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English Language Learner Teachers' Perspectives of Professional Development and Their Implementation of Instructional Practices

Cara Nicole Scales-Judkowitz
Walden University

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Cara Nicole Scales-Judkowitz

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Walden University

2022

Abstract

English Language Learner Teachers' Perspectives of Professional Development and
Their Implementation of Instructional Practices

by

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MA, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, 2011

BS, The University of Miami, 2006

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

An increasing number of U.S. teachers of English Language Learners (ELL) across the nation are not receiving adequate in-service training to provide instruction within students' zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky's ZPD is the difference between what a person can achieve when acting alone and what the same person can achieve when acting with support from someone else. ELL instructional practices should be implemented in ELL students' ZPD to ensure adequate academic performance. A lack of training is a local problem for a school district in the state of Florida. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of ELL teachers regarding the professional development trainings they received to teach ELL students within their ZPD. The two research questions focused on: (a) how elementary teachers implement instructional practices and resources to teach ELL students within their ZPD and (b) what their perspectives are of the professional development they were provided to teach ELL students. A purposeful sample of eight teachers of ELL students in the first through fifth grades participated in individual interview sessions. Using thematic analysis, data were analyzed using open coding and axial coding. The findings revealed participants' concerns regarding their knowledge and preparation, as well as the professional development they were offered for teaching the ELL students. An in-service training project was created to provide teachers of ELL students with more information regarding strategies, accommodations, and instructional implementation. This study may contribute to positive social change by highlighting areas of concern for further research. Providing in-service training may equip teachers with the skills and knowledge that they need to teach ELL students within their ZPD, which may result in better educational outcomes.

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Dedication

To my parents, Phyllis and John Scales, who my entire life, have raised me to climb mountains even when the road was flat; who encouraged me to spread my wings, as they always believed I could fly; and who knew that my quest was to reach the unreachable stars.

To my husband, Joseph Judkowitz, who holds my hand through the darkest hours and who always walks with me through the roughest storms. And to my daughter Gabriella Judkowitz, who has been my cheerleader and number one supporter since the day I started. You are my heartbeat. To my girl Reagan and my boy Riley, always by my side always in my heart.

This project study is dedicated to all of you with my most sincere gratitude. I love you all forever! I walk for us all!

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

As more and more students with immigrant and refugee status continue to enter United States (U.S.) public school classrooms, the education system is becoming more culturally, racially, and educationally diverse. Teachers require different knowledge and skill sets to meet the needs of many of these students. English Language Learner (ELL) students, for instance, require special services to attain appropriate levels of mastery in the English language and academics (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Rodriguez (2014) found that ELL programs grew by 60% making ELLs the fastest growing student group in the United States. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, over 4.8 million (9.5 %) ELL students were enrolled in the 2014-2015 school year, an increase of 1 million from the 3.8 million (8.1%) in the 2000-2001 school year (Brown et al., 2017).

According to the Florida Department of Education (2019), there were a total of 265,000 ELL students in the state of Florida in 2019, speaking more than 300 different languages. The state ranked third in the United States in the size of the ELL population (Florida Department of Education, 2019). The problem is that the demand for services related to ELL needs is outpacing the in-service training of teachers who service this population. Nationally, only 29.5% of teachers who worked with ELLs in their classroom (both general education teachers and ELL teachers) reported that they had been properly trained (Rodriguez, 2014). In a survey conducted by Khong and Saito (2014), 87% of 422 mainstream kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) classroom teachers indicated they had

received in-service training on how to adequately teach ELL students. This statistic questions both the quality of instruction and the teachers' understanding of how to teach ELL students (Kong & Saito, 2014).

This basic qualitative project study, focuses on the instructional in-service training provided for teachers of ELL students in a Florida school district. and how these teachers implement the instruction in classroom settings. Section 1 of this project study includes an introduction to the local problem, the purpose of the project, and the literature supporting this investigation of the training and instructional practices of teachers working with ELL students.

Background

In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court decided in *Lau v. Nichols* that school district personnel must identify students whose proficiency in English is not yet adequate for them to learn without the proper accommodations (Hamann & Reeves, 2013). In the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, federal lawmakers directed attention to ELL students, intending to help them to obtain proficiency in the English language (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). However, research has shown that due to the ELL certification, most teachers felt less pressure to meet the needs of the ELLs; because this support was conceptualized as an ELL-certified teacher's job, teachers felt it was not their concern. Scholarly literature shows that although the number of ELL students entering school systems has expanded exponentially, the number of teachers with ELL qualifications has remained inadequate (Hamann & Reeves, 2013). Research indicates that, in 2014, only 12% of public-school teachers across the United States who taught ELL students had 8

hours or more of professional development training on meeting the needs of ELL students (Zhang & Pelttari, 2014). Other research shows that teachers who do receive training are generally dissatisfied with the kind of professional development offered by their districts (Peter et al., 2012). In a study conducted by Okhremtchouk and Sahr Sellu (2019), participants reported that they did not feel ready to teach ELLs in the areas of language acquisition theories, foundations of ELL curriculum, or language assessment and foundation.

O'Hara's (2020) research indicates that new teachers enter the classroom with limited information on meeting the needs of ELL students. Although new teachers have been exposed to accommodations for the ELLs, they often are lacking tools and strategies and exposure to ELLs. Although mentoring programs are generally provided to new teachers, they often do not emphasize the importance of the academic language development of ELLs (O'Hara et al., 2020). In another study, teachers of ELL students expressed frustration with their inability to assess the progress of individual students in standard-based curriculum and instruction, as the grading focused on the ability to reach standards and not the student growth (Kibler et al., 2016).

Although many teachers acknowledge that ELLs need modifications and accommodations, few understand how different types of accommodations may affect learning, particularly linguistic and instructional accommodations (Pappamihel & Lynn, 2016). In a survey conducted by Larsen (2013), 54% of the ELL teachers stated that they were not at all or were only marginally prepared to teach ELL students (Larsen, 2013). In addition, Percy et al.'s (2015) research indicated that many new and preservice

mainstream teachers admit to feeling inadequately prepared to teach ELL students. This research shows the scope of the broader problem, which is inadequate and ineffective professional development provided to U.S. teachers of ELL students.

The Local Problem

The problem at Snowflake Mountain Public Schools (SMPS, a pseudonym) is that teachers of English Language Learner (ELL) students are not receiving sufficient professional development to help them meet the instructional needs of ELL students within their zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD refers to the difference of what individuals can accomplish on their own versus what they can do with the assistance of another (Danish et al., 2017). In successful learning processes, the adult's assistance is adapted to the child's ability, meaning that the adult typically offers greater assistance in the beginning; the assistance gradually fades as the child becomes more capable (Clara, 2017). ELL students might benefit from being taught within their ZPD, as they need assistance when first learning a new language. If the ELL students are not provided with proper accommodations and instructional practices within their ZPD, the ELLs often continue to struggle in their academic performance, regularly underperforming in relation to their native English-speaking peers (Szpara, 2017). According to the bilingual department chair at SMPS, there is a current gap between what teachers are being trained to teach the students and how they should be prepared to meet the instructional needs of ELLs within their ZPD.

ELL students do not all start at the same level regarding English comprehension, as they have different factors regarding exposure to English. These include prior

schooling, home environments, and life experiences, all of which contribute to where they begin academically and developmentally when entering school as an ELL.

Therefore, it is important for teachers to distinguish between what a student is currently capable of with some assistance within their ZPD, and those students that are currently able to work more independently, outside their ZPD (Danish et al., 2017). Although the benefits of using ZPD with ELL students is well documented, many teachers continue to instruct students as a whole class (Danish et al., 2017). By teaching the class as a whole group, teachers provide students with minimal or nonexistent opportunities to talk about their learning and experiences.

Furthermore, teachers are unable to focus on each student's area of academic concern. This can hinder communicative interaction (between teacher and student and between a student and their peers) and even interrupt the emergence of communicative strategies (Behroozizad & Nambiar, 2014). Therefore, students benefit from learning in smaller groups and should be given the opportunity to converse with their peers for both practicing English and learning from each other. Language development happens through collaborating and interacting with other speakers. Learning can come from not only an expert or more advanced peer, but also from peers of the same level and from literary sources (Carr, 2018).

One way to model the technique of teaching ELLs within their ZPD is to use the method of scaffolding. In the field of education, the term *scaffolding* refers to a process in which teachers model or demonstrate how to solve a problem and then step back, offering support as needed. Vygotsky's perspective on scaffolding is that a teacher should

encourage and strengthen independent learning because it is the teacher who is able to recognize the learner's ZPD (Behroozizad & Nambiar, 2014). Scaffolding is utilized to improve students' comprehension of class material over time through social interaction. Teachers use this technique to guide students with assignments at the beginning of the learning process. Students use what they have learned to move forward and eventually work independently (Colter & Ulatowski, 2017).

Vygotsky's ZPD is defined as the difference between what a person can achieve when acting alone and what the same person can achieve when acting with support from someone else (Fernandez et al., 2015). Scaffolding is the support offered by that other person to help the ELL students succeed academically. Esquinca et al. (2014) stated that the six essential elements of scaffolding are (a) recruiting interest in a task, (b) simplifying the task, (c) keeping the goal, (d) marking critical features of discrepancies between the produced and the ideal solution, (e) controlling frustration and risk during problem-solving, and (f) demonstrating an idealized version of what is produced. Teachers need to implement these elements to effectively scaffold instruction.

Teachers at SMPS are provided a mandated list of ELL strategies to implement when instructing ELL students within their ZPD (see Appendix A). According to the Bilingual department chair, observations of the teachers' interactions with the students, as well as examinations of data of the ELL students' academic growth and achievement, have both uncovered concern regarding the training offered to teachers on how to teach ELL students within their ZPD. The concern for teachers to adequately implement instruction to ELL students goes beyond the SMPS district.

The training offered to teachers of ELL students is a nationwide problem. According to Kibler et al. (2016), findings from multiple survey studies attest that many teachers in the United States are not adequately prepared to teach ELL students. One study indicated that of 41.2% of public-school teachers with ELL students, surveyed nationwide, only 12.5% of public-school teachers with ELL students had 8 or more hours of training on how to teach ELL students (Kibler et al., 2016). Okhremtchouk and Sellu (2019) found that ELL exposure during in-service, especially during preservice professional development, resulted in teachers having a greater sense of ELL readiness. Okhremtchouk and Sellu's finding is supported by Johnson and Wells (2017), who suggested that teachers who attend professional development focused on ELL students rate themselves more prepared to teach ELL students than teachers who have not attended the professional development.

Rationale

In the SMPS district, teachers have indicated that the in-service and/or preservice training they receive is inadequate or ineffective when confronted with real ELL classroom teaching. According to the bilingual department chair at SMPS, student test results, teacher observation, interviews, and other data have supported the concern with the in-service training, regardless of added federal and state legal definitions, lawful expectations, and penalties for noncompliance (receivership). Assessment results indicate that ELLs are achieving well below the national standards and the ELLs are falling behind academically in all content areas. The problem at SMPS is consistent with findings from the literature (Rodriguez, 2014).

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Setting

According to data posted on the SMPS district website, there were an estimated 159,903 elementary students in the district during the 2015-2016 school year; 46,190 (29%) of these students were ELLs. During the 2016-2017 school year, 48,668 of 159,538 (31%) elementary students in the SMPS were ELL students. During the 2017-2018 school year, of the 155,873 elementary students in the SMPS, 43,700 (28%) of the students were ELLs. Approximately 30% of the elementary students in the SMPS from 2015-2018 were ELL students. Furthermore, the SMPS district bilingual department chair indicated that only four face-to-face instructional ELL professional development sessions are provided each year. There are two PDs offered at the beginning of the school year: one professional development in the spring and one in the summer; an insufficient number of professional development to effectively prepare the teachers of ELL students.

In addition to these PDs, four to five curriculum specialists typically provide ELL support in six to eight schools in the district. A curriculum specialist from the bilingual department for SMPS reported that the department works in conjunction with other curriculum departments, offering PDs during the school year. The main focus of these additional PDs is not on ELL instruction but on regular education curriculum. The curriculum specialist also reported that principals are encouraged to contact the bilingual department in the district should they need any support. Finally, online instructional webinars are provided for teachers who are unable to attend a professional development. Approximately 270 teachers of ELL students attended the first district-wide training of the 2020 school year. A SMPS bilingual department curriculum specialist reported that

the remaining four PDs each have an estimated 75-150 teachers in attendance each year, some of whom may have attended more than one of those PDs.

According to bilingual department curriculum specialists, several general education teachers who taught ELL students and ELL teachers remarked throughout the 2016-2017 school year that they had not been to more than two ELL development sessions, if any, since they started teaching ELL students. Other ELL teachers noted that they had yet to attend any trainings for teaching ELL students. A bilingual curriculum support specialist from the SMPS district reported there are not enough professional development sessions provided for the number of K-12 ELL teachers who need training, nor are there enough teachers of ELL students attending the PDs that are provided. There is a gap between what teachers are being trained to teach ELLs and how the teachers are implementing instruction in the classroom to meet the needs of their ELLs within their ZPD.

According to the bilingual department chair, in the local school district, ELL students take the Accessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State (ACCESS) 2.0 assessments. ACCESS 2.0 is an English language proficiency assessment that is administered for ELL students in 40 states. The ACCESS 2.0 assessment includes four sections: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. School leaders use the data from these assessments to evaluate the ELL student comprehension (ability and capability) so that they can be placed in the ELL program accordingly and with proper accommodations. According to the bilingual department chair, results from these assessments prompted study regarding whether ELL students were receiving sufficient

instruction. According to the bilingual chair at SMPS, many students are not exiting the ELL program in their expected 2- to 3-year window. According to the data provided by the data, research, and analysis department at SMPS, the results from the 2016-2017 ACCESS 2.0 assessment show that students lack academic improvement. Of the 69,957 ELL students tested on the ACCESS 2.0, only 28% met proficiency. According to the bilingual department chair, due to the students not meeting proficiency, many of the ELL students are not exiting the ELL program due to poor performance on the reading and especially the writing section of the ACCESS 2.0 exam.

Evidence of the Problem From Scholarly Literature

Researchers have documented several issues with teachers' training on ELL instructional methods. Rodriguez (2014) found that almost half of the ELL teachers had not participated in an ELL professional development, and about a quarter of the teachers had less than 10 hours of in-service application. Sui (2015) noted that many teachers in a mainstream classroom with ELL students have inadequate knowledge about ELLs, or about what constitutes effective ELL instruction for them. Data suggest that general education teachers of ELL students are lacking confidence and doubting their individual skills for working with ELL students (Tellez & Manthey, 2015). In their research, Kong and Saito (2016) stated that the biggest institutional obstacle for ELL teachers is inadequate in-service and preservice training, despite the importance of preparing teachers to work with ELLs. They further noted that in a survey conducted, more than three-quarters of 422 mainstream K-12 classroom teachers did not receive any training (preservice or in-service) in ELL education. Instructors have difficulty in obtaining

knowledge about teaching ELL students and in practicing what they have learned (Daniel, 2014). As evidenced by these studies, the problem of how teachers are trained, and how they use ELL instructional and grading strategies, is not unique to SMPS.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to research the perspectives of elementary teachers of ELL students regarding the professional development trainings they received to teach ELL students within their ZPD. I also explored how the teachers of ELLs implement instructional practices in their classrooms to teach ELLs within their ZPD. The need for this study was based on the gap between what teachers are being trained to teach ELLs and how the teachers are implementing instruction in the classroom to meet the needs of their ELLs within their ZPD. If a teacher is not trained correctly, and a student fails to learn to read adequately as a child, social and economic advances in the future will be difficult (James, 2014).

Tellez and Manthey (2015) stated that the Latino population constitutes the largest group of ELLs (80- 85%) and thus serves as a proxy for the assessment of ELL achievement. Latinos have the lowest level of education and the highest dropout rate (Tellez & Manthey, 2015). According to Rodriguez (2014), about 40-50% of 15 to 17-year-old Hispanic students were below grade level, which may indicate poor retention. In addition, Hispanics have the lowest level of bachelor's degree completion among ethnic groups (Rodriguez, 2014). Calderon and Zamora (2012) associated the low success rate with diminished quality of life students who do not complete high school, including lower standards of living and possible criminal activity (Calderon & Zamora, 2012). In

summary, children with poor English skills are less likely to succeed in school and beyond (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). To reverse this trend, research regarding the in-service training of ELL teachers and strategies for implementing proper instructional practices of all content areas for ELL students is warranted.

Definition of Terms

Access for ELLs 2.0: A secure, large-scale English language proficiency assessment administered to K-12 students who have been identified as ELLs. It is given annually in WIDA Consortium member states to monitor students' progress in acquiring academic English (WIDA, 2018).

Bilingual: A term that is often used interchangeably with *bilingualism*. It is the practice of alternatively using two languages by an individual or group of speakers (Ping, 2017).

Comprehension English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA): An assessment that was administered from May 2008 to May 2015 to measure the progress of English Language Learners' (ELLs') proficiency in English. The ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 assessments replaced the CELLA program (Florida Department of Education, 2017).

Curriculum support specialist: According to the SMES website (2018), a Curriculum Support Specialist is an employee who “serves as a resource to administration and teachers and is responsible for planning, delivering, and presenting subject area in-service professional development to teachers and/or students by developing curriculum materials and assessment tools and providing a demonstration and lessons on how to sufficiently use the materials and tools”.

English Language Learner (ELL): A term that is often used interchangeably with *English as a Second Language* or *limited English proficiency*. The state definition of English Language Learners (ELLs, following the federal definition of limited English proficiency, is “an individual who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English and who has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language; these difficulties may deny such individual the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English” (Cellante & Donne, 2013).

Mainstream classroom: A classroom environment in which instruction and curricula have been designed for native-speaking students (Kibler, 2013)

Professional development: A term, also referred to as *in-service* or *preservice training*, that involves a continuum of learning and support activities designed to prepare individuals to work with and on behalf of young children and their families, as well as ongoing experiences to enhance this work. These opportunities lead to improvements in the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions of early childhood professionals (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2017).

Scaffolding: A term that refers to a cluster of instructional techniques designed to move students from a novice position toward a greater understanding so that they become independent learners (Colter & Ulatowski, 2017).

WIDA Consortium: “A nonprofit cooperative group whose purpose is to develop standards and assessments that meet and exceed the goals of the No Child Left Behind

Act of 2001 and promote educational equity for ELLs” (Greater Clark County Schools, 2014).

Zone of proximal development (ZPD): The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential problem solving as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more able peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Significance of the Study

The project study is potentially significant to the local district because it addresses the gap between what the district’s teachers are being trained to teach ELLs and how the teachers are implementing these instructional strategies to teach ELLs within their ZPD. The stakeholders (teachers of ELL students, parents, and administrators) may benefit from the findings of this study. The administrators may use the information to provide more and appropriate support and training for teachers. All the ELL teachers may be provided additional training to teach the ELLs. Providing quality professional development training is necessary in order to create a better learning experience for the ELL students who are struggling with a new language (Kong & Saito, 2014). The students may then receive effective education, with the appropriate resources and accommodations. Implementing accurate instructional strategies that focus on the diverse learning necessities of the ELLs in reading and writing could improve their academic performance (Tomlinson, 2015).

The results of this project study may provide insight on needed improvements in teacher training for teachers of the ELL students. The knowledge gained on teachers’

perspectives through interviews resulted in the development of professional development sessions. Positive social change may result from increased in-service training for teachers of ELL students. Such training may provide ELL students with better education and allow them to succeed in school and be more prepared for postsecondary education or employment. This study may increase understanding of the problem of teachers of ELL students not receiving adequate in-service training, by highlighting areas of concern.

Research Questions

This project study, investigated what instructional practices teachers use to teach ELL students within their ZPD and what training teachers of ELLs need to provide better instruction to ELLs. The participants were selected through purposeful sampling and included one teacher of ELL students from each grade level (first to fifth grade) in each of three elementary schools in the SMPS. The following two research questions (RQs) guide the basic qualitative research study:

RQ1: How do the elementary teachers of ELL students implement instructional practices and resources used to teach ELL students within their ZPD?

RQ2: What are elementary teachers' perspectives of the information they receive at the professional development training provided to teach ELL students within their ZPD?

Review of the Literature

The literature research focuses on ELL student achievement, Professional Development for teachers of ELL, teacher perspective of teaching ELL students, and

Vygotsky's ZPD theory. The literature showed that ELL academic achievement is low, teachers feel unprepared to teach the ELL students, and there is not enough training provided for the teachers of ELL students (Soto- Santiago et al., 2015). Literature defined Vygotsky's ZPD as the difference between what a person can achieve when acting alone, and what the same person can achieve when acting with support from someone else (Soto-Santiago et al., 2015). The project study will indicate whether the teachers are being trained various instructional strategies for ELL students and if they are implementing the provided strategies in the classroom.

The literature review was conducted using the Walden University Library to search in the education databases Education Source and ERIC, as well as the psychology database PsycARTICLES, for peer-reviewed literature published within the last 5 years. In the education databases, keywords such as *English Language Learner*, *English as a Second Language*, *professional development*, *teacher training*, *instruction*, *strategies*, and *zone of proximal development* were used. The psychology databases were used to research the conceptual framework for this project study. Key terms included *theorists*, *Piaget*, *Vygotsky*, and *zone of proximal development*. The review of literature has been divided up into eight sections: conceptual framework, professional development for teachers of ELL students, ELL instruction, achievement gap, vocabulary, computer programs, accommodations, grading and assessments, teacher effectiveness, and teacher perspectives.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this project study was aligned with a social constructivist approach where learners are the center of instruction. Social constructivism includes the idea that people generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas (Ardiansyah & Ujihanti, 2018). The project study is grounded in Lev Vygotsky's ZPD, a concept which distinguishes between a learner's independent development of problem-solving and a learner's development of problem-solving under adult guidance (Shabani, 2016b). In this study, the distinction was between ELLs who are given grade-level work without proper strategies and accommodations and ELL students who are given proper strategies and accommodations. Vygotsky's work evolved from the recognition of a need to better understand how learning is constructed so that students can better achieve understanding and accomplish better learning (Behroozizad & Nambiar, 2014).

In developing his theory of cognitive development, Vygotsky derives from social interactions that underpinned the guided learning of adults and peers. Vygotsky indicated that interaction with peers is an effective way to develop skills and strategies; however, adults are equally, if not more so, an important source of cognitive development (Shabani, 2016a). Vygotsky's idea was that with a more capable peer or teacher assistance, students can operate at a higher level than they could independently (Wass & Golding, 2014). To be able to succeed in any aspect of profession and adulthood, students must be knowledgeable; to be knowledgeable, they must be able to learn comprehensively (Ardiansyah & Ujihanti, 2018). Constructivist teachers are responsible

for guiding students' activity, modeling behavior, and providing examples that will transform student group discussions into communication about the subject at hand (Kumari, 2014). This is especially the case with ELL students because due to their language barrier they require more visual and hands-on presentations. When teachers use constructivist teaching strategies, they provide students the opportunity to build meaning in what they learn which may lead to academic success (Weimer, 2013).

The key elements of Vygotsky's ZPD framework define the differences between what an individual can achieve independently and what an individual can achieve when receiving support (Soto-Santiago et al., 2015). Learning within Vygotsky's ZPD occurs in four stages. During Stage I, learners engage in a task with support as they are unable to complete the task without the backing of modeling, coaching, scaffolding, and other tools, such as technology, that provide assistance (Polly & Byker, 2020). During Stage II learners begin to become self-supported, and tasks are completed without assistance; however, learning is not fully developed or automatized (Polly & Byker, 2020). During Stage III, learners focus on completing the task. The performance is developed and automatized, and assistance is no longer needed, as it may be disruptive at this stage (Polly & Byker, 2020). Stage IV is deautomatization, where learners cycle back through their ZPD modifying and adjusting actions based on context (Polly & Byker, 2020).

Vygotsky suggested that students function better academically when afforded knowledgeable and supervisory guidance from leaders. Vygotsky's perspective, that the environment in which children grow up will influence how they think and what they think about, adds to the academic diversity of the ELL students and how they are being

educated. Vygotsky's theories relate to the problem statement (ELL teachers not being sufficiently trained to teach ELL students) on whether or not teachers are aware, observe, or follow the precepts. The lack of teacher training in the local school district is, therefore, problematic because it results in reduced ELL student performance and achievement.

Vygotsky's theory of ZPD suggests that cognitive development varies across cultures. According to the bilingual department chair, this portends the dilemma faced by ELL teachers, who are being confronted by huge increases in immigrant populations. Simultaneously, they are being prepared in ways that are inadequate and/or disproportional to the challenges they face.

The project study, used Vygotsky's theorems to address dilemmas and remedies currently being researched. The project study investigated instructional practices and strategies implemented by the SMPS ELL teachers in response to district-provided professional development, while seeking to understand whether there was a correlation between the research study and Vygotsky's ZPD. Data were obtained from interviews with ELL-designated teachers in the district.

Professional Development for Teachers of ELL Students

The number of ELL students in school across the United States is continuously increasing; most teachers will have ELL students in their classrooms in the near future, if not already (Roy-Campbell, 2013). Schools with high concentrations of ELLs tend to have more teachers with provisional, emergency, or temporary certification, and these teachers receive less in-service training and support than their counterparts in schools

with lower concentrations of ELLs (Lopez et al., 2014). ELLs have the lowest graduation rates across subgroups (Lopez et al., 2014).

To support students learning English, all teachers need opportunities to learn how they can educate these learners effectively (Daniel, 2014). The value of professional development is essential for creating quality education for our ELL students, as they enhance teacher capacity to influence student achievement (Rodriguez, 2014). School district administrators have indicated a need for teacher professional development on the understanding of cultural issues, assessing student progress, and developing instructional strategies for ELL students (Babinski et al., 2018). Research studies have indicated inadequate preparation of teachers to teach ELL students (Roy-Campbell, 2013). The majority of classroom teachers have not had specialized training for working with ELLs. Less than 20% of teacher education programs require a course focused on ELLs (Babinski et al., 2018). Teachers are reporting limited training for teaching ELL students, with an average of 4 hours of ELL training; most of their professional development were not even related to ELLs (Cellante & Donne, 2013).

Roy-Campbell (2013) suggested that one of the reasons for the insufficient training would be that the educators presenting the training may not be prepared themselves. Daniel (2014) supported this in her research where she identified the reason teachers are not learning to educate ELLs is that teacher educators at internship sites are neither modeling nor discussing effective knowledge, skills, and dispositions of supporting linguistically diverse students (Daniel, 2014). Razak et al. (2016) suggested that ELL teachers are not volunteering to attend PDs, but rather are obligated or

mandated to attend. Of those attending PDs, only 12 to 27% of them have seen improvement in their teaching, as most of the PDs are poorly organized, and there is seldom if ever a follow-up workshop to provide support or get feedback from teachers (Razak et al., 2016). Song (2016) suggested ELL students will continue to fail unless teachers take more active roles in becoming better learners (Song, 2016).

ELL students are falling behind academically, and assessment results are indicating that ELLs are achieving well below national standards. The number of certified bilingual and ELL teachers needs to increase, as well as the instructional capacity of teachers serving ELLs in the mainstream classroom (Rodriguez, 2014). Teacher quality affects student academic success, and teacher training can enhance teacher quality (Daniel, 2014). Yet, teachers cannot be expected to implement what they have not been taught (Babinski et al., 2018). To support students learning English, all teachers need opportunities to learn how they can educate these learners effectively (Daniel, 2014). While teachers may understand the role of oral communication for learning, they may not be aware that ELLs often need more explicit scaffolding in performing academic tasks (Estapa et al., 2016).

Traditional professional development uses “one-shot” workshops as a medium to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills they need. However, they receive the most criticisms, and research has shown evidence of failure of these workshops, as they seldom provide a follow-up event, teachers do not receive feedback, and they tend to be poorly organized (Razak et al., 2016). In an attempt to improve professional development, the use of videos for professional development was implemented to help

teacher development with the ability to review and consider the events that occurred. However, even with this tool, challenges occurred. Teachers do not always consider videos filmed in other classrooms to be relevant to what is occurring in their classrooms. In addition, the camera may not always capture the same view that a teacher may observe in the classroom (Estepa et al., 2016).

Online courses have become increasingly common to certify teachers of ELLs; however, little is known of the long-term effects on either the teacher readiness or the effects of the students' learning (Roman, 2013). Online courses were introduced to eliminate barriers that were caused by traditional professional development (Razak et al., 2016). Despite the benefits of the "anywhere, anytime" access online courses provide, studies have shown that ELL teachers have used them to a limited extent, as these programs have failed to highlight how teachers of ELLs can use this tool to find support (Razak et al., 2016).

Another method of professional development called Coaching has been on the rise over the last decade. Coaching, unlike the traditional 1-day in-service professional development, is a type of ongoing, contextualized support that has an impact on teacher learning and practices (Rodriguez, 2014). Song (2016) suggested that successful professional development sessions need to be implemented in the teachers' classrooms with a supervisor or coach; otherwise, the teachers may lose the potential effects of how the lessons should be taught in the classroom. (Song, 2016). In her research study, Meissel et al., (2016), suggested ongoing visits by school facilitators (once every two weeks) involved classroom observation with feedback and discussions through learning

conversations. Facilitators also modeled literacy practices in the teachers' classrooms, led collective activities such as analysis of achievement data, sessions of moderation of writing or reviewing, etc. (Meissel et al., 2016). The results of Meissel et al.'s research study show increases in student achievement and teacher confidence. If teachers of ELL students received this type of support, ELL students could show greater gains as well.

ELL Instruction

Effective instruction for ELL students is composed of multiple functions which include, utilizing strategies to “decode” the curriculum, environmental settings, and cultural considerations. Many ELL students come to this country as immigrants, or were born in the United States but speak different languages at home. Some of the ELL students have not had much schooling in the country from which they originated, and others are literate in their native language and possess excellent content knowledge. Due to mobility, many ELLs have not developed the literacy skills in English that are expected by schools (Ziegenfuss et al., 2014).

Teachers are directed to provide positive learning environments in the classroom where students feel comfortable and accepted. It is essential for teachers to provide welcoming child-centered environments that are conducive to children's learning. (Sullivan et al., 2015). This can be achieved through practicing nonjudgmental discussions, reflections, and the use of engagement strategies (Ziegenfuss et al., 2014). Ziegenfuss et al. (2014), indicates that student motivation and achievement outcomes are greatly influenced by the feeling of belonging, awareness that their teachers value their intellectual competence, and that they can trust the people around them (Ziegenfuss et al.,

2014). It is impressed upon teachers of ELL students to learn of the student's culture, family background, interests, and expectations, regardless of their differences and issues that they may bring to school. Everything about the student becomes an access point to help the student learn therefore, these are critical components for the students' success. (Ziegenfuss et al., 2014). "Teachers should structure activities and provide appropriate classroom support to motivate readers to bring who they are to the reading tasks" (Louie & Sierschynski, 2015, p.103). Honoring students' culture through curriculum choices and instruction is a dimension of culturally responsive teaching. Classroom discussions must engage students and create a learning environment that is understanding and supportive of individual differences (Ziegenfuss et al., 2014). A teacher should connect a subject in the curriculum to an event or situation of the students' prior knowledge. ELL students will be able to construct meaning from the text by relying on prior experience to parallel, contrast, or affirm what the author suggested in the text (Ardiansyah & Ujihanti, 2018).

ELLs often go through what is considered as the silent period, often misinterpreted by teachers as an unwillingness to participate, yet this period plays a crucial role in language acquisition and cultural adaptation. It is characterized as active listening to process the language that is being heard and apply it to the context in which is being used (Sullivan et al., 2015). Classroom discussions and conversations also help with achieving academic literacy. ELLs need to spend time in academic content conversations, as well as meaningful conversations so that they can practice using their voice (Louie & Sierschynski, 2015). Louie and Sierschynski (2015) emphasized this by adding that ELLs must spend a significant amount of time in discussions and

conversations, where they use the English language themselves, and not just respond to a teacher. English learners must be allowed to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and abilities in any language (English, their native language, or both) (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Recognizing the level of language understanding is an important element of language instruction in the content area. All teachers should understand how language is acquired because all teachers teach students who are learning the English language (Ziegenfuss et al., 2014).

The goal of any constructivist program is to stimulate students in all areas of development, physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development (Ardiansyah & Ujihanti, 2018). While instructional strategies are beneficial to all students, they are critical for ELL students (Cervetti et al., 2014). Regardless of language level, all ELL readers use strategies to make their reading more efficient and effective (Park & Kim, 2016). Instead of “dumbing down” the curriculum, teachers can critically evaluate their content area, focusing on the most essential aspects of such, and create modified and supported instruction for ELLs (Ziegenfuss et al., 2014).

The gradual release of responsibility is an instructional model that occurs in four stages, shifting the responsibilities of learning from the teacher to the students (Cimino, 2018). The first stage of the gradual release of responsibility is the teacher models; where the teacher demonstrates the learning task, strategies and provides explicit instruction (Webb et al., 2019). During the second stage, guided practice, the students practice the task taught to them, while the teacher guides the students (Webb et al., 2019). The third stage is the collaborative stage that allows the students to work together while

the teacher overlooks their work (Webb et al., 2019). Finally, the fourth stage is the independent stage that provides the students an opportunity to apply their learning without teacher support (Webb et al., 2019). These stages are also known as I Do, We Do, You Do Together, and You Do (Cimino, 2018). The gradual release of responsibility model reflects Vygotsky's ZPD theory that meaningful learning takes place over time with ample guidance and practice (Clark, 2014). The gradual release of responsibility model may occur over a day, a week, a month, or a year (Cimino, 2018).

To make concepts more comprehensible for ELLs, learning tools are suggested, such as images and videos, manipulatives, and realia with academic vocabulary (which help improve vocabulary), as well as the use of more kinesthetic activity instead of just learning through text or lecture (Cervetti et al., 2014). Practical demonstrations, pictures and graphs help the ELL students understand abstract and complex language. Wordless picture books showcase the art of visual storytelling...they may display multiple levels of meaning and unique structures, use symbols, express tone, and require cultural, literary, and content knowledge for comprehension (Louie & Sierschynski, 2015). Constructivist teaching practices help learners to internalize, reshape or transform any new information. Researchers have found that dialogic reading, an interactive book-reading approach where the teachers model rich language and promote active child participation, enhances the vocabulary skills, frequency and complexity of responses, and other literacy skills of children from low-income backgrounds (Lopez et al., 2014).

Group games are a central feature of the curriculum, and learning centers with art materials, block play, writing and drawing, dramatic play, and exploration with raw

materials, such as dirt, sand, and water are often used to expose students to new areas of interest and/or encourage the students to make choices while involving them in peer play (Ardiansyah & Ujihanti, 2018). ELL participation, where they can use the English language themselves, such as in a small group or pairs, can create a context for meaningful extended language use (Louie & Sierschynski, 2015). ELL students thrive from the use of visual aids such as pictures, graphs, and demonstrations, especially to comprehend complex and abstract language. Repetition is a tool used for ELL students to comprehend new information. It is important not to rely too heavily on the students' native language to assist them. Research shows that many teachers believe that the frequent use of the first language delays the learning of English, and fluency which they view as essential to succeed in their education and lives (Shim, 2014).

Tools and strategies used to teach content to ELL students are an amazing component in the ELL classroom; however, the amount of effort put forth by the teachers to make language understandable for the students is an area that is also imperative to the ELL classroom and yet, needs reexamination, as most teachers of ELL students are not trained and prepared (Cervetti et al., 2014). Teachers need to be trained to understand that ELL students are working to achieve two different milestones at the same time, mastery of the English language, and acquisition of academic content knowledge (Babinski et al., 2018). Reading comprehension is an interactive mental process between the reader's linguistic knowledge, knowledge of the world, and knowledge about a given topic (Ardiansyah & Ujihanti, 2018). ELL students face challenges in speaking, reading, and writing complex content in English (Ziegenfuss et al., 2014).

When teaching ELL students, it is imperative to understand the difference between instructional and linguistic accommodations. Instructional accommodations taught regularly in most teacher PDs, pertain to how it is taught, made accessible, and assessed. Linguistic accommodations involve the direct manipulation of language so that second language acquisition can be integrated into classroom practice; some examples include: directions read out loud, using simplified vocabulary, and rephrasing or translating. (Pappamihel & Lynn, 2016). Included among numerous language strategies associated with enhanced language development are the modeling of varied vocabulary and advanced linguistic structures, strategic repetition, effective use of open-ended questions, expansions, and recasts of children's utterances, extended talk on specific topics, and cognitively rich topics of conversation (Lopez, 2014).

Research has shown that when asking an ELL teacher about the content linguistic accommodations being used in the classroom, they usually refer to the instructional accommodations, as they are unaware of the difference. All content learning must include accommodations for language and linguistic support that go beyond the instructional accommodations, otherwise learning the content will be hindered (Pappamihel & Lynn, 2016). Cervetti et al. (2014), shares an instructional model referred to as *Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)* that presents ELL learners with the same instruction as their native English-speaking peers, only with strategies that make the content more comprehensible to them (Cervetti et al., 2014). This model focuses on lesson plan adaptation for ELLs and specifically includes the development of both linguistic and instructional accommodations (Pappamihel & Lynn, 2016). Research

showed that teachers who participated in using this instructional model perceived that they improved their instructional strategies for ELLs. They attributed their improvement to the SIOP model, as well as guided coaching (Song, 2016).

Additional areas that require extra consideration include, but are not limited to, figurative language, dual meaning words, how much time teachers wait for a student to respond to questions, rate of speech, enunciation, as these areas all play a role in an ELLs' understanding of classroom processes, content, and language learning goals (Cervetti et al., 2014).

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is the modifying of instruction to meet the student's individual needs (Turner et al., 2017). The rationale of differentiated instruction grew from the concerns of the diversity of student learning needs in the school classrooms (Goddard et al., 2015). According to Goddard et al. (2015), students are not all equally proficient on subjects, nor will they be similarly motivated by the same content.

Providing a variety of classroom activities and ways of learning, are key to differentiating instruction (Goddard et al., 2015). Differentiated instruction provides opportunities for students where they are pushed slightly beyond their comfort zones using materials within their ZPD, to challenge them to become better readers (Martinez & Plevyak, 2020).

AlHashmi and Elyas (2018) discuss Tomlinson's (2001) three curricular elements required to modify differentiated instruction: content, process, and product. The content is the information and ideas students are expected to learn. The process is how the student

makes sense of the information they are learning. The product demonstrates their comprehension of the information that they have learned (AlHashmi & Elyas, 2018). Park and Datnow, (2017) stated that students' needs are not just about their academic proficiency or their assessment progress, but also about their interest, and readiness (Park & Datnow, 2017). Birnie (2015) explains that students experience differentiated instruction with three common models: direct instruction of the teacher, cooperative learning in groups, and highly individualized computer-based programs for each student (Birnie, 2015). Cooperative learning improves peer interaction, self-motivation, achievement scores, engages students in deep thinking, and can change a student's perspective of school (Awada & Faour, 2018). Teachers who use computer programs can assign ELA and Math activities that engage students at their individual level and their own pace; as well as help the teachers target lessons for small groups (Park & Datnow, 2017). Additional areas that have been used beneficially for students for direct instruction include: stations, centers, discussion circles, small groups, choice boards...etc. (Tomlinson, 2014).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary development and retention play an essential part in the classroom environment serving ELL students (Gibson, 2016). The process of language learning starts with the most basic words and phrases; and never stops developing vocabulary, even at the highest level (Gu, 2018). Oral language is the first part of language learning and is associated with the growth of one's vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary development maintains an essential and prominent place in the academic success of all

students. Learning vocabulary words is a process, as vocabulary words have multifaceted challenges when learning the depth of each word; especially for ELLs (Tindall & Nisbet, 2014). Successful vocabulary acquisition has been associated with successful reading ability, becoming more communicative, able, and skilled among others (Sa'd & Rajabi, 2018). Learning to read and write requires the transfer of oral language ability to written ability (Reed et al., 2016).

The depth of vocabulary knowledge is a multidimensional construct encompassing all levels of word knowledge, including “pronunciation, spelling, meaning, register, frequency, and morphological, syntactic, and collocational properties (Charkova & Charkova, 2018). ELLs must address the multifaceted aspect of depth of vocabulary demands. To truly know a word, students should be able to define the word, decode and spell the word, know the word’s multiple meanings, ascertain and apply the meaning of the word in appropriate contexts (Tindall & Nisbet, 2014).

Most ELLs have to learn significantly more words on a daily and weekly basis than their nonELL peers. For an ELL student to comprehend vocabulary words, instruction should be planned to include an ELL-friendly definition and multiple contextualized exposures. Explicit instruction transpires only when teachers are purposeful in selecting vocabulary words and strategies before instruction (Tindall & Nisbet, 2014)

Researchers have found that the use of visual representation, translation text, task-based vocabulary teaching, fill in the blank, storytelling, and matching activities, play activities, reading to children, and contextual vocabulary teaching, are effective strategies

to use when teaching ELL students (Gibson, 2016). Additional strategies such as learning words from context, learning word parts, using dictionaries, using deliberate learning from word cards, and finding and learning multiword units can be very effective when learning new vocabulary words (Gu, 2018). Another method suggested was bilingual cognates, words that are spelled similarly, or identically, and possess the same or near the same meanings in both languages. The use of visual representation, translation text, and task-based vocabulary teaching, fill in the blank, storytelling, and matching activities, play activities, reading to children and contextual vocabulary teaching, picture books, word walls, and anchor charts are suggested when teaching bilingual cognates (Gibson, 2016).

Incorporating written vocabulary instruction in English, particularly when emphasizing the morphemes within the words, has resulted in improved reading performance among ELL students. The relation between vocabulary and comprehension is believed to become more pronounced and critical with age –through adulthood (Reed et al., 2016).

Without adequate academic vocabulary, ELLs tend to experience difficulty comprehending texts and performing well on assessments (Tindall & Nisbet, 2014). Failure in learning vocabulary is believed to lead to difficulties in language reception and production, as well as lead to a sense of insecurity and breakdown in communication. It is assumed that growth in vocabulary takes place as a result of gains in language proficiency (Sa'd & Rajabi, 2018). Vocabulary constitutes an essential part of every language-learning endeavor and deserves scholarly attention (Sa'd & Rajabi, 2018).

Computer Programs

One of the most common strategies to use for ELLs in today's technological world is computer-based programs. The effectiveness of computer programs improves the reading abilities of ELLS, as students are placed at individual levels, and work at their own rate while receiving one-on-one instruction (James, 2014). Research has shown that computer-based learning activities can make reading more enjoyable and motivate the students to participate (Park & Kim, 2016). According to the bilingual department chair, many language literacy programs, such as *Imagine Learning*, are supportive for teachers who do not have time to fit in the important curriculum such as phonics lessons during classroom time. The program is working with the students at their individualized levels (ZPD) of instruction. However, some researchers see this resource from a different point of view. Park and Kim (2016) also stated that computer-based readers are often wasting time as the students tend to navigate to irrelevant extra features and websites (Park & Kim, 2016).

According to the bilingual department chair, teachers who are placing ELL students on a computer trusting that it will "teach" the students, may not see the expected advances in their ELL's academic achievement. Computer programs should not replace classroom curriculum, but rather need to be an additional resource for the ELL students. Computer programs do not help with student oral language. Oral reading helps to strengthen decoding skills and foster reading fluency. Inaccuracies found through oral reading can help to identify reading errors (James, 2014). Reading online text differs from reading a paper. According to Park and Kim (2017), ELL students need to learn

both computerized and paper-based strategies for each reading environment (Park & Kim, 2017). Another concern with computer-based reading is the isolation and learning independently, rather than working with friends and learning social skills and communication from each other. Vygotsky believed that learners begin to internalize what they learn, and their development occurs when they interact and cooperate with people in diverse learning environments (Park & Kim, 2017).

Accommodations and Assessments

Accommodations are changes to material or procedures that provide students access to instruction and assessments and improve the validity of assessment results for students who need them. A student's progress either on lessons or an assessment, ties into the instructions and accommodations they were provided by their teacher.

Accommodations are changes in test materials or procedures that do not alter the construct being measured (Thurlow & Kopriva, 2015). Accommodations are more than making adjustments for assessments and instruction; they must be appropriately matched with each individual's needs; this can be very time-consuming, and therefore can be overlooked (Koran, 2017).

Accessibility and accommodations in assessments, and instructional learning, now are seen as critical elements of an appropriately designed and implemented assessment of student achievement (Thurlow & Kopriva, 2015). Schools and states are being held accountable for the academic achievement of ELLs; however, the current accountability system has not been designed to implement valid accommodations for ELLs on their state content assessments (Turkan & Oliveri, 2014). Current practice for selecting

accommodations for ELLs typically consists of an unstructured process that relies heavily on the judgment of each student's teacher, and little research has examined the quality of teacher judgment in selecting large scales test accommodations for ELLs. Research indicates that the development of accommodations and the effectiveness of current practice in selecting test accommodations for ELLs is scarce (Koran & Kopriva, 2017). Assessment programs provide testing accommodations for ELLs with the intent to minimize limited proficiency in English as a threat to the validity measures of their academic achievement (Solano-Flores et al., 2014).

Greater consistency in providing appropriate accommodations can result in more meaningful inferences about the learning taking place in different classrooms, schools, and districts for both school administrators and state education agencies (Koran & Kopriva, 2017). The most effective accommodations are those which include linguistic modification of test questions, as they are critical to an ELL's academic development (Pappamihiel & Lynn, 2017). Content tests fail to accurately assess ELL's content knowledge because they have not yet developed proficiency in the language of the tests (Alexander, 2017). ELLs tend to perform much lower on reading assessments than on mathematics assessments, which is likely due to the increased linguistic complexity of reading items (Roohr & Sireci, 2017). Limitations in accommodation effectiveness may stem from a lack of conceptual guidance on how to create and use testing accommodations for ELLs (Solano-Flores et al., 2014).

Achievement Gap

ELLs are the fastest growing high school graduate group in the United States, and the numbers are expected to rise. By 2030 the ELL population is predicted to be at 40% (Gibson, 2016). The achievement gap among ELLs and their native English-speaking peers shows the need for greater attention on the strategies used to teach the ELL students (de Araujo et al., 2015). Existing achievement gaps between the ELLs and the native speakers are prevalent from students of the kindergarten to university level (Gibson, 2016). Multiple studies have identified the positive relationship between teachers who have high expectations for their students and their academic achievement (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014). According to Gibson (2016), in order to close the achievement gaps between ELLs and their nonELL peers, it is imperative to implement effective language teaching and learning instruction (Gibson, 2016). Effective learning happens through peer interaction while engaging in a particular content area (Turkan & Buznik, 2016). Collaborative learning environments would allow ELLs to communicate meaning around academic content and would encourage comprehensible language use as well (Turkan & Buznik, 2016). Growth in vocabulary takes place as a result of gains in language proficiency (Sa'd & Rajabi, 2018). Vocabulary development is a major section that educators should consider focusing on for better achievement with ELL students (Gibson, 2016). Student scores on written vocabulary measures are highly correlated with and predictive of ones reading comprehension scores (Reed et al., 2016).

Teacher Effectiveness

As the U.S. ELL population increases, educators need to be well prepared to face cultural and linguistic diversity challenges and to comply with state and federal educational policies and standards (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014). Mainstream teachers may find it difficult to create a truly welcoming environment for ELLs in the classroom as there are substantial linguistic and conceptual differences between teachers and students when the same language, assumptions, or life experiences are not common to both groups (Sullivan et al., 2015). Cross-cultural relationships must be developed to create a positive learning environment (Sullivan et al., 2015). Teachers who have developed multicultural competency are likely to be more successful at meeting learners' academic needs when focusing on the development of culturally responsive teaching, understanding the background of diverse learners, adapting curriculum to different cultures and backgrounds, and holding high expectations for all learners (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014).

Researchers have demonstrated that being sensitive to and comprehending various cultures enables teachers to be effective (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014). A culturally responsive teacher affirms students' identities by using their backgrounds and resources to teach and learn. Teachers who respect cultural differences are apt to believe that all students are capable learners, even when students enter the school with ways of thinking, talking, and behaving that contrast with the dominant cultural model (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014). There is often a lack of cross-cultural relationships between teachers and their ELL students and their families, constituting a change of relationship

(Sullivan et al., 2015). Research shows that many teachers have little knowledge about how to work effectively with culturally and linguistically different students. Teachers without proper training can experience feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and intimidation (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014). Mainstream content area teachers often have little or no specialized training for meeting these needs (Russell, 2015). Research needs to focus on the type of support novice teachers can be provided to ensure their success with an increasingly linguistically diverse student population (Russell, 2015). Many ELL teachers do not have time in their daily schedules to do the work that is expected or necessary, nor do they have the training (Russell, 2015).

Effective teachers, according to a sociocultural perspective, should utilize what they know of the ELL's home languages and cultures to build connections between students' backgrounds and the content area to make the content more comprehensible. They should also use the ELL's prior knowledge of a subject to help them relate to the lesson at hand (Turkan & Buznik, 2016). Classroom teachers' attitudes, behaviors, and perspectives have been shown to have a significant influence on students' attitudes toward learning and academic performance (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014). Scholars have asserted that successful school leaders for ELLs prioritize the student while taking into account the academic, sociocultural, and linguistic domains (Russell, 2015). Successful instructional strategies involved establishing an environment in which teachers address students' cultural, emotional, and cognitive needs (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014).

Social interaction plays an essential role in cognitive development processes according to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Sullivan et al., 2015). Interactions between teachers and children have been found to have an impact on children's development (Sullivan et al., 2015). The effective teaching of content to ELLs can also be viewed through a sociocultural lens. Vygotsky posited that learning occurs on a social plane. Social interactions demand the use of language as both a tool and a system (Turkan & Buznik, 2016). The social-cultural theory suggests children learn through social interaction and, in turn, actively pursue knowledge through interacting with their environments (Sullivan et al., 2015). The development of an effective learning environment requires the use of curriculum and instructional practices that promote student growth (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014).

Teachers' knowledge of the discourse is reflected by their abilities to model its features and characteristics and to engage ELLs in using it. The effective teaching of ELLs requires not only understanding of relevant linguistic features but also engaging ELLs in using the academic discourse of the discipline through reading, writing, and speaking (Turkan & Buznik, 2016). Researchers have shown that high-quality language instruction and modeling effectively promotes children's language development (Lopez et al., 2014). Research shows that teacher effectiveness is a significant predictor of student achievement (Johnson & Wells, 2017).

Teachers who espouse English only have argued that exposure to nonEnglish during instruction impinges on English exposure and, as a result, affects the degree to which ELLs English Proficiency can improve (Lopez et al., 2014). Language learning is a

socially mediated process where both students and teachers must actively participate in the coconstruction of language and curriculum knowledge. These accounts parallel Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in which students actively play roles so that learning becomes a reciprocal experience for the students and teachers (Sullivan et al., 2015).

Literature of the Broader Problem

The National Center for Education Statistics reported that the ELL population rose from 4.1 million students in 2007-2008 to 4.4 million in the 2012-2013 school year (Brown et al., 2017). The number of ELL students in a classroom range between a relatively small number per classroom, and classrooms that are composed of 100% ELL students (Estapa et al., 2016). This diverse ELL population has increased the need for the teaching force to understand how to teach ELLs effectively (Percy et al., 2015).

For many years, ELL academic achievement has been largely ignored (Tellez & Manthey, 2015). Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which assesses U.S. students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, reveals that ELL students consistently score lower in reading and mathematics than their nonELL peers (Bohon et al., 2017). The key to closing achievement gaps between the ELLs and their nonELL peers is to identify effective language teaching and learning practices (Gibson, 2016).

Most teachers do not feel prepared to undertake the challenges involved in teaching ELL students; they consider accommodating an ELL student as frustrating and a peripheral task (Song, 2016). Surveys of classroom teachers have documented that many teachers who have attended professional development, still feel underprepared to teach

these students (Kibler et al., 2013). Research indicates that teachers lack confidence in teaching ELLs. They doubt their individual skills and capacities for working with ELLs. (Tellez & Manthey, 2015). Due to the growth of the ELL student population, many of the ELL students are being moved into classrooms with native-English speaking students, rapidly making more teachers responsible for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students, and with little or no preparation in guiding the how to do it (Daniel & Percy, 2014).

Research indicates that many mainstream classroom teachers are not equipped with adequate knowledge about ELLs or what constitutes effective instruction for them (Sui, 2015). Many content teachers feel that is the responsibility of the ELL specialist to teach the ELL students (Song, 2016). Challenges found in research include confusion about leadership roles and onus of responsibility, miscommunication between multiple participants and a still-developing sense of coherence, and structural constraints such as top-down pressures and limited amounts of time (Daniel & Percy, 2014). Some mainstream teachers hold negative attitudes toward having ELLs in their classroom due to the demand of the ELL students' academic needs, and the teacher's limited amount of time (Sui, 2015). Kibler et al. (2016) adds that teachers are expressing frustration with their inability to assess the progress of their ELL students, as the grading process is focused on meeting standards and not the growth and progress the ELL students show (Kibler et al., 2016). Vygotsky's ZPD integrates teaching with assessment in a single activity by providing mediation to help learners perform beyond their independent functioning, and simultaneously promote learner development (Yang & Qian, 2017).

In a study focusing on secondary teachers, research found that 87% of the teachers never received professional development for working with ELL students, and as a result, do not likely use instructional strategies needed to teach ELL students effectively (Rubinstein- Avila & Lee, 2014). This same study also found that teachers were feeling burdened enough with adapting their instruction for all the other students and attributed their unwillingness to adapt their instruction for ELLs due to lack of time (Rubinstein- Avila & Lee, 2014). High stake testing is a concern, as these assessments emphasize student failure for ELL students to achieve the same standards as their peers (Kibler et al., 2016). Teachers are worried about the validity and reliability of the ELL assessments, as most research done on the assessment of ELL students focuses on high stake tests (Guler, 2013).

In an interview conducted by Allen (2017), a teacher commented that the pressure and accountability of high-stakes testing leads teachers to focus on test scores to monitor student progress and performance. Schools and teachers are under enormous pressure to help ELLs meet national and state accountability demands. Assessment results indicate that ELLs are achieving well below the national standards (Rodriguez, 2014). Testing has become the focus of student achievement, taking away time and effort for other academic needs, especially for ELL students (Allen, 2017).

Research indicates that many teachers are not prepared to meet the needs of a large and rapidly growing population of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Percy et al., 2017). The cognitive demand on ELL students is greater than on a native English-speaking student because they are learning both language and content knowledge

(Khong & Saito, 2014). One of the biggest obstacles for teachers of ELL students is inadequate in-service and preservice training (professional development) (Okhremtchouk & Sellu, 2019).

Implications

Data were collected from, interviews of teachers who instruct ELL students and was analyzed to determine the findings of this project study. Information was gathered from teacher interviews, regarding the instructional practices that are being implemented in the classrooms to teach the ELL students. The findings of this study were used to develop a project that may fill a significant gap in professional practices. The gap is between what the teachers of ELL students are being trained to teach, and how these teachers are currently implementing instruction to their ELL students within their ZPD. The findings of this study may also provide information for the SMPS school district to guide the development of an expansive number of more effective professional development for ELL teachers. A project deliverable is professional development sessions to identify a variety of accommodations appropriate for each ELL student and to teach strategies to the ELL teachers to implement when teaching ELL students, so they instruct every student within their ZPD. This development could benefit the teachers of ELL students as the new professional development training they receive on how to teach the ELL students within their ZPD could be highly effective. It could also benefit the ELL students, as the instruction they receive may increase their academic achievement levels. This study may provide insight for local and national districts, where the number of ELL students continues to increase.

Implications for social change include a layout of professional development aimed to help improve the training for teachers of ELL students and the ELL teachers' instructional implementation in the classroom. The instructional areas of focus will include writing, speaking, reading, and listening. This will help the students excel academically, as well as show growth in English language acquisition on the WIDA: ACCESS 2.0 assessment.

Summary

Schools in the United States have been faced with rapidly changing demographics in the last decade (Rodriguez, 2014, p. 64). As suggested in the literature, the influx of students with immigrant and refugee status are entering our public-school system, the number of ELL students is increasing, and the number of efficiently trained teachers to teach them is decreasing. There is a need for improved instruction for ELLs in the United States, as current teachers are underprepared to teach them (Hallman & Meineke, 2016). Findings have also indicated a dissatisfaction from the teachers, with the professional development offered by their districts. Data from the local district, as well as literature, showed a gap in student achievement, as ELL students are not exiting the ELL programs due to poor performance on the ACCESS 2.0 assessment.

Instructional strategies and computer programs for ELL students, professional development for teachers of ELL students, and teachers' perspectives of the training they are being provided, are topics explored in the review of literature. The conceptual framework is grounded in Lev Vygotsky's ZPD theory, which defines a learner's development of problem-solving independently, versus a learner's development of

problem-solving under adult guidance. Vygotsky's ZPD is considered one of his most important contributions to education, as the core idea is that with a more capable peer or teacher assistance, students will be able to operate at a higher level than they could independently, enabling them to learn how to operate on their own (Wass & Golding, 2014). Section 2 will detail the basic qualitative study methodology, the participants, the data collection, the data analysis, the results, and the limitations.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The research design selected for this study is a basic qualitative study. The design was chosen because it allowed for exploration of teachers' experiences related to implementation of instructional practices and use of resources to teach ELL students within their ZPD. In addition, use of the design was consistent with exploring elementary ELL teachers' perspectives on the professional development trainings provided to teach ELL students within their ZPD. In this basic qualitative study, insight was gained and an in-depth understanding of the participating ELL teachers' training and implementation of instructional practices. Open-ended, semistructured interviews were the means of obtaining data for this research study.

Ethnography was considered as an approach for this project, as the focus of this study concerned teachers' means of instructing students of various cultures (ELLs) and learning styles (ZPD). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that the focus of ethnography is on human society and culture. When delving deeper into ethnography studies, the approach is specific to describing, analyzing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group's shared pattern of behavior, beliefs, and language (Creswell, 2012). Ethnography would not have been a proper fit for this study because the participants of this study were the teachers of the ELL students. In addition, the focus of this study was the quality of professional development the teachers received and how well the teachers were implementing the elements of the professional development to teach the ELLs within their ZPD and if they were doing it with fidelity.

Grounded theory, was considered as the researcher takes a collection of evidence and compares it to see if there are any similarities in the findings or to develop a new theory as it emerges (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data in grounded theory can come from interviews, observations, and/or documentary materials (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers who use a grounded theory design engage in analysis in the field and develops questions and answers as they mobilize from one site to another (Bogdan, 2007). The intent of this research study was not to develop a new theory, but to focus on the teachers of ELL students' perspectives of the professional development provided and the instructional practices implemented to teach the students within their ZPD; therefore, grounded theory was not chosen.

Phenomenology is the study of people's conscience experiences of their everyday life and social actions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It was a considered research design for this project as individual experiences are explored to determine the meaning of the phenomena of interest. Phenomenological researchers look closely at the individual's interpretation of their experiences and attempt to understand the meaning of the experience from the perspective of the participant (Lodico et al., 2010). This study focused on the participating teachers' perspectives of the professional development trainings they were offered and how they implemented instructional practices within the ZPD of their ELL students. After researching this research design further, it was discovered that the phenomenological approach requires a collection of data over a long period of time during which the researcher becomes enveloped within the group of participants (Lodico et al., 2010). Researchers attempt to capture the essence of the

human experience by describing with precision the personal experiences of the participants of the study. This focus did not fit the description of the research study.

A quantitative study was not considered because the focus of this study was not student test scores specifically, but rather to view perceptions on the teacher training used to teach ELL students. A quantitative study would focus too much on data; and the data may take this study in a different direction not intended by the researcher. Quantitative researchers use numerical information to measure educational outcomes as well as to summarize and draw conclusions (Lodico et al., 2010). In addition, quantitative researchers ask specific and narrow RQs to obtain measurable and observable data on variables (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative research brings the researcher in close contact with the participants to capture their perspectives, for example, interviews and observations (Lodico et al., 2010). This project study, explored the perspectives of ELL teachers through interviews to collect data. This project study was basic qualitative not quantitative, as the researcher investigates key concepts, or central phenomenon for a specific problem (Creswell, 2014).

Participants

Criteria for Selection

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), an assumption of purposeful sampling is that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight about the study phenomenon; therefore, the researcher must select a sample that affords the most pertinent information to be learned. The purpose of selecting elementary teachers of ELL students was to obtain their perspectives of previously attended professional development

trainings, as well as how they implement their instructional practices in the classroom to assist the ELL students in learning within their ZPD. The criteria for this study were that the participants must be elementary teachers of ELL students; a participant could either a mainstream classroom teacher with ELL students in it or a teacher of only ELL students in the classroom. In addition, the participating teachers must have either had their ELL certification or be currently working to obtain ELL certification. Participants of this study must have attended at least one ELL professional development. The number of years the teachers had been teaching was not an exclusionary factor in this study. It was necessary to have an array of teachers with varying years of experience because this explored the amount of professional development and number of professional development attended had any bearing on their implementation of instruction for ELL students.

Justification for Number of Participants

Purposeful sampling involves the selection of participants who have key knowledge or information related to the purpose of the study (Lodico et al., 2010). The participants for this study consisted of one teacher of ELL students from each grade level (first through fifth grade) in each of the two elementary schools within the SMPS district. This provided a total number of eight participants purposefully selected for the basic qualitative study; a minimum of eight was adequate for saturation. Participants were not selected from the researcher's place of employment, due to the requirements of conducting ethical research. It is common in a qualitative research study to sample a few individuals or sites, as the in-depth details diminish with each additional individual or site (Creswell, 2012). The need to report details about each individual or site can become

ungainly and result in superficial perspectives with a larger number of individuals or sites (Creswell, 2012). In addition, collecting qualitative data for each additional individual or site lengthens the time needed to collect and analyze the data (Creswell, 2012). The information obtained from the participants was utilized to answer the RQs of this study.

Procedures to Gain Access for Research

Before data collection could occur, approval was acquired for the proposal by Walden University's Institutional Review Board. After Walden University granted permission (approval no. 06-03-21-0551573), it was also necessary to obtain from SMPS' permission to perform a study within the school district. The SMPS has a research study approval process to conduct research within the school district. An application must be completed, and the proposal of the study must be included in the submission to the SMPS district. When approval was met by Walden University's Institutional Review Board and the SMPS, I contacted administrators of the two schools via email and provided them with a letter requesting permission and access to individual campuses to conduct interviews with selected teachers of ELL students. When permission was granted by the school administrators via their chosen method of communication (email or telephone), I contacted the preselected ELL teachers individually via their school district email addresses, which was obtained from the school administration, to invite them to be part of the study. Each potential participant was asked to respond to the email within 3 business days. If there was no response to the initial email, a follow-up email was sent asking for a response within 2 business days. If there were not enough

respondents who volunteered, additional ELL teachers would have been selected from the school to be asked to participate.

Establishing a Researcher-Participant Relationship

Once the participants responded to their letters of invitation and confirmed that they would volunteer to participate in the study, a date and time was arranged for an introductory meeting via Zoom due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. During each introductory meeting, an explanation of the research study, the process, and the role of each participant were discussed. I explained to each of the participants that the data to be collected was through interviews. Interviews occurred one time for a duration of 45 to 60 minutes per participant. Before each interview, participants were reminded that with their permission, audio recording for the interview would take place. Additionally, notes pertaining to the focus questions on instructional practices, resources, and professional development, would be taken. All interviews took place via Zoom conference. Measurements taken to protect the participants were discussed, and a question-and-answer session was conducted individually to allow all questions of participants to be answered. The purpose of the question-and-answer session was to answer and address any concerns or possible misconceptions regarding the study. All communications regarding introductions, confirming interview times, and any additional conversations were done through the use of blind carbon copy on email and the email account was checked only on my personal computer at home using my password-protected Wi-Fi account.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical protection is of utmost importance in research. Participants in research studies are concerned about privacy and the use of, the tracking of, and the accessibility of personal information (Steiner et al., 2016). Therefore, measures were taken to ensure the security and privacy of all participants in this study in addition to safeguarding data obtained regarding the participants and the identities of the individual schools and the school district.

The first measurement of participant protection was securing written approval for the study from Walden University's Institutional Review Board to ensure correct measures were in place to protect the participants. Once approved, the participants received an email with a letter of invitation (see Appendix B) to partake in the research study and the informed consent form. The participants responded via email to confirm consent to participation in the study.

According to the consent form, participation is voluntary, and participants have a right to withdraw without any repercussions. The consent form ensures that the participants have been informed about the procedures of the study, as well as warrants that the participants are protected from harm and guarantees confidentiality (Lodico et al., 2010). Selected letters were used as pseudonyms to identify participants and schools to ensure their confidentiality. The consent form contains information regarding the safeguarding of communications between researcher and participants, as well as data collected during the study. The consent form also suggests all information from the study will remain on a personal password-protected computer for 5 years following the

conclusion of the study. Five years after the completion of the study, all printed files will be shredded and all computer files will be deleted (Howell, 2016).

Possible risk factors in the study may include participant interaction within the sample group, as well as stress from interviews. These risk factors would be considered minimal, as components of the study do not go beyond the normal routine of the participating teacher (Jackson, 2008).

Data Collection

Data Collection Instruments

Data were gathered through semistructured interviews of participants. Fifteen teachers were asked to participate in one-on-one interviews. The collection of data from interviews allowed me to find common themes. The data were obtained from semistructured interviews of the teachers of ELL students. Interviews are an appropriate instrument to answer the RQs. Semistructured interviews allow a researcher to begin questioning the participant by using planned interview questions; however, they also give the researcher the flexibility to explore themes that may arise during the interview (Lodico et al., 2010). Interviews allowed me to gather detailed information about a phenomenon that may not be observable (Creswell, 2012). The interviews were conducted via Zoom, one-on-one, and used semistructured open-ended questions. One-on-one and open-ended questions allowed the participants to best voice their experiences and opinions, unconstrained by any perspectives (Creswell, 2012). The interviews were conducted in a quiet place away from any interruptions.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol that was created is aligned with the conceptual framework, related literature, and addresses the RQs of the study. At the beginning of the interview, participants were thanked for volunteering for my study. The participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and that their role was voluntary. The participants' rights were discussed, followed by the signing of a consent form with an agreement to be audio recorded during the interview.

The interview questions were divided into three sections and were based on the conceptual framework and related literature. The first section addressed background information about the participant, such as how long the educator has been teaching, and if ELL certification has been obtained. The second section of questions addressed the professional development training the teachers have received. For example, for the interview question: what did you learn from the professional development that you were able to implement in your instruction? This section aligns with RQ 2, which examines the teachers' perspectives of each professional development. The third section of questions addressed the participants' instructional practices. This section aligns with RQ1, which examines the teachers' implementation of instructional practices used to teach ELLs within their ZPD. At the conclusion of the interview, I thanked the participants for allowing me to conduct the interview. I also reminded the participants that the interview will be transcribed while listening to the audio recording and will be sent to them to verify for accuracy.

Conducting the Interviews

The participant ELL teachers were from two different elementary schools (grades 1-5). The total number of participants in this study included eight ELL teachers. This allowed me to collect data from a representative sample of the school population. In addition, this small sample allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the ELL teachers' training and implementation of instructional practices of ELL students.

Each participant's interview was audiotaped with the participants' approval, allowing a more accurate transcription. Audio recording conversations preserves the integrity of the data, especially since many qualitative studies include verbatim responses as part of the data analysis (Lodico et al., 2010). In addition to the audio recording, field notes were recorded in a reflective journal during the interviews noting any facial expressions, hand gestures, and body language that could not be captured by audio recording (Creswell, 2012). Each interview took approximately 45-60 minutes and occurred in a location that was convenient and comfortable for the participant, either during the teacher planning time or after school. Interviews took place in a quiet location selected by each participant to ensure their comfort. The interview questions were designed to solicit responses regarding the perspectives of the teachers of ELL students regarding implementing instructional practices and resources to teach the ELL students within their ZPD. The interview questions were also designed to obtain the teachers' perspectives regarding the professional development needed to increase their capacity to teach ELL students within their ZPD. The interview questions are provided in Appendix C.

After each interview was concluded, the audio-recorded interview was transcribed using my personal-password protected computer. A draft of the findings was emailed to each participant for verification and accuracy of the data. This process is known as member checking and ensures that the researcher has accurately recorded the participant's thoughts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants reviewed the findings and returned their responses via email within 7 school days. If there was any feedback given by the participants concerning the accuracy, adjustments were made to the findings.

Role of the Researcher

I currently serve as the third-grade ELL teacher and grade chair. This is my fourth year as the grade chair of 13 teachers. The school I currently work at is not included in my study. I have no current or past professional role at one of the two schools selected. I was an employee at the second selected school over a decade ago. I have had no previous supervisory role or any interactions with the chosen participants. Therefore, the professional relationship with the participants should not affect the data. Further, there has been no previous interaction with the participants, thus, interviews are less likely to contain personal bias. Participants verifying the summaries of interviews also assures that there is no personal bias or inaccuracy.

During my 15 years of teaching in various elementary grade levels, my classes have always consisted of all ELL students. The ELL students in my class were either ELL Level One (little to no English), level two (some English), or ELL level three (working toward English proficiency). Since my first year teaching ELLs, I have made it my mission to understand how to properly teach them by attending all the ELL

professional development offered, researching, and communicating with the bilingual department, and ELL support within my district. As the researcher, I had to ensure that any personal biases would not cloud my judgment due to my passion for helping ELL students achieve academic success through effective instructional practices. Researchers monitor their subjective perspectives and biases by recording reflective notes of their thoughts (Lodico et al., 2010). During this study, an external reviewer was utilized to monitor my personal biases.

Data Analysis

The purpose of qualitative research is to discover meaning and understanding of the individual and his or her situation in which that individual is involved (Lodico et al., 2010). Qualitative data, which includes interviews, helped me understand the elementary teachers of ELLs understanding of their instruction and the professional development they received. Knowing how they teach ELL students and how they implemented ZPD revealed teachers' instructional practices and their beliefs. Lodico et al. (2010) explained that data analysis includes the processes of organizing the data, followed by the exploration of the data, the coding of the data, constructing detailed descriptions of the participants and the settings, building themes, and interpreting the data. After each interview was conducted, I began the process of transcribing the data from an audio recording to a Microsoft Word document within 24 hours of the interview. When transcription was completed, I listened to the audio recording while reading the document. This process ensured that the audio recordings were transcribed accurately.

Once the interview data were transcribed, I reviewed the data several times to become familiar with underlying meanings.

The interview protocol that was created (see Appendix C) by a priori coding is supported by qualitative designs and methods detailed by Creswell (2012) and aligns with Lodico et al. (2010) inductive reasoning where the researcher observes the phenomena under investigation, searches for patterns or themes in the observations, a generalization from the analysis of those themes (Lodico et al., 2010). A priori codes were used to categorize the collected data.

Open coding was used next in this research study. Open coding is used to analyze interview transcripts by reviewing each multiple times and making notes about possible meaning (Parker et al., 2016). Coding, in qualitative research, is defined as the process by which raw data are gradually converted into usable data through the identification of themes, concepts, or ideas that have some connection with each other (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Open coding is used as a tag to retrieve data that might be relevant to the study. Open coding has no beginning structure, but rather develops during the process of coding (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Open coding involves the process of conceptualizing, defining, and developing categories (Parker et al., 2016).

Following the open coding step, I began axial coding. The goal of axial coding is to systemically develop and seek out the relationships between concepts, subconcepts, and categories (Parker et al., 2016). At this stage, categories were formed from the open codes (Harati et al., 2018,) and used to determine temporary themes and subthemes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Qualitative research uses thematic analysis to ask whether the data answers the RQ in a meaningful way (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). Thematic analysis was used in this research study. Thematic analysis is a data analysis strategy that is commonly used across qualitative research for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Evidence of Quality

Member checking is another process used by researchers to verify the accuracy of the reports created from the data obtained from interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose is to solicit feedback on your preliminary or emerging findings from the participants interviewed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interviews of this study were member-checked to determine the accuracy of the research. Member checking also ensured that any personal biases were not reflected in the interview data, but rather are a true reflection of the perspectives of the interviewees. Member checking is a way to validate the study as well as provide credibility to the findings of the study. Upon completing their interviews, participants were emailed a copy of the findings during the interview process and asked to confirm the validity of their interviews. Participant instructions included requesting each interviewee to read over the findings for accuracy of the responses provided during the interview. By allowing the participants to review the transcribed interview notes identified in the study, I ensured my personal biases are not reflected in the data but rather the data are a true reflection of the thoughts and perspectives of the interviewees. Questions, noticeable errors, or concerns from the

participants were addressed, as they were instructed to contact me to discuss any discrepancies.

Discrepant Cases

I searched for any discrepant cases which conflicted with the themes. Determination of any discrepant cases was derived from analyzing the interview data collected. Discrepant cases do not align with the themes created from the findings. Discrepant cases can arise from different interview responses based on their points of view or experiences. It is important to note these discrepant cases and report them in the findings as well. The purpose of reporting discrepant cases is to assure the accuracy of data to establish credibility and strengthen the findings (Creswell, 2012). Accurate reporting for any discrepancies in the data reduces the bias and supports credibility (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014).

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of elementary teachers of ELL students regarding the professional development training they received to teach ELL students within their ZPD. This study also explored how the teachers of ELLs implement instructional practices in their classrooms to teach ELLs within their ZPD. Qualitative data was collected through semistructured interviews. Qualitative data analysis is a process that allows the data that is collected to be organized in a manner that brings meaning to the data (Creswell, 2012). The data was generated, gathered, and recorded as depicted below.

Data was collected, transcribed, and analyzed from eight semistructured interviews via Zoom. Forty teachers at two different schools that were approved by both the principals and the District of SMPS, were emailed and invited to participate in the study, however only eight teachers agreed to participate. All eight of the volunteer participants met the criteria for participation and were able to schedule and complete the interview at a time of their convenience. The teachers ranged from first grade to fifth grade, with seven out of the eight of them teaching well over a decade. The eighth teacher was currently teaching in her sixth year. Teachers are identified in the study by the first letter of their last name. Table 1 includes research participant demographics.

Table 1

Research Participant Demographics

Participant	Course	Grade level	No. of years as a teacher
Teacher P	All subjects	4	6
Teacher G	Reading and language arts	5	17
Teacher L	Reading and language arts	5	15
Teacher W	All subjects	5	22
Teacher H	Math and science	5	14
Teacher V	All subjects	1	18
Teacher M	All subjects	2	28
Teacher J	All subjects	3	15

The interview protocol was designed in three sections: Background Information, Professional Development Training, and Instructional Practices. The first section collected background information regarding how long the teachers have been teaching, how many years they have experienced teaching ELL students, and what current grade they were teaching. The second section explored the participants' perspectives of the

professional development that were ELL-based or had ELL components. This section connects to my second RQ because it explores elementary teachers' perspectives of the information they received at the professional development trainings provided to teach ELL students within their ZPD. The third section explored how the teachers implemented ELL instructional practices in their classrooms. This section ties with my first RQ because it explores how the elementary teachers of ELL students implement instructional practices and resources used to teach ELL students within their ZPD.

Validity of Data

To ensure the validity of the data I used member checking to assure the accuracy of the data collected. Each participant was provided with a summary of his/her transcribed interview. Participants were informed to notify me of any changes to the transcriptions that were necessary. Finally, I identified and maintained awareness of my personal bias throughout the study. The interview protocols and procedures were utilized to protect against any personal bias. These steps ensured the validity of the data.

Process for Coding the Data

During the analysis phase, the processes of open coding were implemented. This permitted me to build the findings from the problem and RQs. The types of open coding utilized were deductive and inductive coding. During the open deductive process, a priori coding was utilized from the RQs and interview questions to develop categories for the collected data. The categories included accommodations and strategies, differentiated instruction, technology, professional development, resources, vocabulary, and data. After reviewing the data again, additional information that did not fit into the a priori codes

began to develop. The inductive coding process was then utilized as the new codes developed categories. The inductive process involved organizing, transcribing, analyzing, and interpreting the data to discover meanings in the form of reoccurring themes (Yin, 2014). Each interview transcript was read before the coding process to “obtain a general sense of the data” (Creswell, 2012, p. 243). These new codes were then grouped into emerging categories. The categories included translations, educational websites, and interventions. Table 2 includes a complete list of inductive themes and subthemes.

Table 2

Inductive Categories and Themes

Category	Theme
Translations	Word processing program
Educational websites	Kahoot, Quizizz, Starfall
Intervention	Kinesthetics/movement in phonics

Deductive Coding

Open coding is defined as the process of assigning codes to words and phrases that may be relevant to the overall study (Merriam, 2009). By using a deductive coding process during the first analysis, I was able to apply the a priori codes to the data collected. This resulted in all interview transcription reviews being initially analyzed using deductive coding.

During the analysis, I color-coded categories and themes based on the RQs and interview questions of the study. As the data was analyzed, codes were used to identify themes that illustrated collaboration. The following codes and phrases were utilized: not

enough PDs, small groups, visuals, modification, bilingual dictionaries, i-ready, Wonders Reading PD, and translating. The words and phrases are identified in Table 3.

Table 3

Codes and Phrases

Code	Word or phrase
Professional development	Not enough ELL PD Wonder reading ELL component No PDs for math or science only Reading
Accommodations and strategies	Visuals Bilingual dictionaries Modify
Collaboration	Working together Partners Groups Peers Classmates

Note. ELL = English Language Learner; PD = professional development.

Themes and Patterns

The data analyzed and reported came from interviews of volunteer participants. The data was present to help determine the perspectives of the elementary teachers of ELL students on Professional Development trainings they receive to teach ELLs within their ZPD. This study also collected data on how teachers implement instructional practices to the ELLs within their ZPD. The interviews were conducted via Zoom. Six themes were identified using a priori coding: (a) accommodations, strategies, and resources; (b) differentiated instruction; (c) technology; (d) professional development; (e) student data and evaluation; and (f) vocabulary. Three additional themes emerged

inductively: (a) translation, (b) educational websites, and (c) intervention. Table 4 includes a complete list of deductive themes and subthemes.

Table 4

Deductive Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Accommodations, strategies, and resources	Bilingual dictionaries and visuals, unaware of location
Differentiated instruction	Small groups, modifications
Technology	Imagine learning
Professional development	Not enough ELL PDs, Wonders Reading
Student data and evaluation	PDs didn't cover this topic, small groups CELLA, i-Ready, classwork, WIDA, small group, Imagine Learning
Vocabulary	Modified, translated

Note. ELL = English Language Learner; PD = professional development; CELLA = Comprehension English Language Learning Assessment.

Theme 1: Professional Development

Professional Development for the teachers of ELL students were the biggest takeaway from all of my interviews. A common concern found among all the participants was that there are not enough PDs for teachers of ELL students. To participate in this study, the criteria was that the volunteer had to have attended at least one ELL professional development in the past year. During the interviews, eight out of the eight participants mentioned that they had not been to a professional development specifically focused on ELL students within the past year. Only one out of the eight of the participants had ever been to an ELL-specific focused professional development. Seven out of the eight participants attended a professional development this year for a new

reading program called Wonders Reading Program. The Wonders Reading Program was a 2-day professional development and had an ELL component on the second day that lasted for 1 hour. Seven participants each informed me this was the ELL professional development they had attended this past year. The eighth participant just completed her ELL endorsement this year and took her courses to be the equivalent of a professional development for the ELL professional development criteria to participate in the study.

Participant Concerns. Many of the participants commented that the PDs do not train them in ELL lesson planning, or assessments; they mainly focus on a few accommodations for the curriculum that was the component of that professional development. One participant explained her concerns stating that the last time she was truly trained in ELL was 14 years ago in college. As diverse as this county is, she is surprised there is not more assistance with the ELLs. There are no recertification requirements for ELLs. If she had not been teaching ESE students for so many years, she would not have felt prepared with the ELL students. Another participant added that if the district offers a professional development that covers ELLs, it should include hands-on examples for teachers to do with their students, and they should be longer than an hour because there is so much to cover. Most of the participants commented that there are not enough PDs for ELL students. Another participant stated that they are not trained enough to teach ELL students properly. One participant, who has only been teaching six years, took things from a different angle than many of the other teachers regarding ELL PDs. This participant also commented that teachers definitely need more training when it comes to ELL students, especially in this district where students come from different

parts of the world. However, it is hard to choose an ELL professional development when a new reading program comes out, or a new area that you will be teaching because teachers want to prepare themselves for that other core subject over an ELL professional development. Topics that most of the participants found the PDs they attended did not sufficiently cover were: how to better assist and instruct ELL level 1 students, how to accommodate ELL level 1 students, where to locate the resources, and how to accommodate and instruct ELLs in other core subjects such as math, science, and social studies.

Theme 2: Differentiated Instruction

When asking the participants how they differentiate instruction for ELLs within their ZPD, the answers varied around four common answers; visuals, small groups, modified work, and translation. Modifying the work for ELLs was the answer of five out of the eight participants, visuals and a small group were both mentioned by three out of the eight participants and translating the materials, verbally since they spoke the same native language, or by using textbooks that are translated such as a Spanish math book, was mentioned by two out of the eight participants. One participant stated that she will be able to differentiate with her ELL students more during small group because she will be able to “act things out” and “use more visuals”. Two of the teachers mentioned using small groups to teach vocabulary to the ELLs by providing them a more basic definition, rather than one that is very detailed with words. Another participant mentioned breaking things down using the technique of chunking, as well as many visuals and matching

assignments instead of providing full answers; adding that this depends on the students' ELL level.

Participant Concerns. A concern among the participants regarding differentiated instruction was how to instruct ELL students of different levels in the same classroom. One participant mentioned that she is unaware of how to do small groups with ELL level 1 students because she feels that they cannot work independently enough if she were to take the higher ELLs into a small group. According to eight out of the eight participants, this is not a topic that teachers are trained in or an area that is even discussed at the PDs.

Theme 3: Technology

When participants were asked about using technology in the classroom for ELLs the responses varied greatly. Seven of the eight participants have technology available to them, however, one participant stated that they have not implemented technology yet in the classroom and another participant said they use technology but have not yet this year due to a lack of access to laptops in the school. i-Ready and Imagine Learning were mentioned as technology programs used, but availability and usage varied. The i-Ready program is used throughout the district for reading and math with minimum time limits placed on students. ELL students level 2 and higher are encouraged to use this program to help improve their reading. The Imagine Learning program is an ELL- focused computer program that helps ELL students with reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English. This program can be used at all ELL levels; however, the district has only bought licenses for the ELL level 1 students in the schools. This program is highly advised for the ELL level 1s to use throughout the year, instead of the i-Ready reading

program. In addition to these two programs, when asked “Do you use technology in the classroom? Is the program designed for ELLs? And how often do you use the programs”, many of the participants mentioned Kahoot and Quizizz as their form of technology utilized in the classroom. Although these programs are not ELL-focused programs, they did mention certain benefits for the ELLs of the programs such as visuals, audio, and interactive participation.

Participant Concerns. One of the biggest concerns regarding technology is that aside from the Imagine Learning program, there is no other computer-based program for ELL students. Since the district is only covering the licenses for the ELL level 1 students, teachers are feeling that the ELLs of other levels are not receiving the proper accommodations. Imagine Learning also, only focuses on reading, leaving out other important core subjects such as math, science, and social studies.

Another concern was the lack of access to computers, either in their classroom or lab time. Finally, the participants were not all aware of the Imagine Learning program, or whether or not the program was even being utilized this school year. Only three out of the eight participants used Imagine Learning in their classroom, two other participants don't use the program at all, and one participant didn't know whether or not it is still being used in the district. One of the participants wanted professional development for ELL technology programs and another participant mentioned wanting to know where to find programs for ELL students to use in the classroom and at home.

Theme 4: Accommodations, Strategies, and Resources

Eight out of the eight participants mentioned visuals and extended time regarding

accommodations for the ELL students. Only five of the participants mentioned the use of bilingual dictionaries, and five participants mentioned modifying the student work to help accommodate the students' needs. One teacher admitted to not using ELL strategies to teach her students. The common strategies mentioned throughout multiple interview questions, were visuals, modifications, and extended time. While these techniques are help implement instruction for ELLs, and for ELLs to comprehend what they are learning. There are many more ELL strategies than using visuals and modifying the student work. A list of ELL strategies is included in Appendix A as part of the project study.

Participant Concerns. One participant acknowledged that she did not use ELL strategies daily; however, the participant thought that the visuals that were used in the classroom among all students, were accommodating the ELL students. When asked “What strategies did you learn from the PD?”, six out of the eight participants commented that they did not learn strategies from a professional development. One participant mentioned learning the ELL strategies from her Masters in Reading, another participant commented using strategies that she had always used with her Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students.

Theme 5: Student Data and Evaluation

When asking the participants “How do you evaluate ELL students to ensure they are learning within their ZPD”, many of the participants responded with: modified assessments, and/or small group or one-on-one assessments. A common theme for this answer was for the teachers to assess the ELL students orally, either having the students

read out loud for fluency or comprehension. The participants mentioned assessing the ELL students using fewer questions, bilingual dictionaries, and extra time. The participants were then asked what sources they used to collect the data. All eight of the participants responded by stating that they use student data, however, they all use different sources to drive ELL instruction. Three of the eight participants use i-Ready data while only one mentioned that they use the scores from the Florida State Assessment (FSA). Two participants use an ELL test (WIDA and CELLA) for student data, while another participant uses the students' ELL level to modify instruction. Additionally, the teachers were using regular in-class assignments to evaluate the students. Imagine Learning was not mentioned as one of the data sources among seven out of the eight participants, even though the program monitors all of their work and progress in the areas of Literacy, Vocabulary, and Grammar, and it records the students reading orally. One participant mentioned wanting to learn how to use Imagine Learning data to drive instruction.

Participant Concerns. The participants' biggest concern in this area was that they were not being trained on how to assess and/ or evaluate the ELL students. They were not informed on what tools, resources, and/or strategies they can use to collect this data. One participant even mentioned that the lack of information at the PDs doesn't just affect the teachers, but it affects the students even more. If they don't have trainings for ELLs, the ELLs will not show the gains that they are capable of because they are not being taught effectively. This participant concluded by stating that there is not enough training and teachers do not have the background or training to know how to effectively

teach them.

Theme 6: Vocabulary

Participant responses to the question, “How do you teach vocabulary to ELL students” elicited multiple strategies. One of the vocabulary strategies used is drawing pictures and using visuals. This was mentioned by five of the eight participants, while all the participants discussed shortening or modifying the assignment for ELL students. Another strategy mentioned by participants was acting out the word or modeling it for the students. Finally, a strategy mentioned was to translate the vocabulary words to the students’ native language and possibly add student background and knowledge of the vocabulary word, to help them comprehend its meaning.

Participant Concerns. A common concern regarding translating for the ELL students was the fact that most materials translate into Spanish, but no other languages such as Russian or Mandarin. Most translating can be done with Google Translate, bilingual dictionaries (if the school or student has their native language dictionary), and the teacher orally translating, but this can only happen if the teacher speaks the same language as the student. Visuals help the students to identify the meaning of a word, however, even visuals can lead to a misunderstanding of the meaning.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of elementary teachers of ELL students regarding the professional development trainings they received to teach ELL students within their ZPD. I also explored how the teachers of ELLs implement instructional practices in their classrooms to teach ELLs within their ZPD. Based on current literature (e.g., Rodriguez, 2014; Zhang & Peltari, 2014) and the findings from this study, it is evident that there is a need for professional development to address the concerns of the teachers of ELLs regarding their perspectives of feeling unprepared to teach the ELL students. The findings showed that the participants felt unprepared with strategies, accommodations, and resources for the ELL students. They were also concerned that topics were not sufficiently covered at the PDs as they focused more on core subjects. Some of the participants felt uninformed about the professional development provided. Participants expressed surprise that in a country as diverse as the United States, there is not more ELL support, PDs, or resources. The concern the participants expressed was that there are not enough PDs for the teachers of ELLs, and it is causing a disservice to ELL students because the teachers do not have the background or training to know how to effectively teach them.

The findings were the basis for the creation of a project, a half-day professional learning community (PLC) occurring over 5 days. A PLC differs from a professional development in that it is an ongoing process in which educators meet in recurring cycles (in this case five times) to work collaboratively to achieve better results for their students.

This PLC focuses on enhancing teachers of ELL students' understanding of how to implement instructional practices and resources used to teach ELL students within their ZPD. This focus aligns with RQ1 of the study. During this PLC, the teachers will first become familiar with strategies, accommodations, and resources for the ELL students. During the second session, the teachers will collaborate on how they implement instruction to ELLs of different levels and grade levels. During the third session, the teachers will obtain a better understanding of how to evaluate, assess, and grade an ELL student. During the fourth session, the teachers will learn about the four components of the Can Do Descriptors and why they are important to incorporate in the ELLs' instructions. Finally, the fifth session will wrap up what the teachers have learned and implemented throughout the year. All of these sessions will have a follow-up assignment, which will require the teachers to provide physical evidence of the activity being implemented. The goal of this PLC is to increase the effectiveness of ELL instructional strategies, ELL resources, and ELL accommodations being implemented in the ELL classrooms.

Rationale

The rationale for this project study is supported by current literature on effective professional development. Literature suggests that many traditional professional development experiences involve a one-time experience determined by school leadership. The experience is often passive and likely leads to high levels of dissatisfaction (Smith, 2020). Rather, professional development should be a researched based, collaborative team approach that focuses on equity and quality teaching, according to Smith (2020).

These traits often include teacher and student-focused goals (Smith, 2020). Saleem (2021) added that professional development is necessary for the reformation of a school and to improve the performance of the teachers as it enables them to diagnose classroom problems and ways to solve them. In addition, the provision of professional development results in improved student learning outcomes (Saleem, 2021).

The findings of this study showed that the participants attended professional development opportunities in which they were exposed to a limited number of ELL resources strategies. The participants felt that the PDs offered by the district were not providing sufficient information to prepare them to teach the ELL students. The project was designed based on these findings and with the needs of the ELL students in mind. To better teach the students, teachers have to be prepared. Students require a good primary education to succeed (Saleem, 2021). The PLC project designed offers teachers an opportunity to collaboratively share best practices for ELLs various ways to implement strategies, accommodations, grading, etc. for the ELL students. This environment allows the ELL teachers to learn from their colleagues and explore the latest research-based practices. The results of the PLC project may lead to an increase in effective teaching of various aspects of ELL pedagogy.

Review of the Literature

The literature review was conducted using the Walden University Library to search the education databases Education Source and ERIC, as well as the psychology database PsycARTICLES for peer-reviewed literature published within the last 5 years. In the education databases, keywords such as *professional learning center*, *English*

Language Learners, professional development, teacher training, collaboration, strategies and accommodations, follow-up, and social change were used. The review of literature has been divided up into the following three sections: conceptual PLCs, collaboration, and follow-up assignments.

Professional Learning Communities

Training teachers are essential for the improvement of their development as an effective teacher, as well as the improvement for their institution (Saleem, 2021). Professional development provides support for the teachers when learning a new task that needs to be implemented in the classroom. Research shows that teachers who are lacking PDs, are lacking the opportunities to collaboratively share daily challenges in teaching, assessments, and supervision with their colleagues. Teachers have expressed the want to be part of a supportive team regularly (Hontvedt, 2019). According to Smith (2020), teachers reported the feeling of disconnection from the classroom and irrelevancy from their experiences from most traditional professional development due to a conflicting objective between what is being taught to them at the PDs and what they are experiencing in the classroom (Smith, 2020). Slack (2019) stated that the traditional “one size fits all” traditional PDs that the ELL teachers have attended, have failed to respect teacher knowledge, contribute to school improvement, or advance student learning (Slack, 2019). Instead, Slack (2019) suggested that a more effective approach would be a professional development where teachers are collaborative and learning is ongoing, with a consistent focus on student learning (a PLC) (Slack, 2019). The research findings for this study included concerns from all eight participants regarding a lack of information on

implementing instructions to ELL students. The participants felt unprepared to teach the ELL students appropriately within their ZPD.

PLCs provide teachers with a way to grow as professionals while improving student academic achievement by bringing changes within the school. Brown (2018) defined a PLC as a group of committed educators working collaboratively in an ongoing process resulting in better student achievement (Brown, 2018). PLCs are known for having a sense of belonging and trust among the teachers attending. Common elements presented at a PLC include a focus on student achievement, collaboration of curriculum and instruction, sharing practices and challenges, and an ongoing interactive learning experience (Banerjee, 2017). Voelkel (2017) adds that the most critical practices at a PLC are: shared vision and values, use of data (especially student work to analyze strengths and weaknesses), engagement in collaboration for things such as lesson plans and assessments, and concentrated focus on student learning and results (Voelkel, 2017).

Effective PLCs increase teacher collaboration and student achievement (Voelkel, 2017). Research has found that the results of what teachers learn in PLCs can lead to changes in teachers' perspectives, as well as the effects of teachers' practices and students' learning. (Prenger, 2020). According to Moulakdi (2020), "this method of teacher training has been found to improve teacher experience, as it reduces the feeling of isolation, increases personal satisfaction and ensures a greater sense of self-efficacy through professional development" (Moulakdi, 2020). Brown (2018) suggested "the focus of a PLC is more on learning than on teaching, emphasizing that collaboration and accountability are key to a successful PLC... In order to maintain a genuine PLC,

teachers must meet regularly to improve already established goals” (Brown, 2018). Research shows that PLCs lead to greater teacher satisfaction, greater confidence and commitment, and greater effectiveness in the classroom, as well as the students being more enthusiastic (Prenger, 2020). The participants in this study had not attended a PLC for ELL students. At least half of the participants mentioned the need for ongoing professional development, as the few PDs that they attended did not provide enough information. In addition, the participants mentioned a lack of ELL support provided in the classroom.

Collaboration

Collaboration allows teachers to work together to examine and improve their instructional practices. It has the potential to strengthen the school as a whole (Tallman, 2021). In a collaborative environment, teachers meet to talk about the progress of the students’ achievement in their schools (Banerjee, 2017). Tichenor (2018), defines collaboration the involvement of two or more teachers who work together to share information, plan and problem-solve, to achieve a common goal (Tichenor, 2018). Amponsah (2018) suggested that it is a period where two or more people attempt to learn something together (Amponsah, 2018). When teachers are problem-solving together, they are working together to solve the problems using knowledge, and resources that they share, as they collaboratively find solutions (Miller, 2021). Working together as a team can lead to better results than working as an individual. Teamwork developed through collaboration can result in more effective management (Gcelu, 2019). Collaborating with other people offers the possibility of reducing the feeling of isolation, and/ or burnout.

Collaborating can also increase job satisfaction, teacher confidence, and student achievement (Reeves, 2017). Many formal and informal collaborative activities include coteaching, peer observation, coaching, team planning, working on activities, and collaborative research (Tichenor, 2018). All eight of the participants mentioned that they did not collaborate with other teachers or ELL specialists. Two of the eight participants collaborate with colleagues; however, it is not for ELL purposes.

Teachers in the United States have approximately 3-5 hours per week for collaborative planning, while teachers in other countries have 15-25 hours per week to work with colleagues. Additionally, instructional delivery time in the United States consumes about 80 percent of the teachers' working time, as compared to about 60 percent of the teachers in other nations. Due to this extra time, teachers in other nations have more time to plan and learn collaboratively; and in turn leads to a higher quality of curriculum and instruction (Tichenor, 2018). Tallman (2021) suggested "collaborative group learning is the most powerful form of professional development. It is highly effective in meeting the needs of all students in the classroom and vital for creating opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practices" (Tallman, 2021).

Teacher collaboration is linked to motivation. Asari (2019) suggested that "the study of achievement motivation is always associated with each individual learner, however not many studies suggest the importance of teacher collaboration connected to the student learning motivation itself (Asari, 2019). The idea of collaboration involves learning experiences where the learners understand each other. Collaborative learning can occur in small groups, where participants can work on the same task and share their

ideas (Amponsah, 2018). Collaboration often improves communication and allows for more student-centered instruction, which results in more consistency across instructors regarding performance expectations (Reeves, 2017). Research suggests while collaboration is beneficial, not all teachers approve of the collaboration strategy, as they prefer to work independently. All eight of the participants were open to working collaboratively if given the opportunity.

Research suggests when teachers work together, students perform better on the state standardized tests, than the schools that did not encourage collaboration among the teachers (Reeves, 2017). Collaboration allows teachers to learn instructional strategies from each other while also receiving feedback. Collaboration can result in teacher improvement as well as an increase in student achievement (Reeves, 2017). A teacher's attitudes and beliefs about the ability to teach, and the ability for students to learn can influence instructional practices, as well as student achievement (Banerjee, 2017). Additionally, research has suggested that teacher instructional practices are more important than teacher background qualifications in predicting student achievement.

Follow-Up Assignments

PLCs help teachers to implement new teaching strategies in their instructional practices, and they help teachers to increase their confidence and motivate them to do their job more effectively in their classroom. A PLC is a continuous process of training and follow-ups with the objective to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The focus of professional development is teachers' subject knowledge, teachers' teaching skills, self-efficacy of teachers, and student achievement (Saleem, 2021).

One of the differences from a regular professional development is that teachers who attend a PLC have to learn and show evidence of learning and improvement. The follow-up activities are intended to benefit the teacher, the school, and the quality of education being implemented in the classroom, leading to the students' academic learning gains (Girma, 2019). Follow-up activities are support intended to strengthen learned strategies so they will be retained and implemented effectively. The follow-up activities should be made available to schools to evaluate and measure the changes in teachers' skills and knowledge (Priajana, 2017). According to Popova (2018), follow-up activities, including time to practice with other teachers are less common in regular PDs. This suggests a gap between the PLCs (which use follow-up activities), and the regular PDs that do not require the action plan to be implemented (Popova, 2018). The participants in this study mentioned that of the few PDs they attended, there was always an evaluation assignment to complete to provide feedback for the course. However, it was stated by the participants that there was not any action plan or follow-up activity that was reviewed. The participants felt that the evaluations they completed did not seem to benefit them, as there were never changes to better implement instructions for teaching ELL students.

Follow-up assignments are considered an action research plan. "An action research plan consists of the implementation process of the practitioners themselves in order to understand and solve a problem" (Yildiz, 2021). "Evidence suggests follow-up assignments, or action plans, reinforce skills in training that are important to effective training" (Popova, 2018). Research shows that the results of action plans often lead to an increase in effective student learning achievement (Yildiz, 2021).

Project Description

The purpose of this PLC project is to inform ELL teachers of various aspects of ELL pedagogy. This PLC will be utilized to share best practices for ELL students. This environment allows ELL teachers to learn from their colleagues and explores the latest research-based practices. The project consists of five half-day training sessions; each session is approximately 4 hours long. The first session includes an in-depth look at the ELL strategies, accommodations, and resources. The participants will be informed on how to locate and access web-based materials and resources. All information and materials presented will be emailed to the participants. Labels for the classroom will also be handed out to the participants. These labels will be laminated on bright colored paper (so that they stick out in the classroom) with words such as door, sink, bookshelf, cabinet, desk, computer, etc. on them. Next to each word will also be a picture of the object to help the ELLs identify what the words are labeling. Discussion questions will be utilized throughout the session. The discussion questions for this session would be: What strategies have you used in the past? What has worked in the classroom? What has not worked in the classroom? What resources are you utilizing in the classroom? The follow-up assignment will be for teachers to write a reflection on what they have implemented this school year for the ELLs, what has worked, what has not worked, what they would like to improve on.

The second session would include an in-depth look at how to implement instruction for ELL students, and how it differs from implementing instruction to an English speaking student. Samples of student work from all different ELL levels, grade

levels, and different subjects, will be utilized to discuss how to implement instruction to the ELL students. Modeling, repetition, and visuals will be key in the discussion, but not the only strategies to utilize. Sample lessons will be presented. The discussion question will be: How is implementing instruction to ELLs different than to English speaking students? The follow-up assignment will be to use some of the strategies learned in this session to implement instruction in the classroom and bring back a sample to the next session. It is important to note that these sessions, while guided, are collaborative among colleagues and the information that all participants are learning is coming from all shared participants, not just one presenter.

The third session would include an in-depth look at how to evaluate and grade the students' work and assessments. The discussion question will be: How do you evaluate ELL students to ensure they are learning? The process of how to grade ELL Level 1 students, and ELLs who are in the country less than 2 years in comparison to ELLs who are Level 2 and above, or in the country over 2 years will be explored in this session. Examples will be modeled and samples work will be shown. The follow-up assignment will be for the teachers to provide an artifact of their students' graded papers during their next session.

The fourth session would include an in-depth look at the four components of the CanDo Descriptors. The World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English Language Proficiency Standards are an example of descriptors categorized into broad stages of second language acquisition ranging from "entering" to "bridging" levels of proficiency (Alexandrowicz, 2020). The Can Do Descriptors describe what learners

can do with language across different content areas. The discussion question will ask the participants: what are the four components of the Can Do Descriptors? Why are they important for you as a teacher? The Can Do Descriptors are aligned with the ACCESS test given to the ELL students each year to gauge English proficiency and growth. The follow-up assignment will be to make sure the teachers cover the Can Do Descriptors with their ELL students in the classroom. They will need to bring back an activity that showed they covered the Can Do's, helping the ELLs to prepare for the ACCESS testing.

The fifth session would include an in-depth look at all that the teachers have learned and implemented this year. This session will focus on how to wrap up the school year and how to plan and prepare for the next school year. The discussion question will be: what are the take-aways that the teachers have learned and utilized this year. There will be no follow-up since it will be the last session of the school year.

Resources and Support

Most of the resources needed to implement this PLC are readily available as they are web-based. Other materials such as samples of student work, and materials in the classroom will be ready for use per session. The presenter will need access to the internet, a laptop/desktop computer, and an interactive whiteboard with a projector to be able to present a PowerPoint/ Google Slide Presentation to all the participants. Participants can utilize their individual laptops and/or paper and pen/pencil to take notes if they choose; however, a copy of the presentation will be emailed to them for their records when each session is over. Hyperlinks to resources, strategies, and other materials will all be included in the presentation for the participants to easily access.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

Potential barriers to this project are (a) conflicts with subject area professional development, and (b) teachers participating in training with multiple meetings would need an incentive. One possible solution for reducing the conflict of the other professional development would be to use the early release days on Wednesday instead of on professional development days. This solution will eliminate the conflict of any other PDs being required at the same time, or having to choose a subject area over ELLs. If the PLC is approved by the district for Master Plan Points (to renew teacher certification), this would also help provide an incentive for the teachers to attend the PLC.

Proposal for Implementation and Project Timetable

The timetable for this PLC would be for the 2022-2023 school year. The five half-day sessions will be spread out over the first 5 months of school from September 2022 to January 2023. Each session will be 4 hours in length. This layout is planned to allow teachers to settle into the new school year, and also make sure that they are learning, utilizing, and implementing ELL strategies, accommodations, and resources in a timely manner that aligns with specific school year events such as progress reports, ESOL reporting, report cards, and ACCESS Testing.

Roles and Responsibilities

For this PLC project to be successful, there are several roles and responsibilities that must be fulfilled. The school administrator must first approve the PLC, suggesting dates and times for the program to take place. The administrator must provide a location

for the PLC to take place, and be able to provide all the supplies and materials needed for the participants, such as laptops for the participants, a computer and interactive whiteboard, and a projector for the presenter. The administrator must also approve who will be presenting the PLC. Finally, the administrator must have the PLC approved by the school district. The presenter of the PLC will be responsible for informing any potential participants of the upcoming PLC, providing the participants with the appropriate materials during each session, and emailing the participants copies of all digital presentations and/ or tools and information provided at each session. The presenter will be responsible for creating the presentation for each session. Finally, the participants have a responsibility to attend the PLC with an open-minded perspective and the will to learn and share with colleagues, new tools and skills to be provided in the classroom. For this PLC project to be successful, all roles and responsibilities must be fulfilled.

Project Evaluation Plan

The participants will complete a formative evaluation at the end of each session for them to provide feedback on their experiences. The evaluations will be used by the presenter to modify the upcoming presentation. A summative evaluation will be provided for the participants to complete at the end of the last session. This evaluation will provide feedback on what they have obtained and utilized during their PLC experience. The evaluation will inform the presenters of the PLC if the participants have made any gains regarding teaching ELL students, as it will also determine if the goals of the PLC were met. Finally, the summative evaluation leaves the presenter feedback that can help to improve any possible changes for any future PLCs.

Key Stakeholders

Key stakeholders within an organization are responsible for various roles when implementing any new program. The key stakeholders include the teachers of ELL students and administrators of the school chosen to do the PLC and the school district personnel. The administrators are responsible for monitoring the program and the participants' learning and implementation within the classrooms. Administrators will also monitor student achievement, student learning, and ELL policies. Teachers will benefit from the PLC as they will be better suited to teach ELL students, as they will be prepared with ELL strategies, accommodations, and resources to implement in their classrooms. This in turn will enhance lesson delivery and affect student achievement. Access to the data, the study, and the findings will be made available to all stakeholders to have a more focused comprehension of this project and its goals.

Project Implications

Social Change for the Local Site

This PLC addresses the need to improve teachers' knowledge of how to implement instructions to the ELL students by using the ELL strategies, accommodations, resources, Can Do Descriptors, and proper grading. This PLC may result in positive social change as it could improve teacher instruction which could lead to positively impacting student achievement. Alexandrowicz (2020) suggested "...changemakers demonstrate that they are motivated to act...this begins by identifying a specific problem to tackle and giving one's self permission to do something about it...and it doesn't stop there. Changemakers keep trying until they make a difference"

(Alexandrowicz, 2020). During this PLC the participants will collaboratively share resources, strategies, and accommodations. Participants will also share any concerns when teaching ELLs and work together to find solutions to these concerns.

Larger-Scale Social Change

A larger-scale social change may include utilizing this program beyond the schools chosen for the study. Pregner (2020) stated that professional development are not limited to teachers of one particular school, but could lead to changes all across the system (Prenger, 2020). According to Alexandrowicz (2020), the ELL students in the United States comprise approximately 10% of the student population (or 5 million students) (Alexandrowicz, 2020). Since the ELL population is increasing every school year, the need for increased professional development and collaboration for teachers who serve this population also needs to increase. There is a larger social change necessary regarding administrators requiring professional development training for the ELLs to meet the needs of the ELL students.

Von Esch (2018) stated that few districts have an administration that can understand and/or differentiate the needs of ELL students. These districts develop key leadership roles that support teachers of ELL students, which in turn leads to school-wide initiatives (Von Esch, 2018). This project will provide teachers with the information they need to implement more effective instructions to their ELL students, leading to an increase in ELL academic achievement. The results of this study will offer a rationale to expand ELL-focused professional development to a larger population experiencing the same issues. Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

Section 4, of this study begins with the strengths and limitations of the project and provide recommendations for improvement. This discussion may assist educators at other sites who are experiencing similar problems in ELL instruction and the use of resources and strategies. Also included in this section is my reflection on scholarship, project development, and leadership. This section concludes with personal reflections on the project study's implications, applications, and directions for future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Project Strengths

The project has multiple strengths. One strength of the project is that it focused on the problem of the study. The problem of the study is that teachers of ELL are not receiving sufficient professional development to help them in meeting the instructional needs of the ELL students within their ZPD. This was documented during data analysis. Another strength of the project is that it aligns with the following two RQs:

RQ1: How do the elementary teachers of ELL students implement instructional practices and resources used to teach ELL students within their ZPD?

RQ2: What are elementary teachers' perspectives of the information they receive at the professional development trainings provided to teach ELL students within their ZPD?

The content of RQ1 will be discussed during one of the PLC meeting sessions with the ELL teachers. RQ2 will be addressed through follow-up assignments and a summative evaluation at the end of the PLC.

The project also focuses on the concerns expressed by the participants. The responses from interviews showed that participants felt unprepared to teach ELL students. They also expressed a concern that there were not enough PDs for ELL teachers and/or support for them to help them prepare for teaching ELLs. Many of the teachers were also unaware of the resources, strategies, and even accommodations utilized for ELL students. The project will provide the participants with resources, materials, and information on a multitude of areas that may prepare them to teach the ELL students.

The final strength of this project is that it provides an environment to collaborate with colleagues, and it requires follow-up assignments to ensure implementation of learning. Participants will have time to work together to locate resources and share strategies and accommodations that can be implemented in their classrooms. In addition, they can collaboratively work to identify and find solutions to problems or concerns. The follow-up assignments ensure that the teachers implement what they are learning in the

classroom. These assignments also give them a chance to reflect and discuss the pros and cons of the application. The reflection and discussion entail collaboration.

Project Limitations

The project also has limitations. One of the limitations of this project is a lack of time. One of the greatest benefits of a PLC is that is ongoing and requires follow-up activities and reflection while collaborating, unlike professional development which focuses less on collaboration and more on direct instruction from a presenter. However, due to the format of a PLC, sessions have a shorter time frame than a professional development. It is difficult to include reflection and collaboration of previously implemented topics (follow-ups), as well as introduction and collaboration of new topics, within the 4-hour time of a PLC session.

Another limitation is teacher attendance. The PLC will be scheduled for Wednesdays after school. Wednesdays are early release days, where the students leave at 2:00 p.m.; however, the teachers must remain until 3:25 p.m. There are often many conflicts on these Wednesdays such as grade-level meetings, conferences, and after-school commitments. It is the only time that the whole school has the same planning time, and it is often a competition to use this time slot. Although teachers who are committed to wanting to better their ELL teaching knowledge may find a way to attend most of the PLCs, it is not guaranteed they will be able to make every one of the meetings, especially because they are not five consecutive Wednesdays.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

An alternative way to address the problem at the school of study could include implementing a long-term professional development program that continues throughout the entire school year on scheduled professional development training days instead of a PLC. When scheduling trainings to take place on professional development days, it allows the duration of each session to be longer and could allow more information to be disseminated per session as they are usually longer than a PLC session. This will also allow the participants an opportunity to fully share best practices and reflections on what they are implementing in the classroom, based on what they had learned during the previous professional development sessions. Finally, a professional development would allow for the opportunity to involve other schools as professional training days align district-wide. Expanding to other schools will allow for the sharing of best practices, and the use of resources, strategies, and accommodations. This in turn will increase ELL teacher knowledge and overall student proficiency in academic achievement.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

This study will provide stakeholders with information about the ELL teachers' perspectives of professional development and their implementation of instructional practices for ELLs in the classroom. Improving ELL teachers' instructional practices could show improvements in ELL academic achievement. Addressing the need for teachers of ELLs to receive adequate training to teach ELL students appropriately could lead to an improvement in teacher success as well.

Self-Analysis of Scholarship

During the process of this research study, I gained valuable knowledge about the teachers of ELL students feeling unprepared to teach ELLs, as they felt there was little to no ELL professional development or support system, and resources or strategies provided.

The research study provided an opportunity for me to challenge myself, both as an educator and researcher. As an ELL teacher, it allowed me to strengthen my ELL instructional practices. Also, as a researcher, I have been able to obtain information regarding strategies, resources, and accommodations, and in turn, implement it in my classroom. All too often the ELL students are overlooked as teachers of ELLs either are unprepared to work with them or their scores on high stake testing do not count in the calculation of the school grade, therefore these students are not a top priority. The longer the ELL students are not receiving proper instruction and accommodations, the more challenging the journey is to English proficiency. The research study confirmed that this is not only a local problem in a very diverse school district but a national problem that has been occurring for many years.

Throughout this research study, I learned how to be a research practitioner by conducting a study and analyzing the data collected to determine findings. I found transcribing qualitative findings to be the most difficult. Since the participants did not have a lot of background information on ELLs, I found their responses to be the same or similar even though the questions varied in topic. My new goal will be to share my knowledge of ELLs with all those who are teaching ELL students.

Self-Analysis of Project Development

During the research process, I learned that the most common concern among the teachers was that they did not feel prepared to teach ELLs. Many of the ELL teachers had not attended a professional development that was specifically focused on the ELL students, and the PDs that they did attend that contained ELL information, did not provide the teachers with enough information on resources, strategies, or accommodations. The ELL teachers expressed wanting to be able to have support from an ELL specialist, so that they could ask questions, share their concerns and receive guidance. I took the information I learned from the review of literature and the data collection, into consideration when developing this project. My goal is to provide teachers with the information they feel they lack regarding resources, strategies, and accommodations, while also including a collaborative approach and a follow-up assessment that mandates the participants to be involved. The project was created with the focus of accommodating the ELL teachers' needs, while also helping the ELL students in the end.

Self-Analysis of Leadership and Change

During this study, I became cognizant that ELL teachers lacked the foundational knowledge to properly instruct and support ELL students. My goal now is to be able to work in a leadership role providing teachers of ELLs with the information they require to adequately teach ELL students and guide them in the process of implementation. This doctoral journey has led to a possible new career goal for me to advocate for ELL teachers and to bring about positive change for ELLs.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

My goal was to find a solution to help improve the training and knowledge of the ELL teachers and the implementation in the ELL classrooms. Through my review of the literature, I discovered that PLCs were a highly effective way to increase teacher knowledge and training today. The impact of developing ways for the teachers of ELLs to become more knowledgeable about how to implement better instruction for the ELL students, guided me to complete the research and project development process. The research that I have done and the work that I will continue to do is significant as it could positively influence the ELL teachers and the ELL students at the school of study.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The project I designed is a PLC. It is designed to address the concerns of the ELL teachers at the schools of study, regarding the need to provide training for teachers to teach ELL students within their ZPD. The information from this study and the PLC program that was developed can be used by administrators to adhere to ELL teachers' concerns about teaching ELL students, which may lead to positive social change. Improving ELL teachers' knowledge of the resources, strategies, and accommodations for their implementation of instructional practice could lead to more effective instruction in the ELL classroom and an increase in students' academic achievement.

Possible future implications and applications include additional ongoing PLC programs that address the need of utilizing the proper resources, strategies, and accommodations when implementing ELL instruction. This study could also be implemented at other schools in the district with ELL students, to extend the

collaborative effort of the PLC program. In addition, the information gathered from this study and the implementation and evaluation of the PLC program could be shared with local colleges and universities in an effort to create more effective teacher preparation programs.

For further research, I recommend extending the research to include more schools in the district and teachers of grade levels beyond the elementary level. Studies could be conducted in schools throughout the district, and the PLC program could be implemented on a district-wide basis. These PLC programs would provide ELL teachers information that would increase their knowledge of ELL instruction, thus improving their implementation of ELL instruction in the classroom and the overall student proficiency in academic achievement.

Conclusion

This study was focused on discovering the ELL teachers' perspectives of professional development and their implementation of instructional practices. From the research findings, I created a PLC to address the teachers' knowledge of resources, strategies, and accommodations for implementing instructional practices for ELL students within their ZPD. The PLC also provides participants with the time to collaborate and develop more effective ELL instructional practices. If effective, this PLC will lead to an increase in ELL student academic achievement. In addition, this PLC program may be valuable to other schools in the district in assisting ELL teachers.

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Appendix A: The Project

Audience: Focus on Elementary ELL Teachers K-5, all other ELL teachers are welcome to attend.

Duration: 5 meeting days throughout the school year for four hours each. Suggested months are September, October, November, December, and January. Teachers may request supplemental meetings in between sessions.

Purpose: To inform ELL teachers of various aspects of ELL pedagogy. This PLC will be utilized to share best practices for ELLs various ways to implement strategies, accommodations, and the proper grading used for ELL students. This environment allows ELL teachers to learn from their colleagues and to explore the latest researched-based practices.

Smart Goal: By June, the number of teachers implementing ELL instructional strategies, utilizing ELL resources, and providing ELL accommodations will increase as measured by administrative observations.

Session 1

Time: Four hours

Discussion Topic: What strategies have you used in the past? What has worked in the classroom? What has not worked in the classroom?

Activity:

- 1) Open the session with a 12-minute video on ELL immersion. Follow up discussion. Estimated duration of video and discussion, 30 minutes.
- 2) Introduce the participants to different levels of ELLs. Another 12-minute video will be provided with a follow up discussion. Estimated duration of video, 45 minutes.
- 3) Discussion questions prompt group conversation. After participants answer the questions regarding strategies, an ELL strategy matrix will be presented and discussed with the participants. Many additional areas will be discussed and explored. Estimated duration of group discussion and presentation, 45 minutes.
- 4) Technology- the Imagine Learning computer program and its importance for ELL students will be discussed and explored by all participants. Estimated duration of presentation and individual exploration, 60 minutes.
- 5) Resources- Where to locate curriculum resources will be explored with the participants. Participants will participate in a scavenger hunt to locate ELL resources. Once the resources are located, discussion on how to use them, will take place. Estimated duration of curriculum exploration, 60 minutes.

Follow Up Assignment: Teachers will write a reflection on what they have implemented this school year for the ELLs, what has worked, what has not worked, what they would like to improve on.

All participants will be informed on how to locate and access web-based materials and resources. All information and materials presented will be emailed to the participants.

Below is a link that provides all of the ELL strategies that can be utilized when implementing instruction to ELL students.

[ELL PLC Presentation: Slides 1-11](#)

[ELL PLC Presentation Slides 1-11 \(PDF\)](#)

Session 2

Time: Four hours

Discussion Topic: How is implementing instruction to ELLs different than to English-speaking students?

Activity:

- 1) Follow-up review- The participants will share their reflections about what they have implemented for the students so far this school year, what has worked and what has not worked, and what they would like to improve on. Estimated duration of participant reflections, 20 minutes.
- 2) Participants will be given a lesson idea to explain how it would be implemented into their instruction to teach the students. This assignment will be completed individually, and a discussion of their ideas will follow. Estimated duration on planning a lesson, 20 minutes.
- 3) After participants present their ideas on how to implement instruction, examples of different ways to implement instruction to ELLs will be presented (modeled) and discussed with the participants. This activity focuses on how to take on grade level curriculum, and modify it to the ELL students' ZPD. Different ways to implement instruction will be discussed based on different ELL levels, grade level, subject, etc. Estimated duration of presentation and discussion, 60 minutes.
- 4) Resources will be identified to use when implementing instruction. This includes curriculum resources, board games, storybooks, etc. Teachers will learn to use everyday items they do not think of, to teach their ELL students. Participants will

be given an assignment to select a resource and explain how they will implement it in the classroom. Participants will then share their answers. Estimated duration of presentation and discussion, 60 minutes.

- 5) Collaboration- Based on what the participants have just learned, the participants will be put into groups to discuss, share and brainstorm new ideas on how to implement instruction in the ELL classroom. Each group will design a model of how to implement a lesson. Each group will then present their ideas. Estimated duration of assignment and presentation, 60 minutes.

Follow-Up Assignment: Teachers will use some of the strategies learned in today's session to implement instruction in the classroom. Teachers will prepare to bring back an example of what they have implemented in the classroom to the next session.

All participants will be informed on how to locate and access web-based materials and resources. All information and materials presented will be emailed to the participants.

[ELL PLC Presentation Slides 12-16](#)

[ELL PLC Presentation Slides 12-16 \(PDF\)](#)

Session 3

Time: Four Hours

Discussion Topic: How do you grade and/or evaluate ELL students to ensure that they are learning?

Activity:

- 1) Follow-up review- Participants will discuss what they had implemented in their classroom. Estimated duration, 15 minutes.
- 2) Participants will be given a mixture of ELL and non ELL student work to grade. Participants will then share and discuss their graded work. Estimated duration, 45 minutes.
- 3) Discussion questions prompt group conversation. After participants answer the questions regarding grading and evaluating student work and assessments, examples of different ways to grade, evaluate and assess ELLs will be presented and discussed with the participants. Sample work will be shown from all different levels and subjects of ELL students and grade levels. Understanding when to “pass” and “fail” an ELL level 1 student will also be discussed. Estimated duration, 45 minutes.
- 4) Participants will review their previously graded student work, and be given an opportunity to regrade it based on what they just learned. Discussion will follow, on the changes they have or have not made. Estimated duration, 30 minutes.
- 5) Formative vs. Summative assessments will also be discussed. The discussion will begin with an explanation of what each assessment entails. Participants will

review examples and components of each. Examples of how to assess ELL students formatively vs. summatively will be presented. Estimated duration, 45 minutes.

- 6) Participants will work in a group to come up with 4 ways to formatively, and 4 ways to summatively assess their students. If participants work on different grade levels, their answers can vary based on the grade levels they teach, to accommodate all of their students. Participants will then present their ideas. Estimated duration, 60 minutes.

Follow-Up Assignment: Teachers will work on the new grading strategies that they learned in today's session. Teachers will provide an artifact of students' graded work and/or assessment during the next session.

All participants will be informed on how to locate and access web-based materials and resources. All information and materials presented will be emailed to the participants.

[ELL PLC Presentation Slides 17-23](#)

[ELL PLC Presentation Slides 17-23 \(PDF\)](#)

Session 4

Time: Four Hours

Discussion Topic: What are the four components of the Can Do Descriptors? Why are they important for you as a teacher?

Activity:

- 1) Follow-up review- The group will share their students' graded work, and discuss anything they difficulties they may have encountered. Estimated duration, 20 minutes.
- 2) Participants share what they know about the Can Do descriptors, by filling out a KWL chart. Discussion questions will prompt conversation about what the participants already know, and what they would like to learn about the Can Do descriptors. Estimated duration, 45 minutes.
- 3) A presentation on each of the four components of the Can Do descriptors, how to apply them in instruction based on each ELL Level and student ZPD, will be given. Estimated duration, 45 minutes.
- 4) Participants will be given a student scenario, where they will have to analyze the student's needs and describe which Can Do descriptors would accommodate the ELL student. Participants will follow up with a discussion of their designs. Estimated duration, 60 minutes.
- 5) ACCESS Testing will be presented to the participants. The presentation would include discussion of what is ACCESS testing, the purpose of ACCESS testing, and how to ACCESS test the students. The presentation would also include how

implementing the Can Dos into instruction will help prepare the ELLs for the ACCESS Testing. Estimated duration, 45 minutes.

Follow-Up Assignment: The teachers will cover the Can Do's with their ELL students.

At the next session, they will bring back an activity that shows how they have covered the CanDo's, helping the ELL students to prepare for the ACCESS test.

All participants will be informed on how to locate and access web-based materials and resources. All information and materials presented will be emailed to the participants.

Participants will bring student data to the next session to analyze student growth.

[ELL PLC Presentation Slides 24-28](#)

[ELL PLC Presentation Slides 24-28 \(PDF\)](#)

Session 5**Time:** Four Hours**Discussion Topic:** How do you teach ELL students to write?**Activity:**

- 1) Follow-up review- The group will share the activity that was implemented with their students'. They will share the Can Do descriptors were covered in the activity. The group will discuss each participants activities providing collaborative feedback. Participants will also discuss anything they difficulties they may have encountered. Estimated duration, 20 minutes.
- 2) Participants share what they know about the teaching writing to ELL students by filling out a KWL chart. Discussion questions will prompt conversation about what the participants already know, and what they would like to learn about the teaching writing to ELL students. Estimated duration, 45 minutes.
- 3) A presentation on writing strategies used to teach ELL students, and how to apply them in instruction based on each ELL Level and student ZPD, will be given. The presentation will cover color coding, visuals, starter sentences, picture writing, transitional words, writing frames etc. Estimated duration, 45 minutes.
- 4) Participants will be placed into groups where they will have to prepare a writing lesson that they would teach to their students. Each group will be given different strategies and scenarios so that ELL students of all levels and ZPDs are addressed in this session. Each group will then present their writing lesson to the other groups for collaborative learning and feedback. Estimated duration, 90 minutes.

- 5) Participants will be given samples of student writing. They will review and individually grade each writing piece. When the teachers complete their grading a group conversation on how each piece was graded will take place. Materials (grading rubrics) from a previous session on grading will also be reused to help analyze the writing pieces. Estimated duration, 45 minutes.

Follow-Up Assignment: The teachers will cover a writing lesson with their ELL students. At the next session, they will bring back a sample of their students writing that shows how they have implemented writing using ELL strategies in their classroom.

[ELL PLC Presentation Slides 29-35](#)

[ELL PLC Presentation Slides 29-35 \(PDF\)](#)

Session 6

Time: Four Hours

Discussion Topic: What are the teachers' takeaways that they have learned and implemented since they started this PLC?

Activity:

- 1) Follow-up review- The participants will share how they implemented the Can Dos into the instruction in their classrooms. Estimated duration, 30 minutes.
- 2) Discussion questions prompt group conversation. Participants will share what they have implemented into their classrooms, and benefited from learning from the PLC this year. Any questions and/ or concerns about what the participants have learned this year will be addressed. Estimated duration, 45-60 minutes.
- 3) Participants will share and analyze data of their ELL students and discuss how what they have learned and implemented this year has affected their student growth and development. Estimated duration, 60 minutes.
- 4) Discussion and presentation on how to close the current school year and how to plan better for the following school year. Estimated duration, 45 minutes.
- 5) Teachers will be given a summative evaluation to complete. Estimated duration, 20 minutes.

Follow-Up Assignment: Participants will complete a district evaluation of the PLC. All participants will be informed on how to locate and access web-based materials and resources. All information and materials presented will be emailed to the participants.

[ELL PLC Presentation Slides 36-38](#)

[ELL PLC Presentation Slides 36-38 \(PDF\)](#)

Professional Development Formative Evaluation Form

Dates: _____

Directions: Rate the training using the criteria for #1-5. Please provide feedback for #6.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
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Circle a rating for each number.					
1. The objectives of the training were clearly stated	1	2	3	4	5
2. Today's session was informative.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I can take today's learning and apply it to my everyday work.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The trainer was prepared and well knowledgeable about the content.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The training objectives were met.	1	2	3	4	5

Please answer each of the following questions.
1. What was most helpful in today's session? _____ _____

<p>2. What was most confusing in today's session?</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>3. What did you learn that you did not know during today's session?</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>4. How can you use what you have learned today in your class?</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>5. How would you change today's activities?</p> <hr/> <hr/>

Professional Development Summative Evaluation Form

Dates: _____

Directions: Rate the training using the criteria for #1-5. Please provide feedback for #6.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
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Circle a rating for each number.	
1. After attending this professional development I feel better equipped to teach ELL students.	1 2 3 4 5
2. After attending the professional development, I feel more knowledgeable strategies, accommodations, and resources for ELL students.	1 2 3 4 5
3. I have been able to implement strategies I learned from the professional development in my classroom.	1 2 3 4 5
4. I feel confident implementing instructions to ELL students in my classroom.	1 2 3 4 5
5. I feel confident locating and utilizing strategies, accommodation materials, and resources.	1 2 3 4 5
6. I feel that this professional development will make me a more effective teacher.	

7. The professional development was relevant to my needs.	
8. This professional development was of quality.	
9. This professional development provided me with tools to effectively implement in my classroom.	

Please answer each of the following questions.
1. What was most helpful in this professional development? _____ _____
2. What would you like to have learned more about in this professional development? _____ _____
3. What was the most effective thing you learned during this professional development? _____ _____
4. How can you use what you have learned in your class? _____ _____

5. What suggestions do you have to better improve this professional development for next time?

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation

Date

Principal of School Name Mr. X

School Name

Address

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Mr. X:

My name is Cara Scales-Judkowitz and I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your elementary school. I am a teacher in the Miami Dade County Public Schools and a student currently enrolled in the Doctorate of Education program at Walden University. I am in the process of writing my Project Study entitled, ELL Teachers' Perspectives of Professional Development and their Implementation of Instructional Practices.

Due to the nature of the study, I am hoping that the school administration will allow me to recruit one teacher of ELL students from each grade (grades 1-5), from the school to be individually interviewed. The teachers will be asked to participate on a volunteer basis only. Teachers who are interested and volunteer to participate will be given a consent form to be signed and returned to me at the beginning of the research study.

If approval is granted, interviews will be conducted in an uninterrupted, quiet setting on the school site; either during the teachers planning time or after school via

Zoom, due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. The interview process should take no longer than 45-60 minutes. The data collected from this study will remain confidential and anonymous.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have; you may contact me at my email address.

If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form to me via e-mail. Alternatively, a signed letter of permission on your school's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this survey/study at your school would suffice.

Best regards,

Cara Scales-Judkowitz Ed.S., M.A.

Approved by:

Print Name

Title

Signature

Date

Enclosures

cc: Dr. Z, Research Advisor, Walden University

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Research Questions:

1. How do the elementary teachers of ELL students implement instructional practices and resources used to teach ELL students within their ZPD?
2. What are the elementary teachers of ELL students' perspectives of the professional development trainings provided to teach ELL students within their ZPD?

Date and Time:

Setting (pseudonym):

Interviewer:

Interviewee (pseudonym):

Grade:

Opening Script:

Thank you for taking the time to allow me to interview you today. The purpose of my study is to explore how the elementary teachers of ELL students implement instructional practices and resources utilized to teach ELL students within their ZPD. In addition, the study explores the teachers' perspectives of the professional development training provided to teach the ELLs within their ZPD. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If at any time there is a question you do not want to answer, or if you would like to stop the interview entirely, please let me know. In order to protect your identity, I will be assigning you a pseudonym and will use it instead of your name. I will be taking notes during the interview and I will also be audio recording the interview to ensure the

accuracy of my findings. The audio recording is for research purposes only, and will only be heard by me and will be kept secure on my personal computer. Once the interview is over, I will transcribe the interview from the audio recording, and I will provide you with a summary of the findings for you to review for accuracy. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin the interview questions? Please let me know when you are ready and we will begin.

Background Questions:

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. How many years have you been teaching ELL students?

Training Questions:

1. How many ELL PDs have you attended in the past year
2. What were the topics covered at the PD(s) you attended?
3. What have you learned about instructing ELLs within their ZPD?
4. What ELL strategies did you learn from the PD that you use to teach ELLs within their ZPD?
5. How did the PD(s) help you with lesson planning and assessing ELL students?
6. What PD topics were not sufficiently covered to help you teach ELLs within their ZPD?
7. What trainings do you feel you would benefit from in order to better instruct ELL students within their ZPD?
8. What was the most beneficial in the PD training regarding teaching ELLs within their ZPD?

Instructional Practice Questions:

1. Tell me how you introduce new concepts to your ELL students within their ZPD.
2. How do you differentiate instruction for ELL students within their ZPD?
3. Give me an example of how you teach vocabulary to ELL students within their ZPD.
4. Do you use technology in your classroom? If so, are the programs specifically designed for ELLs to learn within their ZPD
5. ? How often do they use these programs?
6. How do you use student data to drive ELL instruction within their ZPD?
7. How do you evaluate ELL students to ensure they are learning within their ZPD?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Concluding Script:

Thank you for allowing me to interview you. I appreciate your time. Please keep in mind that all of your responses will remain confidential and secure. Once I have transcribed the interview a summary will be sent to you to review the findings for accuracy. If you find anything that you feel should be changed, please notify me.