just 'good teaching' and ' best practice'	94%	6%	0%	100%	0%	0%

N=54

Table 4

Interview Data-Summary of Findings

Non-ESL-endorsed Teachers	Interview Questions	ESL-endorsed Teachers
<p>Average of 18 years of teaching experience</p> <p>Vocabulary, writing, reading aloud, decoding, repetition, comprehension, writing, idioms, phrasal verbs, vowels, pronunciation, exposure to language, need to feel comfortable, language acquisitions, communication with home, academic language, accommodation in testing, need to improve oral language, need to feel comfortable, figurative language, understand grammar rules, accessible and kind teachers.</p> <p>Repetition, differentiation in instruction, classroom management, modeling, use gestures and visuals, videos, peer support, use the word wall, graphic organizers, give time to process. Allow turn and talk, listen to classmates, oral language, small groups, lots for examples, differentiation in writing, sight words, one-on-one support, collaboration with prior teachers.</p> <p>ELLs need more vocabulary, synonyms, antonyms, oral language. Monolingual kids are more comfortable than ELLs. ELLs need smaller text and vocabulary. Monolinguals struggle with text evidence. ELLs lack exposure to English. School psychologist Input: bilingual students transfer native language rules into English. Native speakers of English are relaxed, while ELLs put so much effort into understanding.</p>	<p>1-How long have you been a teacher?</p> <p>2-List three or more ELL learning needs</p> <p>3-List three or more learning strategies for ELLs</p> <p>4-How are the learning needs of ELLs different from monolingual students?</p>	<p>Average of 14 years of teaching experience</p> <p>Vocabulary, reading comprehension, writing, grammar rules, background knowledge, more time to process language, visuals, phonics, sounds, homonyms, speaking skills,</p> <p>Verbal cues, body language, modeling, hands-on, more time to process and practice, need to feel comfortable, respect their culture, prefixes, and suffixes, idioms, safe environment, socioeconomic status, communication, learn test strategies.</p> <p>Small groups, collaboration with peers, one-on-one, break down steps, teach phonics, multiple-meaning words, teach reading and writing, academic language, cognates, base words, roots of Greek and Latin words, use Total Physical Response (TPR), activate background knowledge, use tier 1 and 2 interventions, modify and scaffold instruction, use exit slips, peer tutoring, picture books, context clues, allow students to use native language, help students transfer knowledge from their language to English, show kids world, real examples, work closely with ESL resource teachers, build a positive relationship with ELLs. ELLs need grammar and repetition. Monolingual students have some of the needs of ELLs in grammar. Monolinguals with low socioeconomic lack background knowledge like ELLs. ELLs need reassurance and repetition, and grammar skills. It is important to understand and respect ELLs cultures. Research says that ELLs take 5-10 years to learn the academic language. With monolinguals, I need to focus on the content; with ELLs, I need to focus on both language and content. ELLs need to be frontloaded with vocabulary. ELLs need to fit in. Refugees did not have prior education. ELLs need more background knowledge and vocabulary; ELLs use code-switching.</p>

Non-ESL-endorsed Teachers	Interview Questions	ESL-endorsed Teachers
<p>It is hard to know the difference. I can't tell. I do not know if there is a tool. Nothing is explicit. I do not have a tool. I ask kids to read aloud and explain what they read. IF they cannot explain, they most likely have a learning disability. I struggle with this. I use Fountas and Pinnell and reading Records to assess comprehension. I assess comprehension by asking questions to check to understand. I use formative and summative assessments. Students can draw a picture to show understanding. I use manipulatives and visuals.</p> <p>School Psychologist Input: Language assessment is different from cognitive assessments. I assess Spanish kids in Spanish. I assess students with other languages with easy texts and ask them to respond in non-verbal language using pictures. I analyze students' data in all assessments.</p> <p>Attend in-district PDs-never outside-once every couple of years-nothing outside the district. I do not think I had any outside, and the district rarely offered any. The district does not offer very often. Rarely inside and never outside.</p> <p>Nothing-I need PD about how to teach writing. I need to learn strategies for teaching vocabulary. I would like to get a Pd on the SIOP model. Need to work with ESL resource teachers. I need a PD about how to teach ELLs writing and learning versus learning issues.</p> <p>Need PD about strategies to teach phonics and how to activate background knowledge. I need PD on how to help ELLs succeed. I need to learn how to teach academic language. I need to attend a PD about ELLs with ADHD and Autism.</p>	<p>5-What tools do you use to differentiate second language learning(L2) from learning disability (LD)</p> <p>6-How often do you attend professional development in and outside the district?</p> <p>7-What professional development do you think you would need to help ELLs better?</p>	<p>We should not just look at test scores. We should not compare ELLs with non-ELLs in-classroom observation. This is an area of need. Students need to have enough time before we decide. We must use the native language in assessing those students. Teachers need to make sure ELLs are able to sequence events. If the problem is the retention of memory, then it is not language. Consult with ESL resource teachers; kids with disabilities do not retain information even if you explain the same concept multiple times. Kids with learning disabilities do not retain information. Teachers must consider ACCESS scores as the main data to drive instruction. Consider WIDA standards and language proficiency levels when evaluating ELLs. Triangulate data from all tests, and test kids in Spanish as well.</p> <p>The district never offers PDs that address ELL needs. The district rarely offers PDs related to ELLs. The district rarely offers PDs. There is no PD about ELLs. I never had any inside or outside PDs related to ELLs.</p> <p>I need a PD that addresses how to better engage and connect with ELLs. My ESL endorsement made me a better teacher. We need to learn about teaching newcomer ELLs and strategies on how to teach writing. I need a PD that dresses how to teach ELLs with multiple levels in the same class.</p>

Non-ESL-endorsed Teachers	Interview Questions	ESL-endorsed Teachers
<p>Nothing different, kids blend in quickly—no need to talk about cultures. Talk about different places, different celebrations, habits, food.</p> <p>Need support in this area. I do not include much. Sadly non.</p> <p>Sometimes we read about Mexico. We work on projects to study different places.</p> <p>School Psychologist Input: build rapport with students and families, learn about students’ backgrounds, encourage kids to talk about their own countries. Use Google Map to locate students’ countries.</p>	8- What instruction do you embed in your lesson planning to address ELL sociocultural needs?	<p>Read about holidays around the world, discuss celebrations, play different music from students’ cultures. Discuss other cultures. Ethnic foods, holidays. I use a website called readworks.org. I give my Spanish speaking students access to read the same books we are reading but in Spanish. Teachers must value bilingual students and value what they bring to classrooms. We talk about Ramadan and especially that students are fasting. Connect literature with ELLs experience. Make them talk about their culture. I use social studies content to discuss different countries, flags.</p>
<p>No need for extra support. Math is the same for everyone. Use manipulatives, count backward, work with partners. I use a smartboard, teach academic math vocabulary, and work with partners—hands-on visuals. Math does not have much language. It is more universal.</p>	9-What special support do you provide to ELLs in math?	<p>Manipulatives, math facts every day, play videos of explanation, small groups, math facts every day, math manipulatives, pre-teach vocabulary, use visuals, use dry-erase whiteboards with markers, hands-on. Math is not a universal language. We must teach vocabulary, especially multiple meaning words. I have posters and a word wall for math. We write definitions of new math words in notebooks, provide test accommodations, I play music.</p>
<p>I call when I need to talk to them. It is hard to make connections with parents. I need to get better at this. Language is a barrier. We communicate through Seesaw. I send newsletters and reading materials at home. Send home bags of books, use class Dojo with translation. Use district translators. Families bring someone to translate for them. Usually, parents bring someone to translate for them. Students translate for their parents during parent-teacher conferences. Parents can email me with their questions.</p>	10-How do you encourage bilingual parents to be engaged in school life?	<p>Build a relationship with parents, partner them up, make sure they are comfortable. I learn about their background. I encourage them to come to class. I make them feel comfortable. I am friendly with them, and I make them feel welcomed. I send home weekly updates. We always make sure someone is here to translate for parents. Use class Dojo and Seesaw and get things translated for parents.</p>

N= 22

Context

Context is the fourth arena in the 4Cs. Wagner et al. (2006) suggested, “Understanding context means knowing more about the worlds from which students come and those for which they must be prepared” (p. 104). Demographic data of River Valley tell us that 16% of all students are ELLs and that overall, 55% of students in the school district are low income and receive free or reduced lunches. Very specifically, PowerSchool, the district data software,

informs us that in the 2018-2019 school year, about 400 newcomer students were admitted to the elementary schools in the district. Those students represented 14% of all ELLs in elementary schools. The term *refugee* does not only imply the economic status of students but also indicates that students and their families came to the United States with poverty, fear, insecurity, anxiety, and little or no prior formal education.

To portray a clear picture of the context of River Valley, it was important to emphasize that there was a clear indication of discrepancy in achievement between the ELL population's performances versus their non-ELL peers. For that matter, as you will learn soon, ELLs at River Valley performed at a lower level compared to other ELLs in the state. As schools continue to implement College and Career Readiness Standards, mainstream teachers face challenges supporting ELLs in meeting state academic expectations. To reiterate, the goal of this study was not to change the demographic or socioeconomic data of the school district. The goal was to bring change to students' academic outcomes under the existing demographic and socioeconomic circumstances.

Depending on the socioeconomic status, literacy level in the native language, and years of formal education, ELLs show progress in meeting language and academic skills (Hamayan et al., 2013). ACCESS testing scores for the school year 2018 informed that only 2% of the ELL population in the elementary schools in River Valley met the language proficiency criteria. Data from the 2018 state standardized assessment of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) informed that in the subject of English language arts (ELA), only 6% of ELL third-graders, 9% of ELL fourth-graders, and 2% of ELL fifth-graders met the standards. Compared to white students at River Valley, ELLs performed at a lower rate. In the subject of language arts, 22% of third grade, 25% of fourth grade, and 29% of fifth-grade

students met the state standards. In the subject of mathematics, 9% of third grade, 7% of fourth grade, and only 2% of fifth grade ELLs at River Valley met the mathematics state standards.

White students at River Valley outperformed ELLs (though they did poorly compare to the state average of White students). In mathematics, 19% of third grade, 23% of fourth grade, and 23% of fifth-grade White students met the state mathematics standards.

Data also showed that ELLs at River Valley performed poorly compared to the state average of ELL students meeting the same standards in both ELA and mathematics contents. The state average of ELLs meeting the ELA standards in the same year was 18% of third graders, 17% of fourth-graders, and 18% of fifth graders. The state average of ELLs meeting mathematics standards was 20% of third graders, 13% of fourth-graders, and 5% of fifth graders (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018). Table 5 exhibits the comparison between the outcomes of elementary ELLs of River Valley versus their white peers and between the ELLs of River Valley versus the state average of ELLs.

Table 5

Summary of 2018 PARCC Data

Content Area	Grade Level	White students at River Valley	ELLs at River Valley	State Average of ELLs
ELA	3	22%	6%	18%
	4	25%	9%	17%
	5	29%	3%	18%
Mathematics	3	19%	9%	20%
	4	23%	7%	13%
	5	23%	2%	5%

Note. Data retrieved from Illinois Report Card 2018-2019.

These data results show that not only is there an achievement gap between the ELLs and the white students in the district on a local level, but they also show that the ELL populations at River Valley perform lower than the average ELLs at the state level. The poor performance of

ELLs in the content of ELA can be explained that the majority of the ELL populations at the district have not yet reached the proficiency level in the English language, not to mention that the ELA state assessment is designed for monolingual students who speak English natively. However, I found it difficult to explain why these ELL populations struggled with the mathematics subject. As explained previously in the review of literature, the language of mathematics needs to be taught explicitly, and if classroom teachers differentiate and utilize effective strategies, ELLs can meet and exceed standards in the subject of mathematics.

English Language Learners Outcomes

To create a better academic context for ELLs at River Valley, this research investigated whether classroom teachers with ESL endorsement taught their ELLs the content of mathematics more effectively and their students have better outcomes than the classroom teachers with no ESL endorsement. To find an answer to this research question, the *t*-test was used to “determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of two groups” (Carroll & Carroll, 2002, p. 81). According to Carroll and Carroll, 2002, the statistical technique of the *t*-test answers the null hypothesis, which was “There is no difference between two groups on their respective mean scores” (p. 81). For the purpose of this study, as a researcher, I investigated whether I could reject the null hypothesis and get inferential statistics that concluded there was a statistically significant difference between the ELL group that was taught by ESL-endorsed teachers and the ELL group that was taught by the non-ESL-endorsed teachers. Before we launched the *t*-test results, valuable descriptive statistics were performed to prepare data to conduct the independent samples *t*-test. Table 6 and Table 7 present the third and fifth grade MAP scores in mathematics and the growth they made individually from fall 2018 to spring

2019. Data in the second column indicate whether ESL or non-ESL-endorsed teachers taught the ELL students.

Table 6

Third Grade ELLs' Individual MAP Math Scores Fall 2018-Spring 2019

<i>ELL Students</i>	<i>ESL-Endorsed Teacher</i>	<i>Fall 2018</i>	<i>Spring 2019</i>	<i>Growth</i>	<i>% Growth</i>
ELL1	Yes	177	192	15	8.47%
ELL2	Yes	173	189	16	9.25%
ELL3	Yes	190	195	5	2.63%
ELL4	Yes	184	203	19	10.33%
ELL5	Yes	190	199	9	4.74%
ELL6	Yes	151	171	20	13.25%
ELL7	No	192	202	10	5.21%
ELL8	No	187	180	-7	-3.74%
ELL9	No	187	207	20	10.70%
ELL10	No	187	189	2	1.07%
ELL11	No	164	180	16	9.76%

Table 7

Fifth Grade ELLs' Individual MAP Math Scores Fall 2018-Spring 2019

<i>ELL Students</i>	<i>ESL-Endorsed Teacher</i>	<i>Fall 2018</i>	<i>Spring 2019</i>	<i>Growth</i>	<i>%Growth</i>
1	Yes	216	229	13	6.02%
2	Yes	210	221	11	5.24%
3	Yes	215	230	15	6.98%
4	Yes	221	231	10	4.52%
5	Yes	192	212	20	10.42%
6	Yes	219	237	18	8.22%
7	Yes	228	246	18	7.89%
8	No	212	221	9	4.25%
9	No	218	232	14	6.42%
10	No	223	223	0	0.00%
11	No	212	237	25	11.79%
12	No	222	241	19	8.56%
13	No	209	215	6	2.87%
14	No	184	194	10	5.43%
15	No	196	197	1	0.51%
16	No	231	251	20	8.66%
17	No	161	160	-1	-0.62%

Data management and analysis of the t -test were performed using SPSS. The independent variable for the statistical analysis was whether students were taught by an ESL-endorsed classroom teacher. The dependent variable was the growth students made between fall 2018 and spring 2019. The mean growth of the mathematics MAP scores (2018-2019) was compared between the two groups of ELLs taught by ESL-endorsed teachers versus ELLs taught by non-ESL-endorsed teachers.

As was indicated, the purpose of running the t -test was to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two ELL groups (ESL-endorsed or non-ESL endorsed teachers). There were three crucial decisions that needed to be made to select the type of t -test to be performed. The three decisions were: (a) whether the null hypothesis was a non-directional (two-tailed) or a directional (one-tailed) test, (b) if the level of probability was 0.05 or 0.01, and (c) whether the test would be an independent (comparing two separate groups) or correlated t -test.

To compare the two means of the compared ELL groups, the independent sample t -test with a significance level of .05 was determined to be performed. It is important to note that a critical decision was made regarding conducting a two-tailed test. Although the study focused on only one tail and was only interested in one-directional positive (right-tailed) t statistics, the test had to be conducted as a two-tailed test because SPSS software had no setting to conduct a one-tailed test for differences of means (IBM Support, n.d.). It is important to explain that an extra step was taken after getting the initial results to adjust the p -value from the two-tailed test to the one-tailed test.

Table 8

Mean Differences in Growth between Students of ESL-endorsed and Non-endorsed Teachers

Endorsement	Grade Level	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error Mean
FA18	Non-ESL-endorsed	15	199	21.233	5.482
	ESL-endorsed	13	197.38	22.835	6.333
SP19	Non-ESL-endorsed	15	208.6	25.884	6.683
	ESL-endorsed	13	211.92	22.333	6.194
Growth	Non-ESL-endorsed	15	9.6	9.364	2.418
	ESL-endorsed	13	14.54	4.684	1.299

Note. *N* = number of participating ELLs.

Table 8 shows the mean growth made (between fall 2018 and 2019) by the students taught by ESL-endorsed teachers was 14.54, while the amount of the mean growth made by the students taught by non-ESL-endorsed teachers was 9.6. These numbers show that ELLs taught by ESL-endorsed teachers made more growth between fall 2018 and spring 2019 than ELLs taught by non-ESL teachers. Furthermore, the variance in growth between ELLs taught by ESL-endorsed teachers (4.684) is smaller than the variance in growth between ELLs taught by non-ESL-endorsed teachers (9.364). This difference means that the gap in achievement among ELLs taught by ESL-endorsed teachers is smaller than the gap among ELLs taught by non-ESL-endorsed teachers, which means more consistent results from instruction by the ESL-endorsed teachers.

Table 9

Independent Sample Test Results

Independent Samples Test		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Growth	Equal variances assumed	6.16	0.02	-1.721	26	0.097	-4.938	2.869	-10.837	0.96
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.799	21.189	0.086	-4.938	2.745	-10.643	0.766

Notes. P-value = 0.086 for two tailed. Hence, it's 0.043 for one (right)-tailed.

Data from Table 9 show that when using the independent samples t-test, the degrees of freedom (df) is calculated as the total number of the participants minus 2 (Carroll & Carroll, 2002). So, the degrees of freedom would be $(28 - 2 = 26)$. Data from the same table also show that the two-tailed test's P-value was 0.084, which was higher than the probability of 0.05, indicating that the test did not show a statistically significant difference.

Nevertheless, these are not the final results. As explained earlier, data from this table resulted from a two-tailed test versus a one-tailed test, which was required here. The purpose of the test was to determine whether there was a difference in the means between the two compared groups in a specific direction (positive). To further explain the difference, a two-tailed test uses both the positive and negative tails of distribution to determine the possibility of positive or negative differences, which was not focused on in this study and, as explained earlier, due to the fact SPSS does not have a specific procedure to run a one-tailed test. The IBM SPSS software instructs the users to divide the significance that was resulted from a two-tailed *t*-test in half to determine whether the *t* statistics is significant (IBM Support, n.d.). To adjust the results, the

significance p -value of the two-tailed test was divided by two to get the one-tailed P -value, $P = 0.086 \div 2 = 0.043$. The actual P -value for the one-tailed test was 0.043, which was smaller than 0.05, the significance level, which means that there was enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the means of the two ELL compared groups.

Interpretation

The collected quantitative data that addressed the first research question investigated whether the ESL endorsement had positive impacts on the outcomes of the ELLs. The results of the one-tailed t -test that compared the growth made in the content of mathematics between ELLs taught by ESL-endorsed versus ESL-non-endorsed teachers showed a significant difference.

Not only did data show that ELLs taught by ESL-endorsed teachers made growth, but all non-ELL students in the classroom did as well. The significance of this finding adds to the value of acquiring the ESL endorsement since ESL-endorsed teachers are capable of improving the achievement of their ELLs and non-ELLs.

Data from both the questionnaire and interviews were gathered to address the second research question. To answer the second question, the knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions of the ESL-endorsed versus non-ESL-endorsed teachers were measured and compared. Data from both the questionnaire and interviews were coded and triangulated in some ways. One way was to determine the important themes that need to be discussed in this study to explain the implication of acquiring a grade-level teacher's ESL endorsement. The second was to investigate whether participating ESL-endorsed teachers had better dispositions, understanding, and more effective strategies than non-endorsed teachers. The emerging themes from the

analyzed quantitative and qualitative data of the questionnaire and interviews that addressed the second research questions were:

- identifying ELLs needs
- applying effective teaching strategies for ELL
- addressing ELL needs in the content of mathematics
- participating in the district offered professional development that addresses ELL needs
- high-stakes tests and ELL data
- differentiating between language development and learning disability
- addressing the sociocultural needs elements across the curriculum, and
- parent engagement.

The questionnaire and interview data that addressed the second research question showed that ESL-endorsed teachers had better knowledge, pedagogical skills, and dispositions toward ELLs and more profound knowledge in second language development. As shared earlier, 72% of the ESL-endorsed versus 61% of the non-endorsed teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that ELLs should be placed separately from the monolingual students.

The gathered data answered both research questions and showed a positive relationship between acquiring ESL endorsement and improving the ELL outcomes. Results also showed that ESL-endorsed teachers had more knowledge and a better disposition toward ELL populations than the non-ESL-endorsed teachers. A closer examination of the research questions and collected data confirmed that the two research questions were interrelated. Data suggested that when general education grade-level teachers acquired ESL endorsement, they developed a better understanding and attitude toward ELLs. This understanding translated into adequate and practical instruction that improves ELL outcomes.

Judgments

Although I believe that the questionnaire questions were exact, the data results of one question were surprisingly unexpected. One of the questionnaire's items measured teachers' understanding of what it takes to teach ELLs effectively. Apparently, both endorsed and non-endorsed teachers agreed or strongly agreed that just "good teaching" and "best practice" are enough to provide ELLs with their needs. According to research, just "good teaching" is not enough to provide effective instruction to the ELL population (de Jong & Harper, 2005). In other words, good teaching practices for monolingual students does not necessarily mean good teaching of bilingual students. Coady et al. (2016) stated, "Inclusive teaching in mainstream classrooms requires that teachers go beyond good general education practices and include ELLs physically in classroom activities" (p. 361). My explanation for the unexpected responses is that the wording of the question was subtle. In teaching, phrases such as "best practice" and "good teaching" are prevalent and heavily used. In the context of providing professional development, presenters refer to research-based practices as "best practices." However, when it comes to meeting the needs of students who speak a native language other than English and come from a different cultural background, "best practice" requires specific pedagogy that is different from the pedagogy of teaching native speakers of English. This is why teachers who agreed to participate in the interview were asked specifically to explain what they did to ensure bilingual parents' engagement, which (most likely) was different from what they did to ensure monolingual parents' engagement. This explains why many of the non-endorsed teachers admitted that they needed support in the area of engaging parents.

Recommendations

As school leaders, we have a moral and ethical obligation to address and remove all barriers that hinder ELL students' growth and achievement. The first step to achieve this goal is to focus on high-quality learning for those children. Given the collected data and the fact that classroom teachers are responsible for delivering meaningful and strategic instruction that meets ELL linguistic and content needs, I have three recommendations to bring forth the needed change.

The first recommendation is to establish a new policy for hiring new elementary teachers. All new elementary classroom teachers, who will be assigned to teach classrooms with any number of the ELL population, must have an ESL endorsement.

My second recommendation is to request those classroom teachers who have already been teaching classrooms with ELL populations to join and complete an ESL-endorsement program. River Valley has already been offering teachers (free of charge) opportunities to join and complete ESL-endorsement cohort programs in 18 months.

My third recommendation is that the school district must offer ongoing professional development that addresses meeting the needs of ELLs generally and newcomers specifically since this has been a challenge for most participating teachers. No doubt, ESL-endorsed teachers must continue learning best practices in ELL pedagogy. Teachers must not stop learning even if they are ESL-endorsed. As discussed previously, Wagner et al. (2006) emphasized that teachers must view themselves as learners ensuring that ongoing professional development builds the needed competencies that lead to the targeted educational transformation. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) agreed with Wagner and recommended that ongoing and sustained professional development provide teachers with opportunities to examine their practices and to

gain new and necessary skills that can match the rapid change in content curriculum, pedagogy, and learners. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin believed (2011), “Efforts to redesign education ultimately require rethinking teachers’ preparation and professional development” (p. 83).

CHAPTER FIVE

Changing As-Is to To-Be

Wagner et al. (2006) recommended that district leaders do some further analysis in terms of how to move schools from the status quo to exhibit what the system might look like when the identified problem has vanished. This process involves the four arenas of change after the targeted change takes place. In this chapter, I describe my vision of what context, culture, competencies, and conditions in River Valley would change to if and when general education classroom teachers acquire the ESL endorsement.

Competencies

When the recommended change of having the classroom teachers acquire the ESL endorsement takes place, building leaders realize that for the best interest of students, they should encourage classroom teachers to participate in the charge-free ESL endorsement. Being a part of the bilingual department that offers this opportunity to teachers, I am confident that the coursework endorsement is provided by an accredited university and financially covered. Having taken this coursework before, I am also convinced that teachers will realize that the methodology and second language acquisition classes will inspire and provide them with methods on how to meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students.

As discussed earlier, grade level teachers express their concerns regarding how to reach out to newcomers who come to the United States with little or no English skills. Completing the coursework of the ESL endorsement equips teachers with strategies to use with both newcomers and those who have been in the country for some years. In addition to serving the ELL students, during collaboration, the ESL-endorsed teachers can offer professional development to their colleagues in the building regarding scaffolding instruction for low-achieving students.

Moreover, the ESL endorsement coursework enables teachers to gain knowledge about the language development standards that the ELLs with different language proficiency levels must learn to reach proficiency in the language. As the above data suggest, all classroom teachers must learn basic knowledge of the second language acquisition process to serve the academic needs of the ELLs better. For example, all teachers taking the ESL endorsement coursework must learn about language development standards developed by the WIDA. (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.). WIDA, an educational consortium, designed a framework that describes the language development continuum within the four domains of language (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) with five language proficiency levels: entering, beginning, developing, expanding, and bridging. These levels describe the spectrum of ELs' progression from knowing little or no English to acquiring the necessary skills to be transitioned to the English-only classroom without extra support.

Condition

Thus far, the premise of this study has argued that when classroom teachers acquire ESL endorsement, changes take place. I believe conditions at River Valley will move from as-is to to-be. Based on the collected data, I expected at least three essential problems to be resolved, (a) classroom teachers would most likely accept accountability for the academic outcomes of their ELLs, (b) classroom teachers would provide their ELLs with accommodations during both instruction and assessment, and (c) classroom teachers will have a solid knowledge of second language acquisitions that will lead to a better understanding of the difference between language development and learning disability.

Providing ELLs with test accommodations is one of the crucial topics not discussed enough with classroom teachers in schools. Data results from the teacher questionnaire indicated

that 100% of the ESL-endorsed versus 88% of non-endorsed teachers were willing to provide accommodations when testing ELL students. This finding conflicts with my own observations of teacher behavior. I observed that a few non-ESL-endorsed teachers were providing test accommodations for the ELLs. The Illinois State Board of Education provides guidelines for recommended accommodations that can support the ELL students during testing (Illinois Assessment of Readiness, 2019).

While accommodations for all ELL students in the areas of reading and language arts are limited to just extended time and perhaps testing students in small groups, in mathematics, students are entitled to have the test read to them either electronically, by using text-to-speech accommodation, or by a human reader. Aside from this, providing students with access to use their native language while taking an assessment is one of the tools classroom teachers can use to provide accommodations to ELLs. The Illinois State Board of Education provides a Spanish version of the standardized mathematics test to students who are proficient in Spanish. The key problem here is that because the list of accessibility and accommodations for the ELLs is provided by the state as guidance rather than obligation. This creates inconsistency in implementing those accommodations throughout the schools within the district; in fact, it creates inconsistency among school districts. Therefore, ELL low readers struggle with the complexity of language embedded in the word problems and score low in mathematics. In all important respects, low achievement in mathematics might lead to two negative consequences: (a) classroom teachers tend to reject being accountable for ELL outcomes and (b) ELLs' low scores might mislead classroom teachers who believe that mathematics is a universal language into thinking that ELLs who fail mathematics tests have learning disabilities.

Realistically, standardized tests will continue to pressure teachers and administrators. However, teachers understand how to collect data on the growth their ELLs make. As a result of a better understanding in the fields of second language acquisition and language development process, only ELL students who are struggling with cognitive challenges will be referred to special education after being provided with necessary tiers of intervention. Overall, ELL students will be provided with the appropriate intervention instruction and the needed test accommodation during testing. To recapitulate, accepting accountability for ELLs, providing testing accommodations, and learning about second language acquisition would improve the conditions at River Valley.

Culture

Changing As-Is to To-Be would lead to a change in a few aspects: the way teachers perceive ELL populations, incorporating sociocultural elements in daily instruction, and their relationship with the stakeholders who have an impact on the ELLs, including the bilingual parents and the ESL resource teachers. Richard-Amato and Snow (2005) recommended, “All teachers need to understand how language is learned” (p. 145). No doubt, collaborating with ESL resource teachers unite all the efforts made to serve the ELLs linguistically and culturally.

Research suggests teacher interaction is crucial for improving teaching and learning. Hopkins et al. (2015) pointed out that teachers learn as they interact with their colleagues. However, they are not always aware of each other’s expertise. Moreover, as researchers examine the relationship between language learning and cultural identity, they find that for teachers to respond positively to the ELL students’ attitudes, motivations, and behaviors, they must take into consideration the students’ sociocultural elements and the psychological foundations of second language acquisition (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Richard-Amato & Snow, 2005).

De Jong and Harper (2005) emphasized that classroom teachers must understand that the process of acculturation is not simple for ELL students. In every sense of the word, I find this concept true. A new life in a new culture could be very challenging for students. Culture can be a big shock and might impact a student's ability to adjust to the new culture and language. I find it also important that teachers do not misinterpret ELL students' behavior in the context of the American culture. For example, in some cultures, it is disrespectful for children to have eye contact while speaking with adults; the child must look down to show respect to an adult. In contrast, in American culture, it is not polite to speak to an adult and look somewhere else. Likewise, in some cultures, parents teach their children to share food with others sitting at the same table. However, in most (if not all) schools, children who share food with others in the school cafeteria break the cafeteria rules. Although it is important for the ELLs to understand and follow the school rules, it is also important for teachers to understand the struggles the ELLs go through to adjust to the new cultural rules.

Addressing ELLs' sociocultural needs is not limited to acknowledging students' holidays and celebrations. Research suggests that to provide culturally and linguistically responsive instructions, teachers need to make connections between ELL students' lives outside the classroom and the lessons they are delivering. Richard-Amato and Snow (2005) explained that teachers could make their content-planned activities serve the sociocultural elements. For example, when teaching the content of social studies or science, teachers may ask their students to interview their grandparents or a family member to get their perspective or experience on a certain event or a concept. Richard-Amato and Snow also argued that culturally responsive teachers must encourage students to use their native language in schools to express their prior knowledge. The authors assured that classroom teachers do not need to be bilingual to allow their

students to use their native language in the classroom. Teachers may pair up students with classmates or with volunteers or tutors who speak the same native language. Studies clearly indicate students need to bring in their experience and prior knowledge. Regarding the subject of activating ELLs' prior knowledge, Cummins (1996) argued, "No learner is a blank slate" (p. 17). To put it concisely, research recommends, "In programs where English is the primary language of instruction for literacy development, it is critical for teachers to show respect for the students' primary language and home culture" (Calderón et al., 2011, p. 110).

Context

Even in the world of to-be, River Valley still has a large number of low-income families. I expect that the value of having racially and linguistically diverse students will be more appreciated by classroom teachers. Although the school district will continue to welcome more newcomers with little or no prior education into general education classrooms, classroom teachers who attained ESL endorsement have gained the knowledge and skills that teachers need to effectively teach ELLs both language and content (Coady et al., 2016). Parents will find strong support from schools and will be encouraged by teachers to be engaged in their children's school lives. Family support staff and translators support both teachers and parents in the communication process.

Also, ESL-certified classroom teachers will have a better understanding of the roles that language and culture play for students in the process of learning and that the achievement gap between monolingual and bilingual students will diminish gradually as ELLs have a better grasp on the academic language. When classroom teachers gain knowledge in the field of second language acquisition, they understand that ELL students develop social language more quickly

than the academic language, and they realize the significance of providing their ELL students with the academic vocabulary.

Based on the data collected in this study, ELL students taught by ESL-endorsed teachers made more growth in the subject of mathematics than the ELLs taught by non-ESL-endorsed teachers. This leads me to expect that more ELL populations will meet the requirement of ACCESS, the annual language proficiency testing, and will exit the ESL program. Students who pass this test will no longer need language support, but they need to be monitored for two academic years to ensure competence in the academic language. In addition to passing the ACCESS testing, more ELLs will meet the state standards of language arts and mathematics as they receive differentiated instruction. ELL-certified classroom teachers are able to collaborate with classroom teachers to serve ELLs better.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of ESL endorsement on elementary ELL students. General education teachers at River Valley are increasingly expected to teach students with diverse learning needs. These students come from families with different socioeconomic levels and various language proficiency levels. Based on the study findings in the last chapter, I believe that when the elementary general education classroom teachers acquire the ESL endorsement, they will be better prepared and equipped with the ELL pedagogy to offer the most effective instructional practice.

CHAPTER SIX

Strategies and Actions

Introduction

In Chapter Four, I connected the (As-Is) 4Cs arenas (i.e., competencies, condition, culture, and context) with the findings of the study. The study results significantly supported my argument that the presence and the absence of general education teachers acquiring ESL endorsement can strongly impact teachers' attitudes toward their ELL populations and ELL achievement. I move on now to consider how to reach the status of to-be. In other words, in this chapter, I describe three clear-sighted strategies and actions that play a vital role in moving from as-is to to-be status. As was pointed out in the previous chapter, some uncontrollable barriers, such as students' low economic status and newcomers' lack of background knowledge, continue to exist regardless of the change. However, students' outcomes will be better, and parents will be more informed and engaged due to the new knowledge and skills that grade-level teachers will gain.

Strategies and Action

As I followed the framework of the 4Cs, As-Is, and To-Be inspired by Wagner et al. (2006), I was convinced that the question that needed an answer was: What would it take to move River Valley from the As-Is to the To-Be status? In this chapter, I recommend three systematic strategies that I believe can lead to the desired change. As I consider these recommended strategies will lead to educational transformation, they must be translated into a new policy for the school district.

Strategy I: Issue a New Amendment in the District Hiring Policy

I recommend that the River Valley School District adopt a new hiring policy that requires newly hired teachers who will be assigned to teach a classroom with ELL populations to have the ESL endorsement. A key aspect is to implement this policy horizontally by requiring existing elementary classroom teachers, who are currently teaching classrooms with ELL populations, to join and complete the tuition-free ESL endorsement offered through the school district.

The implementation of this strategy might be challenging for some elementary buildings with a large number of ELL populations than elementary buildings with fewer numbers of ELL populations. For example, as of this writing, one elementary school building within the school district houses 91 ELL students who are distributed across all grade levels, while another school building houses only 14 ELL students across all grade levels. As a yearly routine, before the new school year starts, building leaders assign classroom teachers with class rosters of the ELL and non-ELL populations in every grade level. To assure the quality of teaching, the action that needs to be taken is to assign the ESL-endorsed teachers to teach classrooms with many ELLs. As previously indicated, the implementation of this strategy might take longer in some elementary buildings with high ELL populations, but based on the collected data, ELL outcomes will be improved, and River Valley's competency, context, culture, and condition will be in the To-Be status.

Strategy II: Prioritize Teacher Professional Learning

Requiring general education teachers to obtain ESL endorsement is a starting point, but not the end. Teachers must continue seeking ongoing professional development that addresses the needs of the ELLs and their families. Data results indicate that River Valley rarely offers professional development sessions that provide elementary educators with the needed tools and

knowledge to support ELL students and their families. One of the most important topics teachers need to learn about is parent engagement. Parents are an essential part of the teaching team, yet, educators may be challenged to communicate with those parents who speak another language. Data showed that 100% of ESL-endorsed versus 86% of non-ESL endorsed teachers indicated that they found ways to engage bilingual parents. This datum result suggests that learning about English Language Learners and their families motivates teachers to create ways to reach out to bilingual parents and to make a connection with them. Ongoing professional development in the area of parent engagement will provide teachers with a variety of methods on how to involve parents in classroom learning. For example, teachers need to know about the multilingual resources that explain Common Core Standards, the state and the school district requirements and information, and the visual tools their students can use to better understand what they learn in school. When ELLs are admitted to schools with limited to no English, teachers need resources and guidance with the best practice of ELL methodologies to both communicate with parents and fill in the newcomers' linguistic gap.

Strategy III: Reinforce Collaborative Teams

As discussed in Chapter Four, the data collected showed that ESL resource teachers and grade-level teachers have no common collaboration time. Few interviewed classroom teachers expressed their concern of lacking information regarding what skills or instruction the ESL resource teachers targeted for ELL students when they were pulled out from their classrooms. Since the conducted interviews did not include ESL resource teachers, the results did not reflect their perspectives. However, I believe that it is important for ESL resource and grade-level teachers to have a common planning time where they meet, discuss ELL students' needs, and share goals, ideas, and strategies. One of the most significant findings that emerged from this

study is that ELL students are a shared responsibility. Regardless of the nature of the materials classroom and ESL resource teachers utilize to address both language and content, there must be coherence and collaboration in what needs to be taught. According to Commins and Miramontes (2006), “A common curriculum should guide the planning for all learners in a grade level, content area, school, or district” (p. 244).

Conclusion

Wagner et al. (2006) recommended the As-Is and To-Be framework to outline the contributors to the identified problem. The leadership lesson that I learned from this approach was to construct a systematic plan that identifies a problem, suggests a solution, and then draws a picture of all the changes that can be made when this solution is put into action. In the next chapter, I convert my recommended strategies into a policy of change, and I explain the educational, social, political, legal, and ethical aspects of this policy. In other words, chapter seven provides the rationale behind my recommended policy.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Implications and Policy Recommendations

With the ongoing growth in the number of ELLs in K-12, there is more demand for qualified classroom teachers who have a better understanding of second language acquisition and research-based methodologies to serve the ELLs effectively. As discussed earlier, research has shown that classroom teachers in mainstream classrooms know too little about English Learners to plan responsive and differentiated instruction for students with different language proficiency levels (Coady et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, under current practices, without being prepared to work with the ELL population, classroom teachers struggle to meet the needs of students whose first language is not English, and the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs continues to increase. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAPE) indicated that in 2007, only 7% of fourth grade ELLs versus 36% of monolingual peers met the professional level in reading (Working Group on ELL Policy, 2009).

Classroom teachers lean on ESL resource teachers to fill the linguistic gap. Depending on the capacity of the caseload of their ELL students at River Valley, where the study was conducted, the ESL resource teachers provided their ELL students with language services from 30-40 minutes per day. In some buildings, ESL resource teachers only served their students two or three times per week because of the high number of ELL students in their buildings. This raises the question of what would 30-40 minutes do for students who need to be taught both language and content? As the literature reviewed in Chapter Two stated, ELL students are a shared responsibility. While ESL resource teachers work on filling in the linguistic gaps by teaching the four domains of language (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing), classroom

teachers lack training on supporting ELL students in both language and content. Data from the questionnaire and interviews showed that classroom teachers were concerned about being held accountable for ELL outcomes, and many of them admitted that they needed guidance on how to meet the needs of the ELLs, especially students with low proficiency levels.

Based on the findings of this research, including student demographics, test scores, questionnaire responses, and interview results, taken together, these results suggest that the ELL populations are not receiving equitable education when they are being taught by classroom teachers who lack preparation. Data from this study's questionnaire showed that while 10% were undecided, almost 50% of the non-ESL-endorsed teachers agreed or strongly agreed that teaching ELLs had been a challenging task for them. Regarding accountability, 17% of the non-ESL-endorsed teachers did not consider themselves accountable for the ELL achievement and 37% were undecided. In my opinion, I believe 37% is a high percentage to be indecisive. It could be argued that non-ESL-endorsed teachers had mixed feelings or were not convinced to be accountable for the ELL achievement. Aside from this, about 53% of the non-ESL-endorsed teachers admitted that they lacked an understanding of how to differentiate between ELLs who struggled academically due to language development or learning disability. On the same topic of differentiating between language development and learning disability, 30% of the non-ESL-endorsed teachers were undecided. Again, the study results have raised important questions about what essential knowledge classroom teachers must acquire.

The policy I am recommending in this study is that the school district requires all newly hired general education classroom teachers in the elementary school to have ESL endorsement. The change I recommend in this study would take both horizontal and vertical directions. In other words, the plan I am recommending requires the school district to continue offering free of

charge ESL-endorsement cohorts to existing classroom teachers and, more importantly, to start hiring qualified elementary classroom teachers who are already ESL-endorsed.

Mostly, I would recommend that content teachers K-12 throughout the school district must have an ESL endorsement. However, this recommendation is beyond the scope of this study, as this research focused only on elementary ELL students.

In addition to only hiring classroom teachers with ESL endorsement to teach classrooms with ELL populations, I recommend that the school district allocate more funding to enroll more existing teachers in the ESL-endorsement cohort from 20 to 30 teachers per year. If implemented, this policy would ensure that current teachers are becoming endorsed and that the newly hired ones will be ready for ELLs. The policy recommended in this context would lead to a new era of providing ELL students with quality, linguistically, and culturally responsive instruction. Next, I explain my rationale for this policy through the lens of educational, economic, social, political, and ethical/moral analysis.

Educational Analysis

To improve the outcomes of the ELL populations and to close the achievement gap between monolingual and bilingual students, content teachers must be prepared to serve diverse students in their classrooms, given the rapid growth of the ELL population (NCES, 2020). As shared earlier, 16% of River Valley's student populations were identified as ELLs. This number of students included a mix of students who were regular immigrants and refugee students who came from refugee camps from multiple parts of the world. Like other school districts, River Valley makes much effort to improve student achievement by creating a culture of accountability. The school district expects that all staff members share responsibility for the learning progress of every student. It is inevitable to notice that mainstream classroom teachers

admit that they struggle with teaching non-English-speaking students who also happen to live below the poverty line.

Hamann and Reeves (2013) disagreed with those who believe that professional development sessions can help content teachers understand ELL needs. They wrote, “We cannot yet be assured that the time teachers spend in professional development or preservice training yield a return in teaching-with-ELLs expertise” (p. 4). They also believed, “key educators have lacked needed information and skills to serve ELLs well” (p. 5). In the same referenced article, Hamann and Reeves added that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln designed the ESL methodologies course (within the teacher preparation program) to prepare teachers to be able to demonstrate an understanding of the second language acquisition process, meet both content and language needs, embed sociocultural elements within the curriculum, and meet the linguistic and cultural needs of the ELL population. Going back to the study results section, the core of the interview and questionnaire questions were built around those topics being taught in the ESL-endorsement cohort.

In addition to monitoring student achievement, the teacher evaluation system serves as a tool for measuring accountability. However, before we judge teachers and blame them, let us discuss why we hold mainstream teachers accountable for ELL outcomes if they have not been adequately prepared to meet their needs.

In the state of Illinois, Danielson’s framework of teaching is being used as an evaluation tool. Teachers are evaluated based on a few domains that are divided into components. For example, domain one addresses planning and preparation: domains 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1e measure setting instructional outcomes and designing coherent instruction. Domain 2a evaluates the characteristic of creating an environment of respect and rapport. Teachers are expected to

establish a culture of learning where students feel safe. Furthermore, teachers are expected to demonstrate knowledge about individual students beyond school. For example, a classroom teacher might show interest in learning about the geography and the culture of his or her ELL students in the classroom. Giving an opportunity to ELL students to share information about their cultures makes them feel valued. Domains 3a, 3b, 3c measure teacher's level of proficiency in communication, discussion, and engaging students. Danielson guides teachers' evaluators to look for evidence that teachers scaffold instruction and use the appropriate pacing of the lesson to ensure students' participation. Teachers need to arrange and rearrange student grouping to allow them to become resources for one another (Danielson, 2013).

Considering this framework, evaluators should look for evidence of whether teachers accommodate and differentiate to ensure the engagement of ELL students. For example, principals or assistant principals should be looking for evidence that shows that the teacher modifies materials, provides resources in the native language (if available), and creates opportunities for cooperative learning. In addition, evaluators should look for specific components and evaluate whether the teacher adjusted an assignment to one or more of the groups that are not very vocal and required an alternative assignment. Highly effective teachers use visuals and videos during instruction and pair ELLs with high-achieving students who speak the same first language. Aside from this, during class discussion, it is important to observe whether the teacher has encouraged their students to ask and answer questions, making sure students communicate their ideas without fear of correction or embarrassment.

While domain 3c measures the skill of engaging students in learning, domain 3d sets expectations for using assessment in instruction. This component evaluates teachers on being able to differentiate and adjust assessments. This domain is critical because teachers might fail

ELL students, thinking that they are fair to other students. Given this list of measurements, the evaluator should observe and decide to what degree the observed teacher adjusted to accommodate the needs of ELL students. Again, we hold high expectations for teachers who teach various social and academic levels of monolingual and bilingual students.

Economic Analysis

Purinton and Azcoitia (2016) suggested that culturally proficient school leaders must reflect on whether resources are dedicated equitably and whether the needs of students with different languages and cultures are met. Patton (2008) inquired whether the funds are being used for intended purposes, whether goals have been met, whether resources are efficiently allocated, and whether the staff is qualified (Patton, 2008, p. 121). These questions are considered to be the heart of my dissertation topic. When it comes to meeting bilingual students' needs, who is held accountable for their progress and success? What goals do general education teachers have for their students? What resources are being sought to achieve those goals? Deep down in their mindset, who do they consider accountable for their ELL performance and success?

Hiring ESL-endorsed teachers would save the district the money spent on ESL endorsement. As mentioned before, Patton (2008) used some reflective questions to make sure that accountability requirements were being met and recommended that we ask ourselves whether “funds are being used for intended purposes” and whether resources are being efficiently allocated; he also questioned if the staff is qualified” (p. 121).

Should my recommended policy take place, the school district would save a large amount of money every year. River Valley school district covers the costs of the ESL cohorts for teachers. If newly hired teachers have already acquired ESL endorsement, then the hiring school

district does not need to pay tuition and fees for the ESL cohort. With a long-term partnership agreement with a university that offers an ESL endorsement cohort, the school district receives a group discount that limits the program's cost to as low as \$5,000 for each teacher to complete the cohort. If the school district hires at least ten teachers (with the ESL endorsement) per year, the school district will save \$50,000.

Through a different lens, there is another way to save money when hiring ESL-endorsed teachers. As explained previously, many ELL students might have acquired special education status due to being misidentified. Hamayan et al. (2013) explained, “More often than not when a teacher feels that an ELL is having greater than expected difficulty at school, there is an inclination to jump to the conclusion that the student has a special education need” (p. 1). Students with IEPs cost the school district a great deal of money spent on resource teachers and materials. I suggest that hiring ESL-endorsed teachers would eliminate the misunderstanding between second language acquisition and learning disability. Hamayan et al. (2013) indicated that no one perspective could determine if a student’s academic difficulties are due to language proficiency level or a learning disability, or both. It is essential to have both an ESL/bilingual perspective as well as a special education perspective to examine the observable behaviors (Hamayan et al., 2013). This research led me to argue that well-prepared general education classroom teachers would identify ELLs with disabilities based on specialized knowledge in language acquisition. When this happens, fewer numbers of ELL would be enrolled in special education, and this would save the district money. Hamayan et al. (2013) argued, “More often than not when a teacher feels that an ELL is having greater than expected difficulty at school, there is an inclination to jump to the conclusion that the student has a special education need” (p. 1).

Not only would hiring ESL-endorsed teachers save the school district money, but it would also save the federal and state governments some expenditures. To ensure that ELLs receive services, school districts receive both federal and state funding every year. When classroom teachers become ESL-endorsed, and when they apply teaching practices learned from the methodology, second language acquisition, and other courses, students improve their literacy skills as well as their content knowledge. This would lead to a decrease in the number of ELL populations. ELL students would no longer be viewed as ELLs once they pass the language proficiency state-mandated ACCESS testing. As the number of ELL students decreases, the school district would reduce the number of hired ESL resource teachers, and the state would save money paid yearly for students with English language proficiency status.

Social Analysis

What do classroom teachers need to know to adopt effective teaching strategies that could be employed to establish and sustain social interactions with their ELL students in the classrooms? ELL students coming from different racial/ethnic and sociocultural backgrounds may find daily instruction and curriculum less relevant to their personal experience, leading to feelings of isolation and alienation (García & Tyler, 2010). ELL students may react to this isolation in different ways depending on their upbringing, personal traits, and culture. Some students might shut down and avoid verbal and non-verbal social interactions; some others might demonstrate misbehavior and cause a distraction to express their frustration of not being able to participate and communicate. In many cases and many classrooms, new immigrants, or as we in the school district call them, newcomers, might feel socially marginalized and unwelcome (Rance-Roney, 2008).

Two years ago, a principal at one of the elementary schools asked me to help a kindergarten classroom teacher “correct” the behavior of a newcomer kindergarten student. The principal considered that the issue of misbehavior belonged to the bilingual department since the child involved in this situation was a newcomer. Before sharing the case, it should be noted that the school had three full-time ESL resource teachers, a tutor, and a parent liaison, who was shared with other buildings. The student came from Congo with no English or prior educational experience. The classroom teacher was frustrated with the child for two reasons. First, the child did not follow her directions, the directions she gave in English. Second, he ran away from the classroom every time she corrected him. In fact, he ran away every time she screamed at his face. I observed this teacher giving instructions in the classroom and the school hallway. I also observed how scared the five-year-old child was. To make the situation even worse, the teacher and the principal of this school decided to retain the child at the end of the school year. The rationale behind this decision was that the child did not have enough time to learn either English or content. Fortunately, I was able to stop this injustice, and I was also able to move the child to a different school. The purpose of sharing this story is to make a case that classroom teachers’ lack of understanding of bilingualism causes social damage.

Marzano and Marzano (2003) shared their results of over 100 studies on the topic of teacher-student positive relationships and student behavior. Results of this study show that teachers who have positive relationships with their students had 31% fewer discipline issues over a term of a year than did teachers who lacked this type of relationship with their students. These research results confirm that a positive relationship between teachers and students decreases or avoids negative behavior.

From another perspective, ELL students need to be taught English social language as a part of their daily classroom instruction. This means that classroom teachers are responsible for teaching their ELL population social language. Including the state of Illinois, 36 states have adopted 5 English language development standards (ELD) that were designed by WIDA (Education Commission of the States, 2014). These standards have been constructed for students who are linguistically and culturally diverse in grades K-12 (WIDA, 2014). These state standards address the social instructional and academic language skills that are required for ELLs to be able to be engaged and to interact with their teachers and peers. In this section, we discuss the value of ELD Standard One: “English language learners communicate for social and instructional purposes within the school setting” (WIDA, 2014, p. 4).

WIDA ELD standards explain to teachers that although their ELL populations in the classroom have not yet mastered the English academic language, they may hold a different position on the linguistic six-level language spectrum. Level one is entering, and level six is reaching. At the reaching level, students should have already mastered the academic language. It is worth noting here that, according to WIDA, students can exit the program at level five.

WIDA provides teachers with the content of what they must teach within the sociocultural context through listening, speaking, reading, and writing at each language proficiency level. For example, at the entrance level, teachers should teach ELL students everyday social and instructional words and expressions in addition to content words and phrases. This means that students at this level need to learn how to greet others, ask for help, and use basic phrases such as “I need help,” or “I need to use the restroom.” Given this, students at level three should be introduced to idioms and content-related words (WIDA, 2014, p. 7). One time I offered professional development to general education teachers, and I asked them if they

had ever realized that while delivering instruction, they were using idioms such as “let’s wrap up the lesson” or “turn in your homework,” or “let’s kick off this activity.” During this presentation, the majority of teachers admitted that they used these and other idioms every day in their classroom, knowing that monolingual students had no difficulty understanding idioms.

While I am discussing the significance of teaching WIDA standards, one might think that addressing these standards would fit into the educational and legal aspects of the policy. My focus in this section is to bring to light that WIDA standards that are not addressed by classroom teachers focus on the social and interaction skills that should be explicitly taught to ELLs. It is critical to acknowledge that classroom teachers might not have heard of WIDA ELD standards unless they have received professional development that addressed this topic. Unfortunately, many of the classroom teachers who are aware of the standards believe that they should be implemented only by ESL-certified resource teachers during their 30-40 minutes ESL services. I know this because I have spoken with general education teachers in my district. So, now we learn two facts. First, ESL-endorsement courses include the knowledge and implementation of WIDA ELD standards. Second, classroom teachers unintentionally deprive ELLs of instruction in a sociocultural context and social interaction.

Political Analysis

As I am advocating for a new policy of hiring teachers who can better serve the ELL population, from a political perspective, I think of one barrier that can stand in the way of implementing this policy. In our democratic society, we are expected to follow regulations and decisions made by the elected legislatures. As I will discuss the policy from a legal perspective later in this section, education is governed by federal and state laws.

From a political perspective, it is important to emphasize that in addition to federal and state laws, schools are also governed by the school board members as elected local legislatures. Most of the time, policies that are not issued by the federal or state legislatures are made by the school boards. Research suggests that to improve student achievement, board members and leaders of the school district must work together in uniformity rather than in confrontation, and they also must employ politics to bring the necessary change. This could be done by sharing a vision that is decided based on precise data, including demographic data (Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005). For the policy I am recommending in this study, the school district board members must approve it.

From my experience attending several board meetings, the school board members at River Valley have had concerns about school achievement and state test scores. There is no doubt that an effective school board places student achievement as a high priority. Most school boards hold their positions voluntarily. Therefore, they have no agenda other than making their school districts successful and attractive to the community. However, research shows that many school board members are politically divided among themselves and lack educational research-based information (Education Writers Association, 2003). I have to rely on my personal experience to defend my point. In one of the board meetings, I explained to board members the rationale of requesting money to purchase new supplemental resources for ELL populations to align with the district curriculum. Instead of asking me questions about how this specific resource would provide the linguistic need of ELLs, two members focused their questions on “When do we see the change in ELL achievement?” It struck me that those two board members did not know the difference between newcomers who needed from five to seven years to acquire academic language and other ELL populations who were on the verge of becoming academically

proficient. It sounded to me like they perceive the issue of student achievement through the lens of one size fits all. Therefore, I appreciate the research that brings an emphasis on the importance of examining school demographic data. If school board members at River Valley were aware of the school district demographic data and that almost 14% of the enrolled ELL population in the elementary schools came from refugee camps, they would have responded differently to my request. I wondered after this personal experience if the board perceived bilingual students as “deficient,” “underclass,” “minority,” “unskilled,” and other terms that research has described as “oppressive labels” (Lindsey et al., 2009).

Again, the question that was asked by the two mentioned board members made me think of how the ELLs are viewed as a homogeneous group (Lucas et al., 2008). Students who were identified as ELLs do not necessarily have the same academic or linguistic level. Some ELLs were born in the United States, some came from their home country with strong prior formal education, and some came with little or no prior education. What all ELLs have in common is that they speak one or more native languages other than English, and they still have not reached proficiency in the English language yet. Given this situation that described the mindset of some of the board members and revealed how they viewed ELLs, the question of how the board will react to my suggested policy remains. Will the board members buy into bringing change to the policy of hiring teachers to improve the outcomes of ELLs?

In addition to considering how the school board can be a crucial factor in supporting or resisting my recommended policy, I believe the general education teacher’s sensitivity to the change is also another crucial factor. As is the case in any institution, change is often difficult. Teachers, already believing their plates are full, may resist the requirement that they take part in ELL cohorts as recommended. In a time when there is a national teacher shortage, requiring the

ELL endorsement for all newly hired teachers may be a challenge. Districts already are reporting they are often beginning the school year with vacancies they have a difficult time filling. Aside from this, ELL-certified teachers are needed everywhere. Thus, the competition to acquire highly qualified ELL teachers will continue to be a challenge.

Despite the challenges noted above, the mission of all districts should focus on meeting the needs of all children. We must not postpone seeking systematic solutions to improve ELL academic achievement. There is no alternative to preparing highly qualified classroom teachers who can work with non-native English speakers in their classrooms.

Several researchers addressed the relationship between teacher preparation and student outcomes. Generally, and without diving into teaching diverse groups, Darling-Hammond (2000) found a significant positive correlation between teacher qualifications and student achievement. As she compared student achievement and teacher qualification on international and national levels, Hammond stated, “States interested in improving student achievement may be well-advised to attend, at least in part, to the preparation and qualifications of the teachers they hire and retain in the profession” (p. 32). Similarly, Wagner (2014) drew a comparison between students’ academic performance and teachers’ preparation. He criticized teacher preparation programs that focused on the collection of courses and tests that have little to do with the requirements of the job. Wagner argued, “We need to identify the competencies that are most important to be an effective teacher” (Wagner, 2014, p. 148).

Legal Analysis

In this section, I discuss the legal requirements regarding providing services to ELs. This analysis includes the laws enforced by the Office for Civil Rights. The argument in this section was based on information provided by the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department

of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (2015) letter. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 enforces federal rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. Title VI states:

No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. (U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Office for Civil Rights, 2020, January 10)

According to the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education (2016), this document (letter) about English learner students and limited-English-proficient (LEP) parents is a crucial document. It provides public schools, state educational agencies (SEAs), and local educational agencies (LEAs) with legal obligations regarding compliance with the law in ensuring that ELLs receive meaningful and equitable services under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

While Title VI and related case law, such as Lau and Castañeda, prohibits public schools, SEAs, and LEAs from discrimination and states firmly what not to do, the Equal Education Opportunities Act (EEOA) advises these agencies what to do to guarantee equity education to ELs. The EEOA is not specific to recipients of federal funds. The document, “The Provision of an Equal Education Opportunity to Limited-English Proficient Students,” includes five key components to ensure effective service for EL students. The five essential elements are:

1. identifying students who are ELs,
2. developing a program that ensures students’ success,
3. ensuring that staff, curriculum, and materials are in place to support students,

4. developing language proficiency criteria that can measure EL students' progress and completion, and
5. evaluating the success of the program and modifying it if needed.

Staffing and Supporting an EL Program

Under the civil rights legislation, there are two primary components for EL programs. ELs must attain English proficiency and access to academic content. According to the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education (2016), "This obligation includes having highly qualified teachers to provide language assistance services, trained administrators who can evaluate these teachers, and adequate and appropriate materials for the EL programs" (p. 14). Here is other evidence that the law requires teachers who teach ELs to be qualified:

A school district with a structured English immersion program, consisting of ESL and sheltered content instruction, does not have a sufficient number of either qualified ESL-licensed teachers to provide ESL services or qualified content area teachers who are adequately trained to shelter content for EL students. The school district creates an in-service training on sheltering techniques, requires all core content teachers to complete the training within two years successfully, and requires a quarter of its new hires to obtain an ESL license within two years of their hiring date. (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 16)

From No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to the ESSA

The NCLB 2001 Act required school districts to make adequate yearly progress for all students and for subgroups, including ELs who used to be referred to as LEP. As ESSA replaced NCLB, it brought a few changes regarding ELs. The most significant change was the adoption of English language standards, and accountability for ELs achievement used to be under title III

funding under NCLB. ESSA shifted these two requirements to be under title I (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). This shift indicates that success and accountability for ELs have become significantly crucial to federal laws and that title 1 districts must pay special attention to the needs of ELs.

Under the law, every school district that houses the ELL population should evaluate the effectiveness of their ELL programs and services. Regarding staffing and professional development, school districts should consider some questions such as whether classroom teachers have the resources, skills, and knowledge to address the needs of EL students in their classrooms, and whether they are trained in specific methodologies to provide EL students with meaningful access to the content. The following quote is taken from the document of the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2020, January 16):

Teachers have mastered the skills necessary to teach effectively in a program for LEP students. In making this determination, the recipient should use validated evaluative instruments—that is, tests that have been shown to accurately measure the skills in question. The recipient should also have the teacher’s classroom performance evaluated by someone familiar with the method being used. (para. 13)

By reading this piece of the law, I can argue that not only does the law expect content teachers to be prepared to serve ELLs, but also principals and assistant principals who evaluate those teachers. The question is: How can principals or assistant principals fairly and effectively evaluate classroom teachers if they lack the essential knowledge about the needs of ELLs? The lack of understanding of the crucial needs of ELs can take two incredibly wrong directions: (a) teachers might receive poor performance due to their ELL low scores in reading and language arts and (b) teachers might obtain an excellent performance rating based on engaging

monolingual students regardless of their disservice to the ELL population. Unfortunately, unlike what the law requires, ELs are receiving education in a school system that is being run by administrators and content teachers who lack knowledge of second language acquisition and other needed skills and expertise. As I explained in the 4Cs sections, some administrators who have been leading their buildings for years lack a basic understanding of language learners' needs. Preparing administrators for ELL is not the focus of this research; however, it was interesting to read that the law requires teacher evaluators to acquire knowledge in this field.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

From an ethical perspective, education stakeholders need to make sure that ELL students are in good hands with culturally proficient educators who value diversity and make every effort to meet their diverse groups' needs. Lindsey et al. (2009) believed, "culturally blind educators view student's cultural differences as indications of disobedience, noncompliance, or other deficiencies" (p. 117). According to the Illinois Educator Code of Ethics:

The Illinois educator is committed to creating, promoting, and implementing a learning environment that is accessible to each student, enables students to achieve the highest academic potential, and maximizes their ability to succeed in academic and employment settings as a responsible member of society. (Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, 2014, Section 22.20 Code of Ethics, a)

ELLs experience challenges learning academic content in English when they are in the process of developing language proficiency in English. Students in the early stages of learning a new language may, on the surface, present some characteristics that are very similar to those of students with learning disabilities but for very different reasons. As a result, many ELs lack language proficiency and are being misinterpreted to be learning disabilities. Hamayan et al.

(2013) proposed a list of observed behaviors that can be explained from a second language acquisition perspective as well as from a special education perspective. A bilingual student who struggles to learn mathematics instruction in English, for example, might have difficulty because the symbols, algorithms, or numerals may be unfamiliar or because mathematics word problems are written in English and not accessible to students in the early stages of academic English development. Alternatively, possible learning disability explanations for difficulties in mathematics class might point to challenges with abstract reasoning or underlying comprehension difficulties that present across languages and contexts.

In many cases, ELL populations experience misplacement. As of this writing, the school district demographic information indicates that around 15% of all students in elementary schools have IEPs. About 20% of students with IEPs are identified as ELLs. The question raised by these data is how many ELL students were misdiagnosed due to their lack of language proficiency.

We can avoid misjudging ELL students if we require classroom teachers to be ESL-certified. The reason for suggesting this policy is because ESL-endorsed teachers study second language acquisition, methodology, and through other preparation courses, in which they develop an in-depth understanding of the process of second language learning. Further, the equity mindset needs to be spread through the school district to eliminate labels that are demeaning to ELLs. For example, words such as “deficient” and “minorities” are harsh. They carry connotations of humiliation. I strongly agree with Lindsey et al. (2009), “Culturally proficient educators have to work hard to resist these labeling traps so that they can avoid referring to students and their families with multiple oppressive, deficiency-based terms” (p. 81). To close my argument here, ethically, it is up to educators and policymakers to ensure fairness in the way ELL students are being treated, educated, and evaluated.

Implications of the Policy for Staff Relationships

To what extent do general education and resource teachers who share ELL students in one school building collaborate and align their curriculum map and instruction? Outside the context of this research, I once asked a principal at one of the elementary schools about her explanation of having a minimal number of ELL students (at her building) meet ACCESS criteria and transition from the ESL program. In her own words, she stated, “There is a disconnect between classroom teachers and ESL resource teachers. They’re never on the same page” (personal communication, 2019).

Given the policy for which I am advocating, hiring teachers with ESL endorsement will have positive implications for staff relationships. There was a piece of strong evidence by the collected data that there is a disconnect between grade-level classroom teachers who have the ELLs for most of the day and the ESL resource teachers who pull out ELLs for some minutes during the day. In Chapter Six, I recommended that resource classroom teachers and ESL teachers who share the same ELL students must have common planning time to discuss their students’ learning styles and their needs. They also need to plan cooperatively to align the targeted language and content skills and standards that need to be focused on, so students can receive consistent and relevant instruction.

Social interaction among teachers is also essential. As a bilingual leader at the school district, among other administrative responsibilities, I plan for professional development for ESL resource teachers in elementary buildings. Several ESL teachers requested that I plan professional development sessions for them instead of attending the professional learning community (PLC) meetings at their buildings. Those teachers expressed their concerns that they find PLC meetings irrelevant to the nature of their work. ESL resource teachers feel left out

because when they meet with classroom teachers, they discuss curriculum maps, grading papers, report cards, and other non-related topics. In the meantime, classroom teachers judge ESL for having less responsibility as they work with small groups. Hiring ESL-endorsed classroom teachers would help build an authentic PLC, where teachers have more common ground when they meet.

Implications of the Policy for Bilingual Parents and Community

Research shows that establishing a trusting relationship with parents has a positive impact on parents' participation in their children's lives and increases students' motivation to improve academic achievement and keeps students away from troublemaking. Research also shows that "Families of all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels encourage their children, talk with them about the school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 39).

Reaching out to bilingual parents can be challenging due to limited language proficiency in English, formal education, lack of access to technology, and socioeconomic status. However, teachers can break these barriers by coordinating with the translation department and/or family liaison officers to connect regularly with parents. Contacting parents regularly makes them feel that they are partners in the educational system. As shared in Chapter Four, the questionnaire data revealed that 100% of the ESL-endorsed versus 86% of non-ESL-endorsed teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they find ways to encourage parents of ELLs to get involved in school activities. The interview data also proved that ESL-endorsed teachers adopt different methods to connect with bilingual parents.

There is a misperception that bilingual parents do not care about their children's education because they are not always involved in school activities. Nevertheless, research

indicates that immigrant parents place a high value on education, but they also struggle to get involved due to their limited language proficiency and understanding of the American culture (Ferlazzo & Hull-Sypniewski, 2012). This explains why it is important for teachers to consider the home visitation to reach out to bilingual parents. Home visits can be a powerful way to connect teachers with parents and students and to raise the curtain on students' lives, backgrounds, cultures, and socioeconomic status. Patton (2008) believed, "Home visitation is an early intervention program to prevent child abuse or neglect, identify potential developmental needs of children in high-risk groups, and enhance school readiness" (p. 466). In my professional experience, I witnessed a great extent of change in the attitude of one classroom teacher after we both gave a home visitation to one of that teacher's ELL students. One year before this writing, a non-ESL-endorsed, first-grade teacher complained to me that one of her ELL newly arrived students, who happened to be a refugee, was not responding to her instruction and did not show the academic growth she expected. I recommended a home visitation and made arrangements with a family liaison officer who spoke the same language as the child. When the teacher and I met with the parents at their home, they looked too tired and could barely open their reddened eyes. The family liaison officer who came along to translate to both the parents and us explained that both parents worked all night, and they usually slept during the day. However, they would not have missed our visit. When the teacher saw the parents, their exhausted faces, and their tiny and humble house that sheltered seven children, she sat quietly on the fallen-apart couch.

Ironically, the boy she complained about was excited to see her at his house, and he chose to sit by her. To my surprise, the translator was waiting for the teacher to speak so that he could interpret her concerns to the parents, but she did not speak. Finally, I had to explain the reason for our visit. The end of the story was even happier than I expected. After this home visit, the

teacher understood that the child did not just lack language skills, but he also lacked the feeling of being accepted and encouraged to overcome poverty and scarcity of resources. After this visit, not only did this teacher change her attitude toward the ELL child, but she also changed her teaching strategies. How do I know she changed? Three months after this home visitation, she agreed to participate in this study. During the interview, I asked her about ELL students' needs, and she said, "They can become frightened because they don't know what's going on and I don't know what their living circumstances have been before they came here" When I asked her about what strategies she used to differentiate for ELLs, she said, "I notice that when we do something that does have a video or short clip with it, that they are very engaged in there. So, you've got to do more than just read from the book, and you certainly have to do more than just talk."

In addition to showing interest in ELLs' lives, teachers with research-based, second language acquisition background knowledge can take the opportunity of home visits to explain to them the value of keeping and developing the native language at home. With the pressure of their children's low test scores, many parents get mixed messages from inexperienced teachers and staff, telling them to let their children only speak English and to stop using their native language. This misconception can be corrected by the ESL-endorsed teachers, as they study second language acquisition and understand that cognitive and academic development in the first language has a positive impact on academic skills in the second language, as subject knowledge developed in the first language transfers into the second language (Collier, 1995). Data from the questionnaire show that 78% of ESL-endorsed versus 56% of non-ESL-endorsed teachers agreed or strongly agreed that ELLs should have access to native language during instruction.

ESL-endorsed teachers understand the needs of ELLs and their families. As explained earlier, more than half of the River Valley live in poverty, and 14% of bilingual families are

refugees. Anderson (2014) clarified that there are several ways that teachers can serve the needy in the community from their classrooms. For example, teachers might partner with thrift stores or food pantries to provide needy families with food and clothes. All students and school staff can be involved in these initiatives. Another way to support the community is to collect books in English and other languages and build a class library where students can take books home and share them with their parents. Some schools hold literacy nights where parents are invited to schools, and their children read to and with them.

Home visits, regular communication, requesting translators and translation to connect with parents, and serving the poor in the community require an understanding of the needs of ELLs and their families. No one can deny that some classroom teachers blame parents for their children's low achievement and their limited language proficiency. In fact, the data collected from the open-ended question on the questionnaire disclosed a comment written by one non-ESL-endorsed teacher. The teacher wrote, "If the students with intellectual disabilities are able to learn English, why can't the parents at least try?" This comment reveals an attitude against bilingual parents. While research assures that the key to high parent engagement is to remove the barriers, this teacher can only focus on the barrier. Using this evidence and other data results from the interview and questionnaire, I argue that ESL-endorsed classroom teachers have better ways to engage bilingual parents than the non-endorsed because they have a better perception of the way they view parents and themselves. ESL-endorsed teachers view bilingual parents as partners, and they view themselves as a vehicle for the community.

Conclusion

The policy I am advocating for in this study is that any teacher who teaches classrooms with ELL populations must acquire ESL endorsement. ESL endorsement provides teachers with

the necessary skills to understand ELL needs better. Some of the essential needs of ELLs are connecting with ESL resource teachers and bilingual parents. Classroom teachers and resource teachers who share ELL students must collaborate and communicate together. For this cooperation to happen, there must be a mutual understanding of the research-based pedagogy for serving the linguistic and cultural needs of the ELL through the curriculum. From another perspective, this shared understanding will keep ongoing communication and generate social interaction among classroom and ESL resource teachers. Research shows that immigrant parents place a high value on education. Still, lack of English proficiency, little formal education, and lack of understanding of the American culture are barriers that hinder parents from reaching out to teachers. Teachers must break those barriers and go above and beyond to make bilingual parents comfortable to participate in their children's school lives.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Research Conclusions

Introduction

ELLs are a large, growing, and underserved group. There has been a substantial increase in immigration that has led to a significant change in the demographics of American public schools. This change has significant implications for schools and the role of content teachers in general education classrooms in which ELLs receive instruction. Teachers' quality is a crucial factor that impacts ELL students' academic growth. Teachers' understanding of their ELLs' different needs should drive instruction in the classroom where native and non-native English speakers are shoulder to shoulder. Teachers must develop an understanding of the needs of their ELL students to acquire both English as a language and to learn the content, as the content is delivered in English. It is unfortunate to learn that "The least educated portion of the school-age population is English language learners." (Working Group on ELL Policy, 2009, p.4). This study examined the value of teachers' ESL endorsement on one measure of student achievement and teachers' dispositions towards their ELLs

Discussion

The purpose of this research study is to bring change to the qualification of classroom teachers who teach ELL students in general education classrooms. The findings of this study suggest that ESL-endorsed teachers can and will improve ELL outcomes. The study results also show that ESL-endorsed teachers have a better perception of the ELL population than the non-ESL-endorsed teachers. Data from the questionnaire show that large percentages of non-ESL-endorsed teachers expressed their uncertainty with statements that measure their knowledge with second language acquisition methodologies and how they perceive the ELLs and their cultures.

For example, almost 40% of the participating non-ESL-endorsed teachers agree or are uncertain that ELL populations should be placed separately from non-ELLs. Despite this, less than half of the non-ESL-endorsed teachers agreed to be held accountable for ELL outcomes. Data results also revealed that ESL-endorsed teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with placing ELLs separate from non-ELLs. This indication of acceptance leads me to believe that ESL-endorsed teachers acquire better qualifications and preparation to provide scaffolding strategies that support ELLs and help them learn both language and content in a safe and equitable educational environment.

A significant finding of the study was that ELLs taught by ESL-endorsed teachers made more growth in the MAP test in the content of mathematics than ELLs taught by non-ESL-endorsed teachers. The study results showed a significant difference between the means of the two ELL compared groups. Furthermore, the study also found that the ELL and the monolingual students taught by ESL-endorsed teachers made more growth in the subject of mathematics than monolingual students taught by non-ESL-endorsed teachers. This finding suggests that the strategies that ESL-endorsed teachers are using in their classrooms are effective for all students, and ESL-endorsed teachers are able to improve the outcomes of native and non-native speakers of English in the area of mathematics.

The study also finds that ESL teachers, as well as non-ESL teachers, still need ongoing professional development to be able to accommodate ELL students, especially the newcomers who mostly immigrate to the United States with very limited or no English. A few ESL-endorsed teachers expressed their need to use strategies with newcomers and training on the sheltered instruction observation protocol (SIOP) model. This finding is essential in planning for the

school's yearly professional development plan. In addition to equipping the teachers with this training, school administrators need to receive the same training as well.

Further research is needed to investigate the need of having school administrators acquire the ESL endorsement. Short et al. (2018) recommended that the school principals and assistant principals "Need substantial knowledge about ELs as well as the best instructional programs and research-based practices to serve them" (p. 82). This recommendation is to improve the quality of education provided to ELLs. Short et al. (2018) also agreed that school administrators need this substantial knowledge to be able to judge the quality of instruction in classrooms, offer guidance to the school staff, specialists, and instructional coaches who interact day to day with ELLs, and to build positive relationships with the ELLs families.

It is equally important to note that from the interviews conducted with the Spanish-speaking school psychologist, she was the only Spanish-speaking school psychologist in the school district. The findings of the interview demonstrated that she assessed Spanish-speaking ELL students for learning disabilities using their native language. She also shared that she tested ELL speakers of other languages using non-verbal assessments. In considering the validity of assessing ELL students, this study has raised an important question regarding how monolingual and the non-ESL-endorsed school psychologists in the district evaluate the ELL populations—questions such as these need to be seriously addressed.

The policy that I am advocating for is that newly hired and existing classroom teachers who are assigned to teach classrooms with ELL students must acquire ESL endorsement. ELL populations are rapidly growing in urban as well as rural school districts. The desired outcome of the recommended policy would be that teachers' ESL endorsement will encompass a deeper

understanding of how to provide an equitable learning environment and an effective linguistic and cultural instruction to ELLs.

Limitation

The most challenging limitation this study encountered was the size of the student sample. As noted in Chapter Three, in addition to the fact that conducting the *t*-test with a sample of only 28 students was difficult, ELL students represented 16% of the population in River Valley. Aside from this, general education classroom teachers did not have equal group sizes of ELL students. The number of the two compared groups was not equal in each class. For example, when I conducted the independent *t*-test, the number of the ELL group taught by the ESL-endorsed students was 13, while the number of the ELL group taught by the non-ESL-endorsed teachers was 15.

In addition to dealing with an unequal and limited group size of the sample of the study, I collected unexpected data that I suggest handling with caution. Though I prepared myself from the beginning of the study to accept and expect the unexpected, I found it difficult to explain the responses to one of the questionnaire questions. I found that 100% of ESL-endorsed teachers versus 94% of the non-ESL-endorsed teachers strongly agreed or agreed with the statement of “learning to be effective with ELLs is just ‘good teaching’ and ‘best practice.’” I believe that responses to this question should be viewed with caution because the wording of this question was somehow perplexing. I believe that the expression of “best practice” misled both ESL and non-ESL-endorsed teachers. As discussed in the literature review, pedagogy for teaching ELLs is not just best practice because what is considered “best practice” for teaching monolingual students is not necessarily the best practice for teaching ELLs (de Jong & Harper, 2005).

Leadership Lessons

As I reflect on the leadership lessons I have learned while conducting my study, I believe that I have grown as a leader. As I attempt to explain the learned lessons, I focus on two critical components. First, examining data from the questionnaire and conducting individual interviews helped me better understand in-depth the challenges that the general education teachers face when teaching both native and non-native speakers of English in their classrooms. I met with teachers who were thirsty for guidance on how to serve their newcomers and had no clue of whom to contact to get answers to their questions. As I acknowledged those teachers' needs, I felt responsible for offering mini professional development sessions to address the topics that I noticed many teachers requested during the interviews.

The second lesson that I have learned is to advocate for a change that will lead to an improvement in both the quality of teaching and student outcomes. To reach this goal, I must have a plan that explicitly explains how to move from As-Is to To-Be. Previous professional experience suggests that change has been and will always be resisted. However, change can and will happen when we prove why it must happen. I have seen classroom teachers who misjudged their ELL students' behavior because those teachers lacked the knowledge and the understanding of their students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds. I attended meetings where classroom teachers argued that their ELLs did not respond to interventions because they had learning disabilities rather than considering the research-based practice of expecting ELLs to master academic language within five to seven years. Likewise, I had difficult conversations with classroom teachers who gave in-school detentions to young primary ELL newcomers who ran away from classrooms because they were afraid to hear the repeated screamed phrase "follow instructions." To avoid creating negativity in education, to bring equity to school, to improve ELL outcomes,

and to move from As-Is to To-Be, the findings of this research suggest that the ESL endorsement coursework will adequately equip the general education teachers with the foundational knowledge and skills they need to make a difference in the lives of the ELLs, especially that the deep understanding they will develop will shape their dispositions toward their ELLs.

Conclusion

The lack of knowledge of general education classroom teachers regarding the linguistic and cultural needs of ELLs is a critical issue, impacting students' achievement as well as their school environment. Note that a large number of non-ESL teachers selected "uncertain" in their questionnaire responses. This leads me to believe that these responses reflect a lack of knowledge. In contrast, the ESL-endorsed teachers demonstrated more certainty in their responses.

The findings of this study suggest that ESL-endorsed teachers are capable of meeting ELL needs more than non-ESL teachers. Statistical data from comparing growth in students' test scores show that ELLs in classrooms of ESL-endorsed teachers made more growth than ELLs in non-ESL teachers and that there was a statistical difference between the two groups. Data from interviews and the questionnaire also revealed that a large percentage of ESL-endorsed teachers responded positively regarding the dispositions toward their ELLs. Data also revealed that ESL-endorsed teachers had a better understanding of how to engage bilingual parents regardless of the language barrier. Research suggests that teachers play an important role in increasing parental involvement. Motivating parents to be involved in their children's school lives can be done by establishing positive interpersonal relationships with parents (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). Research also indicates that parent involvement has a positive impact on

children's mental health, social, and emotional functioning, which may ultimately improve their academic achievement (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007).

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Appendix A: Consent Form for the Participation of the Study

My name is Fawzia Boctor, a candidate for a doctorate degree at National Louis University. I am asking you to be a part of a research study. This study is about serving ELL students in general education classrooms. This research will examine how to best improve the teaching and learning of English Learners in general education classrooms.

If you agree to participate in this study, I would like to ask you to please complete an online questionnaire. The first question on the questionnaire will ask you if you are giving your consent to participate in this study. I will use your data only if you check the 'Yes' box. The last question on the survey will ask you if you are willing to participate in an interview. Since participating in the questionnaire is anonymous. If you agree to participate in the interview, please write your name in the box provided for this purpose, and I will contact you to schedule the time that works for you.

I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participating in this study will provide important information about how we best meet the needs of the ELL students in general education classrooms. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may skip any question that you do not want to answer. If you decide, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Data for this study will be kept private. Your identity as well as the school district and school names will not be revealed. I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. If you have any questions, please contact Fawzia Boctor at fboctor@my.nl.edu. You can also contact my university chair, Professor Kristin Lems, at klems@nl.edu.

By signing below, you give your consent to participate in a research study conducted by Fawzia Boctor, a doctoral candidate at National Louis University, Chicago.

Participant Signature

Researcher signature

Date:

Date

Appendix B: Questionnaire Questions

English Language Learners (ELLs)

Questionnaire for classroom teachers with ELL Populations

*** Required**

Given that the Identities of school, district, and participants are anonymous, do I have your consent to participate in this study?

Yes

No

Demographic Questions:

Do you hold an ESL Endorsement? *

YES

No

Just joined a cohort

I am almost done with my courses

What grade are you teaching?

K

1st

2nd

3rd

4th

5th

Multiple Grades

Generally, how long have you been a teacher?

1-5

6-10

11-15

16-20

21+

Do you currently have ELL students in your classroom or on your caseload?

Yes

No

Other

Likert Scales questions start here:

1-I make my instructional program responsive to the needs of the diverse groups in my classroom.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

2-Having ELL students in my classroom is a challenging task.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

3-Instead of being placed in monolingual mainstream classrooms, I would rather see ELLs placed in a classroom just for ELL.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

4-I believe it is fair to hold classroom teachers accountable for their ELL students' achievement.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

5-When, an ELL student, avoids eye contact with me and is not engaged in-class discussion, I know that language proficiency is a concern.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

6-I believe that the language of math is universal, and the language of math should not become a barrier for ELLs.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

7-I always pre-teach new vocabulary from every math unit.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

8-I can (am willing to) ask for accommodations for my ELLs when giving them district or state standardized assessments?

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

9-I have tools that help me decide if an ELL has a learning disability or merely struggles with language acquisition.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

10-Some of the linguistic mistakes made by ELLs are similar to those of native speakers.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

11-To ensure providing effective instruction and avoid confusion; ELLs should not be provided with instruction in their native language in monolingual classrooms.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

12-In my opinion, ELL students should master academic English within three years of education in the U.S.A.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

13-Even if they do not speak English, I find ways to encourage ELLs' parents to get involved in school activities.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Strongly agree

Agree

14-I notice that parents of ELL students reach out to me whenever they have questions or concerns.

Strongly disagree

disagree

Unsure

strongly agree

Agree

15-Learning to be effective with ELLs is just "good teaching" and "best practice."

Strongly agree

Agree

Unsure

Strongly disagree

Disagree

16-Here is my question that I need an answer to.

Your answer

17-Are you available for a confidential face-to-face interview that would not exceed 30 minutes?

Yes

No

Maybe

18-I am available for a confidential interview, and my name is:

Your answer

Submit

Appendix C: Teacher Interview Questions:

- 1- How long have you been a classroom teacher?

- 2- Can you list 3 or more learning needs of ELLs in your classroom that you are most concerned about

- 3- Can you list 3 or more strategies that you believe must be implemented in a classroom with ELL students?

- 4- How do the learning needs of ELLs differ from the needs of native English-speaking students?

- 5- What tools do you use to know if an ELL student struggles with language rather than learning disability?

- 6- How often do you attend professional development that addresses ELL academic language needs inside and outside the school district?

- 7- If there is a course/PD that you believe can help you understand how to better serve ELLs, what topic would this course address?

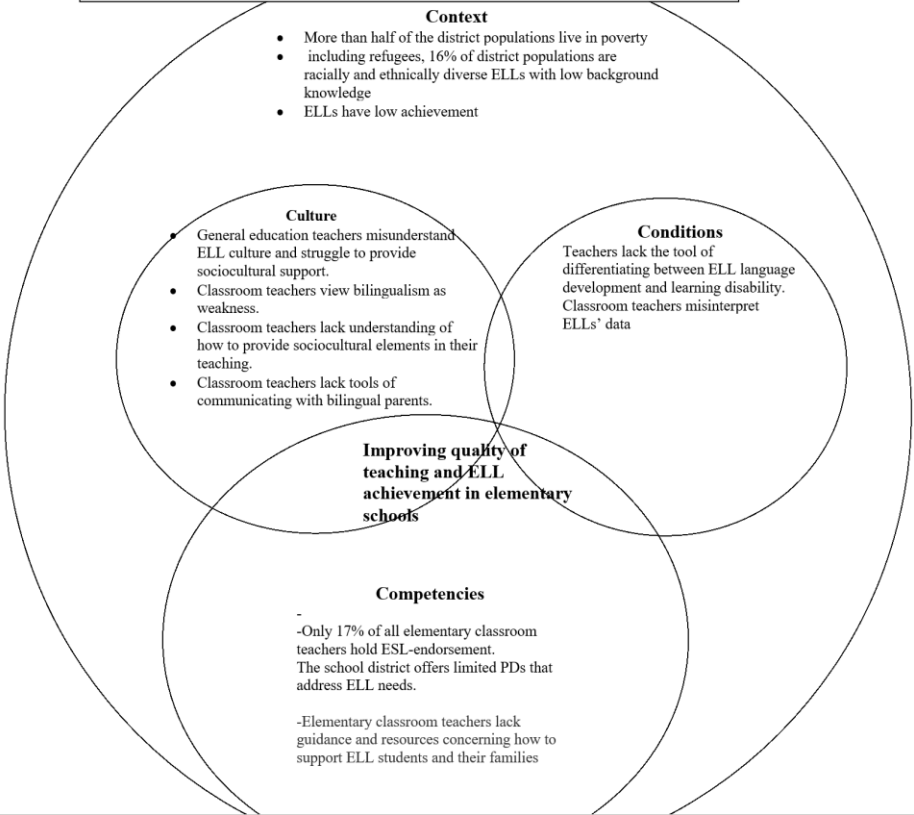
- 8- What instruction elements or activities do you embed in your lesson planning to address ELLs sociocultural needs?

- 9- What special support do you think ELLs need in the subject of mathematics?

- 10-What do you do to encourage parents to be engaged in their children's school life?

Appendix D: As-Is Analysis

"As Is" 4 C's Analysis for River Valley School District



Appendix E: To-Be Analysis

