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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND THEIR ACCESS TO
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION: EXAMINING THEIR
ACHIEVEMENTS AND COLLEGE READINESS THROUGH
EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES**

Anna Kalinowska

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Doctoral Dissertation Research

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
National Louis University, Tampa FL
College of Education

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
Higher and Postsecondary Education

By

Anna Maria Kalinowska

May, 2023

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Anna Maria Kalinowska

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to bring awareness to the issue of English learners (ELs) being unprepared for college and to study the beliefs and perceptions of educators regarding the factors that contribute to the creation of an achievement gap between EL students and traditional students. The study involved an analysis of trends in the perceptions of school counselors, teachers, and administrators regarding EL students being ready to attend college. Data were collected from nine participants from three public high schools in Pinellas County using Zoom and email interviews and then analyzed. Four main themes emerged from the analysis of the data: (a) opportunities, (b) access to higher education, (c) school initiatives, and (d) supporting ELs. Participants expressed similar views regarding EL students being unsupported in school and in the transition from high school to higher education institutions. More professional development and appropriate support are needed to close the academic gap. Educators need to use a holistic approach and work together with students and their families to support and encourage EL students.

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I acknowledge my parents, Ela and Szczepan, for teaching me and instilling in me, from a small child on, how valuable education is, and for always encouraging me to follow my dreams. My mom would always say this when I was younger during our talks about my future: “Remember, your material possessions can be taken, destroyed, burnt or stolen from you, in one moment you can lose everything, but the knowledge that is in your head can never be taken from you. It is yours forever.” This is why I find education valuable.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research study to my lovely daughter, Helena, who is only 3 years old at the moment, but I am hoping that in the future she also knows and appreciates the value of education.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

English language learners make up a large percentage of the student population in schools in the United States, yet they encounter many issues related to academic achievement and the attainment of higher education. An achievement gap has existed and remains between English learners (ELs) and native English-speaking students (Ardasheva, 2010; Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019; C. W. Gibson, 2016; Shin, 2018). Research indicates EL students are less likely to pursue a higher education degree and are far less educated than are traditional students (A. L. Cook et al., 2015; G. Cook, 2010; Johnson, 2021; Martinez, 2017). Also, they are more likely to drop out of high school and not pursue postsecondary education (Johnson, 2021; Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Skokut, 2009), and many face hardships when applying to and attending college (Kanno & Cromley, 2015).

The achievement gap, in all its forms, raises a question about whether EL students are underserved. Despite the availability of many services and interventions and changes to law and policy at both the state and federal levels, such as the No Child Left Behind legislation, ELs encounter severe challenges at school and in college, especially at 4-year institutions (Kanno & Cromley, 2015). Previous research showed many factors may contribute to the achievement gap, such as socioeconomic status (SES), formal schooling, parental involvement, neighborhood, and parents' levels of education (Huang et al., 2018; Kanno & Cromley, 2013; Skokut, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

EL students face barriers in terms of academic achievement and access to college. This research study was designed to address the problem of the achievement gap that

exists between EL and non-EL students. Persistent low assessment scores among EL students in the State of Florida demonstrate that insufficient attention is being given to this issue and the services provided are ineffective. EL students in Florida consistently perform at a lower level on standardized assessments compared to their English-speaking counterparts (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). According to the Florida Department of Education (2023a), 435% of EL students in Grades 6 to 12 are identified as limited English proficiency (LEP) students. In Pinellas County, where this study took place, a total of 6,633 students (6.5%) are considered EL. The data show there are considerable achievement gaps between EL and non-EL students in all grade levels on the English Language Arts (ELA) assessment. In 10th grade, 6.4% of EL students pass versus 52.9% of non-EL students. Achievement level differences on math assessments are somewhat smaller, yet also considerable. The data and previous research demonstrate EL students are underserved and need more support.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to bring awareness to the issue of EL students being unprepared for college and to study the factors that contribute to the creation of an achievement gap between EL students and traditional students in public high schools in Pinellas County, Florida, by analyzing the perceptions and beliefs of school counselors, teachers, and administrators regarding EL students being ready for college. Research has demonstrated EL students often have the desire to go to college and their parents want to be involved; however, many factors affect their ability to apply to college, or even access resources that can help them attain college admission (Tovar & Simon, 2006). EL students struggle to gain the language proficiency they need to be successful

academically and professionally. Past research indicated not all ELs who are receiving English as a second language (ESL) programs are ready for college after their high school graduation (Ardasheva, 2010). Kanno and Cromley (2015) found many factors other than EL students' linguistic abilities contribute to their limited access to and attainment of postsecondary education (e.g., cultural factors or parental involvement).

The final goal of this research was to study educators' perspectives on why ELs are underserved and why they are accessing higher education at a lower rate than their peers. This study was based on previous research and theories about the academic achievement gap and access to higher education.

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural Theory

This research study was framed around the sociocultural theory developed by Vygotsky and Cole (1978), who believed learning derives from interacting with people. Sociocultural theory is based on the idea that caregivers, peers, and the culture at large are all responsible for individuals' learning and development of higher-order functioning. That is, social factors influence cognitive development. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is applicable to this research study and other research in the areas of education and linguistics because it implies that language and thought are connected. Sociocultural theory is also used in the field of instructional design, which has implications for learning and teaching (Polly et al., 2018). Vygotsky believed human development and learning originate in social, historical, and cultural interactions and that thinking has social origins.

Based on Vygotsky and Cole's (1978) ideas, Rogoff (1990) described guided participation as a process in which a learner acquires culturally valuable skills through collaborative activity involving more-knowledgeable others. Guided participation is based on Vygotsky's view of cognitive development as the transformation of social activities into internalized processes (Polly et al., 2018). Vygotsky's theory implies that the understanding of development and learning is universal, whereas thinking and behavior may differ across cultures. Vygotsky developed a concept known as the zone of proximal development, which he explained as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 43).

Zone of Proximal Development

The zone of proximal development refers to the gap between what students know and what they yet do not know. The process of closing this gap involves the student developing skills they may not yet have through the help of a more-knowledgeable instructor (Rogoff, 1990). Teachers and caregivers can foster learning by engaging students in opportunities that lie within their zone of proximal development (Cherry, 2019).

Understanding the zone of proximal development can aid teachers in the classroom. Teachers should first assess students to determine their current skill levels. Once they understand each student's current level of ability, they can offer instructions that will stretch each child's limits (Cherry, 2019). According to Cherry (2019), instructors should plan their instruction and activities to promote student learning and

match their ability levels. Cherry additionally stated educators can use scaffolding, in which they provide students with prompts to move them toward a goal and expand their abilities.

Focus on the Learner in Social Learning Activities

Vygotsky and Cole's (1978) sociocultural theory contributes to modern pedagogical strategies that facilitate critical thinking and learning that focus on the learner within their social, historical, and cultural context. Many instructional designs take into consideration a common, universal concept of a learner. However, more recently, educational designs have started to change as a shift has occurred toward designs that recognize that every learner is unique and affected by embedded context (Polly et al., 2018).

Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition

Understanding the acquisition of a second language can improve a teacher's ability to teach in a diverse classroom and can assist classroom teachers, school counselors, and administrators in serving a culturally and linguistically diverse student population. Krashen (1981, 2003) believed language acquisition requires meaningful target language interactions in which speakers are concerned about the message they are conveying and not how the learner pronounces words. The best methods are to teach the language in low-anxiety situations, not forcing students to produce language early but allowing students to speak when they are ready. Instructors should recognize improvements in students' learning rather than forcing and correcting the production of language.

Over many years, Krashen (1981, 2003) studied and developed five hypotheses of second language acquisition: (a) the acquisition-learning hypothesis, (b) the monitor hypothesis, (c) the input hypothesis, (d) the affective filter hypothesis, and (e) the natural order hypothesis. The acquisition-learning hypothesis is the most fundamental because, according to Krashen, there are two independent systems of second language acquisition: the acquired system and the learned system. Acquisition is a result of subconscious processes and requires meaningful interactions in a foreign language and in natural communication. The learned system is developed through formal instruction and involves a more conscious process. An example of a learned system is knowing grammar rules. Krashen believed acquisition is more important than learning.

Significant and meaningful professional development is needed to fully understand the second language acquisition theory, but some concepts and key teaching strategies can easily be implemented in the classroom: (a) analyzing the characteristics of EL students, (b) creating learner-centered classrooms, (c) setting goals to increase motivation, (d) integrating various theories of second language learning into practice, and (e) fostering value and self-efficacy (Lin, 2008). Klem and Connell (2004) found that when teachers create an organized learning environment, explain class discussions and activities, and are sympathetic to EL students, students are more engaged in learning.

Learner-centered learning has its roots in constructivism and was prominent in Vygotsky's work (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The learner-centered environment is also emphasized in Krashen's (2003) second language acquisition theory through creating learner-centered classrooms. This type of learning shifts the focus of instruction from the instructor to the learner. Learner-centered teachers prepare their students to become

autonomous learners who assume responsibility for their own learning by engaging them in active, goal-oriented, and self-regulated learning. This approach affects students' motivation and thus enhances their learning (Phungphol, 2005). Marwan (2017) examined the learner-centered approach in an EL classroom and found that implementing a learner-centered teaching curriculum makes learning more meaningful for students.

Importance of Educator Attitudes

Previous research conducted regarding teacher attitudes demonstrated teachers often have negative perceptions of EL students (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Kanno & Kangas, 2014; Katz, 1999; Umansky & Dumont, 2019; Valenzuela, 1999; van den Bergh et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2004). Perceptions of EL students differ among teachers regarding student knowledge, personal attributes, and prospects (Jackson, 2016). They are more likely to believe that immigrant students are more hard working than are non-immigrant students, but they also perceive immigrant students as less likely to pursue college education (Blanchard & Muller, 2015; Dabach et al., 2018).

Perceptions of EL students have been found to be tied to students' race and ethnicity, with previous research demonstrating that teachers stereotype Asian students as higher achieving and Latin students as underachieving (Lee & Zhou, 2015; N. Lopez, 2003; Ochoa, 2013). Educators' attitudes and ability to provide meaningful instruction affect EL students' learning of academic subjects, acquiring a second language, and attaining postsecondary education. However, research demonstrates many teachers are unprepared to accommodate the varying linguistic abilities of students in their classrooms (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Rizzuto, 2017; D. Rodriguez et al., 2010).

Although Rizzuto (2017) studied teacher attitudes toward EL students in early childhood classrooms, the study findings are applicable to the current research study. Based on conducted interviews and survey results, Rizzuto found that even though teachers were aware of diverse students' needs and varied abilities, they often failed to differentiate instruction to meet those needs and were ill-equipped with strategies to teach in a diverse classroom. Lumpe et al. (2012) found that students' learning is influenced by teachers' teaching practices, which are based on their convictions and the assumptions they hold either consciously or subconsciously.

School counselors' role in educating EL students is to provide direct and indirect services, to advocate on behalf of EL students, and their families and to serve all students, including those who are considered culturally and ethnically diverse (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012). Studies have shown school counselors who have experience working with an EL population of students display higher levels of self-efficacy. "Self-efficacy reflects an individual's confidence that he or she can achieve certain results" (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005, p. 15). Holcomb-McCoy et al. (2008) found school counselors who completed five to seven multicultural courses reported higher multicultural self-efficacy than did counselors who completed two or fewer of those classes.

Paredes (2010) found school counselors who participated in simulation experiences related to ELs had increased levels of EL self-efficacy. This finding supports that having the needed knowledge and skills, combined with beliefs about one's own ability, is imperative to successfully serving all students and being able to complete various school counselor tasks (Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008). Past research

demonstrated the relationship between EL students and their counselors and teachers affects students' academic performance (Clemente & Collison, 2000; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008; Paredes, 2010). Therefore, studying the attitudes of school counselors and teachers toward EL students and examining their perceptions of EL students and their access to postsecondary education is important.

English Learner Label

The EL classification has been found to have a direct and negative effect on teachers' perceptions of students' skills and academic abilities. Students are tested and identified as ELs to prevent educational inequality and to offer them services to support their needs; however, that label can lead to teacher bias, which can affect student learning (Umansky & Dumont, 2019). There are some positive impacts of EL classification that may benefit students, such as access to instructions in English or in the student's home language (Steele et al., 2017), as well as access to teachers who are trained to teach EL students (Master et al., 2016). EL classification and its negative effects on students include placement in lower-level classes (Estrada et al., 2011; Kanno & Kangas, 2014) and language isolation (Gifford & Valdés, 2006). Researchers in this area have found that bilingual instruction benefits students (Steele et al., 2017; Takanishi & Le Menestrel, 2017), which can be attributed to the notion that bilingual classroom teachers have more positive attitudes toward EL students (Baker, 2011).

Definition of Key Terms

The terms *English language learner* (ELL) and *English learner* (EL) are often used interchangeably with other terms such as *English as a second language* (ESL) and *limited English proficiency* (LEP). These terms are used to describe a group of students

who are learning English as their second language and demonstrate difficulties in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English (Jackson, 2016).

Differentiated instruction refers to instruction designed to accommodate the learning needs of all students based on their abilities, knowledge, and preferred learning style as a way to promote academic growth for all students. It requires instructors to prepare instruction to reach all students in the classroom based on their individual needs, instead of focusing on a one-size-fits-all approach (Tomlinson et al., 2013).

The *Florida Standard Assessment (FSA)* is given to students in Grades 3 to 10 in the areas of English language arts (ELA), math, and science. Results are reported in five achievement levels: 1 = inadequate, 2 = below satisfactory, 3 = satisfactory, 4 = proficient, and 5 = mastery. Students must score at a level 3 or above to pass (Florida Department of Education, 2023b).

Advanced Placement (AP) courses are college-level courses offered to advanced high school students to provide an opportunity to complete college-level work and earn college credit and placement while in high school (College Board, 2020).

Early college and *dual enrollment* programs are available to all qualifying students in Pinellas County schools in Grades 10–12. Through these part-time programs, students can take college courses at a local college at their high school and earn college credits (St. Petersburg College, 2020).

Methodology

This qualitative, phenomenological study involved exploring educators' perceptions regarding EL student achievement. Research in this area has demonstrated that an achievement gap exists between EL students and traditional students (Ardasheva,

2010; Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019; C. W. Gibson, 2016; Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Shin, 2018) and many factors may affect EL students' academic achievement and attainment of higher education (A. L. Cook et al., 2015; G. Cook, 2010; Johnson, 2021; Martinez, 2017).

Research Question

The qualitative research question that guided this study was: What beliefs and experiences do school administrators, school counselors, and teachers from Pinellas County public high schools have regarding the achievement gap between ELs and native speakers in pursuing higher education? The educators' beliefs and experiences of EL students and their academic achievement and access to higher education were examined, analyzed, and assessed.

Research Design

This study was guided by a qualitative, phenomenological research design, which focuses on studying people, groups, and problems in society (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The purpose of the study was to investigate educators' perceptions regarding EL students' access to postsecondary education and their participation in college-level coursework and programs, such as AP or dual enrollment.

Participants were selected from three groups employed by schools in Pinellas County, assistant principals, teachers, and school counselors. The participant list was narrowed to include specific schools with high populations of EL students. A purposeful sampling strategy was used in which the participants selected for inclusion in the sample possessed specific qualifications: (a) employed in specific Pinellas County schools for at least 1 year, and (b) were a general education teacher (only applied to the teacher group).

There are three high schools in Pinellas County that serve a large population of EL students. Educators from those three schools were the sample pool. Of the list of educators who met the desired qualifications, the first three individuals from each list were selected and contacted. From the three potential participants from each group, the first individual who responded to the researcher's email was invited to participate in the study. Nine participants were selected in total, three from each school.

Consent was obtained by first sending a letter to the district stating the intent and purpose of the study (Appendix A). After the district's office granted permission to conduct further research in the three schools (Appendix B), individual emails (Appendix C) were sent to school counselors, teachers, and assistant principals to ask them to participate in the research study.

This study required the use of qualitative research methods to collect and analyze the perceptions held by counselors, teachers, and assistant principals. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to gather information regarding the participants' perceptions of EL students and their readiness for college. Each group answered different open-ended interview questions. The questions used for the counselors, teachers, and assistant principals can be found in Appendices D, E, and F, respectively.

The interviewees were asked clarifying follow-up questions when needed. Because the administrators lacked the time for a sit-down interview, the researcher sent their questions via email. Clarifying follow-up questions were emailed to participants whenever needed. Participants received the questions in a Microsoft Word document and were asked to type their responses in the same document and send it back to the researcher as an attachment to an email. The goal was to identify what faculty think

school leaders can do to encourage more EL students to pursue higher education degrees after high school. Additionally, the researcher examined factors such as family, culture, and SES that have been shown to influence EL students' decisions to pursue a college degree.

Limitations

Limitations in a qualitative research study relate to validity and reliability. "Because qualitative research occurs in a natural setting it is extremely difficult to replicate studies" (Wiersma, 2000, p. 211). Limitations in this study included the sampling method, data collection method, and the time and circumstances in which the study was conducted. Selection bias relates to choosing a sample that is not random and, therefore, may not be highly representative of the entire population (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The selected sampling method for the study may have been vulnerable to selection bias because participants were not chosen randomly. That approach could have created a high level of sampling error and may make the findings less credible (Steber, 2018). The data collection process was a limitation as well, because in-person interviews were impossible due to the global pandemic, COVID-19, and the need for social distancing. Therefore, video or email interviews were required (Steber, 2018). Last, according to Connelly et al. (2013), educators' perceptions of students may be affected negatively by what is currently taking place in the world.

Delimitations

Delimitations in a study arise from the limitations in the scope of the study and are created by excluding and including certain decisions and parameters to narrow the study and focus on specific topics and participants (Creswell, 2013). Delimiting factors in

this research study included the research question, the theoretical framework, the choice of objectives, and the selection of participants. The study was confined to schools in a specific region in Central Florida and certain criteria were taken into consideration when selecting participants.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because results reflect the beliefs counselors, teachers, and assistant principals have regarding the fact that EL students are underserved and in need of support and appropriate services. The results of this study were intended to bring awareness to the issue of EL student underachievement in Florida and potentially assist educators in improving the quality of instruction and focusing on promoting a positive learning environment for diverse students. Educators who recognize and value students' cultural differences may positively influence students and encourage them to pursue higher education. This study was conducted to investigate to what extent educators' beliefs and experiences of working with EL students align with previous research and theories regarding learning, language acquisition, the need for support, and social factors.

Prior research indicated teachers who are unprepared to teach diverse students and who are uninformed about students' cultural differences may hinder their academic achievement (Umansky & Dumont, 2019). Teachers who understand students' differences and build positive relationships with them can promote higher academic achievement (Master et al., 2016). Schools that value students' social and cultural background, involve parents, and understand and celebrate diverse heritages have been found to have increased student achievement (A. A. Lopez et al., 2016; C. Lopez et al., 2022). This study was designed to corroborate or contradict the findings of previous

studies as a means to broaden and deepen the body of knowledge on EL educators and learners.

Summary

An achievement gap exists between EL students and native English-speaking students (Ardasheva, 2010; Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019; C. W. Gibson, 2016; Shin, 2018). Research findings have indicated this population of students continues to be unlikely to pursue postsecondary education and are far less educated than traditional students (A. L. Cook et al., 2015; G. Cook, 2010; Johnson, 2021; Martinez, 2017). Despite the many services being offered to close the achievement gap, EL students are still underperforming. They may desire to go to college and their parents want to be involved, but various factors affect their ability to access resources that will help them attain college admission (R. Bergey et al., 2018; Tovar & Simon, 2006). Teachers, counselors, and administrators play an important role in EL student achievement and desire to pursue a higher education (Lumpe et al., 2012).

Although a great deal of research has been conducted on ELs and closing the achievement gap between ELs and English-only speaking students (Ardasheva, 2010; Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019; C. W. Gibson, 2016; Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Shin, 2018), EL students of descent other than Hispanic/Latino are highly underrepresented, as most studies focused on Hispanic and Latino/a ELs. Additionally, less research has been conducted on the topic of ELs and their access to postsecondary education and on the perceptions of educators toward EL students' participation in advanced coursework. The majority of the existing research focused on teachers' perceptions of EL students (Jackson, 2016; Umansky & Dumont, 2019), rather than on those held by counselors and

administrators, although many research findings show their involvement with EL students can also significantly influence learning and achievement (A. L. Cook et al., 2015; G. Cook, 2010; Paredes, 2010). Most studies focused on secondary education and specific interventions that can be applied to close the achievement gap, especially in the areas of reading and math, to obtain a high school diploma.

Chapter 2 consists of a literature review and theoretical perspectives related to EL students and their access to postsecondary education. Previous research indicated an achievement gap continues to exist between these students and their English-speaking counterparts (Ardasheva, 2010; Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019; C. W. Gibson, 2016; Shin, 2018). Discussions of EL students' underachievement nationally and in Florida are included in the chapter

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

English language learners comprise 10.5% of all students in U.S. schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2022), and for a number of years were the fastest growing part of the K–12 student population (Kanno & Cromley, 2015). There are approximately 4.4 million EL students across the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In 2020, the total number of EL students in the United States was 4.9 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Despite the many available services and interventions at schools as well as law and policy changes at the state and federal levels, such as the No Child Left Behind legislation, ELs encounter severe challenges at school and when entering higher education, especially at 4-year institutions (Kanno & Cromley, 2015). An achievement gap continues to exist between these students and their English-speaking counterparts (Ardasheva, 2010; Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019; C. W. Gibson, 2016; Shin, 2018).

Some of the strategies identified within the literature as effective in helping to decrease the achievement gap include (a) differentiating instruction, (b) encouraging students' intrinsic motivation for academic achievement, (c) using an affirming form of correcting student errors, (d) peer tutoring, and (e) active learning. Previous research has shown many factors may contribute to creating an achievement gap, such as SES, formal schooling, parental involvement, neighborhood, and parents' levels of education (Huang et al., 2018). Other factors that contribute to the existence of the achievement gap include student background (Ardasheva, 2010; Cohen, 2008; Kanno & Cromley, 2013, 2015), parental involvement (Kanno & Cromley, 2013, 2015; Prorise, 2008), quality of

instruction, and teacher preparation (Cohen, 2008; Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2019; Hall-Whittier, 2009; Sandoval, 2011).

EL students have been and continue to be less likely to pursue a higher education degree and are far less educated than native speakers (A. L. Cook et al., 2015; Johnson, 2021; Martinez, 2017). EL students also continue to be more likely to drop out of high school and not pursue postsecondary education (Johnson, 2021; Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Skokut, 2009), and many face hardships when applying to college and attending postsecondary institutions (Kanno & Cromley, 2015).

Research findings also indicate school counselors' interventions affect students' motivation, which makes them more likely to attend a postsecondary institution after high school. EL students are less likely to receive interventions from school counselors than are traditional students, which makes them less informed about postsecondary options (A. L. Cook et al., 2015; Paredes, 2010).

Students whose first language is one other than English are placed in ESL courses to gain proficiency over time and to become ready to enter the traditional classroom. Past research has shown not all ELs going through ESL programs are ready for college after completing high school (Ardasheva, 2010; Johnson, 2021; Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Skokut, 2009), and EL students are often excluded from college preparatory courses and other services geared toward college readiness (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). In 2008, Cohen determined that after several years of receiving ESL instruction, many students still lacked the readiness to be placed in mainstream education classes. Those students were unprepared to participate in college preparatory programs such as dual enrollment and AP courses and remained unready for college when they graduated from high school.

Kanno and Cromley (2013) analyzed the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (Weaver, 2000), which followed a group of students for 12 years after they finished eighth grade. The results showed that within 2 years of graduating high school, 47 of the EL students contained in the study did not enroll in college at all. Only 18% of the EL students from the study enrolled at a 4-year institution. Kanno and Cromley (2015) later examined and analyzed the 2002 National Education Longitudinal Study and found similar trends in college enrollment rates. Two years after graduating from high school, only 19% of EL students were enrolled in college, compared with 45% of traditional students.

Florida's ELs total over 265,000 and their diversity surpasses that of most states in the country. Florida is ranked third in terms of its EL population, and although Spanish is the major native language of these students, ELs in Florida speak more than 300 different languages (Florida Department of Education, 2023a). ELs in Florida encounter major problems entering higher education, especially when entering 4-year institutions (Kanno & Cromley, 2015).

EL students face challenges related to learning the academic content in English while developing English language proficiency. Significant research has been done on ELs in K–12 settings; however, less attention has been given to EL students entering higher education. The challenge of acquiring a foreign language becomes greater in later years, as the academic language becomes precise and the content becomes more distinct. That challenge is a greater issue in college when students are required to master content specific to their major with more advanced vocabulary and abstract concepts.

Many ELs, similar to their classmates, aspire to go to college, but they often lack support systems. AP courses, Gifted Education, and the International Baccalaureate Program are some of the college preparatory programs available for students. Many ELs are unaware of these programs and are rarely informed of their existence (Kanno & Cromley, 2015). The school counselor, a person who aids students in their college preparation, may also be out of reach for many ELs, as they are unfamiliar with the counselor's role in the school. They are far less likely to take advantage of many services and resources available at school. English language learners and other ethnic minority students are highly underrepresented in AP courses and gifted programs. Many EL students and their parents have high aspirations about college, but they have many misconceptions and limited information about college preparatory courses and programs (Kanno & Cromley, 2013).

Studies have revealed some of the factors behind the low college attendance rates of EL students. Many students whose first language is different than English still receive EL instruction long after they first arrive in the United States (Cohen, 2008). In 2009, G. M. Rodriguez and Cruz argued that educational institutions failed to provide EL students the resources they needed to gain language proficiency. Fairly recently, the Florida Department of Education (2023b) addressed the test score gap between 12th-grade EL students and their English-speaking counterparts. A large portion of EL students remain in EL programs and become long-term EL students rather than gaining proficiency and being reclassified as proficient in English (Umansky & Dumont, 2019). For example, Cohen (2008) conducted a qualitative study focused on four students who were being

observed and interviewed and found the students were still receiving EL instruction even though they had been in the United States for more than 5 years.

Cohen (2008) additionally discussed how students' backgrounds affect their academic achievement. Some students come from wealthy families that have prepared them for education in the United States; others come from families with less stable income that lack the means to prepare their children for the academic school settings. Later research confirmed that neighborhoods, previous schooling, and parents' levels of education can also influence EL students' academic success (Ardasheva, 2010; Shim, 2013).

From 1990 to 2017, the number of EL and international students doubled (Institute of International Education, 2021). Second-generation children (i.e., those who are born in the United States to immigrant parents) accounted for almost 20% of all college students in the United States and 24% of all community college students (Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2015). Not all immigrant and international students are considered EL, but these trends demonstrate a continued shift toward more diverse classrooms and campuses. ELs are faced with the challenges of both learning English and developing proficiency in learning the academic content. Some research has been conducted on methods of supporting EL students in K–12 settings (Goldenberg, 2013; Takanishi & Le Menestrel, 2017), yet Oropeza et al. (2010) previously established there was less research in the area of EL students in higher and postsecondary education.

All teachers must be prepared to serve EL learners, as they are likely to encounter an EL student in each of their classrooms. Many states have already mandated

professional development courses for teachers, yet they may be insufficient (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). To meet the diverse needs of students, teachers require regular and ongoing training and support. Instructional practices need to be refined and revised and must include language goals in the content.

Prosise (2008) found that the interaction of EL students with non-EL students benefits both groups. Students who are learning English benefit from collaborating with traditional students because this allows them to practice speaking English. Providing students with opportunities for interaction with native speakers will help to enhance their language skills and will also allow students to engage in collaboration. All students benefit because they learn teamwork and leadership skills, and make new friends.

Growing Population of English Learners in the United States

ELs are a diverse group, with members representing numerous cultures, countries, languages, and ethnicities, with Hispanic or Latino students being the majority and Spanish being the most common language spoken (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The number of ELs rose from 3.8 million in 2000 to 4.9 million in 2019 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The highest number of ELs was reported in California, where 21% of all public-school students were learning English in 2015. Texas and Nevada have also reported high EL populations, at nearly 17% for both states.

English Language Learners in Florida

Many ELs attend public schools in Florida. In 2016, the state reported having approximately 4,237,000 foreign-born residents, which accounted for 21% of the population (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). Students who had one or more foreign-born parents represented 34% of the population in Florida schools, which was higher than

students in the United States as a whole at 26%. Of all students from low-income families, 38% had one or both parents who were foreign born. The top three languages spoken by EL Florida families were Spanish, Haitian, and Portuguese (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). In Florida, the five school districts with an enrollment of more than 5,000 EL students in the 2017–2018 school year were in southern Florida (i.e., Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties) and in central Florida (i.e., Hillsborough and Orange Counties; U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

English Learners in Pinellas County

Of the total student population registered in schools in Pinellas County, 17% are Hispanic, 4.5% are Asian, 18.9% are African American, and 54.1% are White (Pinellas County Schools, 2019). The district in Pinellas County has an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) department that works with newly arriving students regarding their placement in school. It also provides continuous resources to schools, families, and students whose first language is other than English. That ESOL department's goals are to (a) help students attain English language proficiency so they can succeed academically, (b) provide instruction that satisfies diverse students' needs and promotes appreciation for other cultures and their contributions to society, (c) provide for basic EL instructions in basic subject areas, and (d) provide for access to basic instruction in ESOL in all basic subjects (Pinellas County Schools, 2019).

Elementary School Students

All elementary schools in Pinellas County have ESOL services available to all students, teachers who are ESOL certified or are in the process of earning ESOL certification, and teachers who use various ESOL strategies to provide comprehensible

instruction to all students. Elementary school students in the ESOL program have access to resources such as tutoring, translators for parents, and parent workshops (Pinellas County Schools, 2019).

Secondary School Students

At the secondary level, only some schools in the district provide ESOL services. Parents must choose whether their student will attend their zoned school, which may not even have ESOL services, or whether they will attend an ESOL school, which may be outside their school zone (Pinellas County Schools, 2019). That choice can cause an EL student to struggle academically, as some EL families may lack transportation. The resources available for parents and students who are classified as EL in Pinellas County include tutoring, scholarship workshops, and career and college opportunities workshops.

English Learners' Underachievement in Florida

There are fewer EL students in Grades 9–12 than in the primary grades because the latter group of students is very dynamic. As soon as students achieve English proficiency and move away from needing the English language supports and instructions, they exit the EL subgroup, but then new students enter EL programs as they enroll in the U.S. school system. Florida EL students perform at a lower level than their English-speaking counterparts on standardized assessments (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). Because many EL students fail to gain proficiency after 6 or 7 years as measured by the state assessment, policymakers strengthened the ways in which they hold schools accountable for ELs (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). The State of Florida can exempt first-year EL students from English and math assessments and exclude their scores from accountability reports. Therefore, some of the results of previous studies excluded first-year EL

students' scores on standardized assessments, because their low scores would hurt the overall school grade.

EL Students' Performance on the Florida Standard Assessment

To measure accountability, Florida administers the Florida Standard Assessment (FSA) to students in Grades 3 to 10. Results are reported in five achievement levels: 1 = inadequate, 2 = below satisfactory, 3 = satisfactory, 4 = proficient, and 5 = mastery. Students must score at level 3 or above to pass. Table 1 shows the considerable achievement gaps between EL and non-EL students at various grade levels on the ELA assessment. Achievement levels on the math assessments were somewhat lower yet also considerable (Florida Department of Education, 2023a).

Table 1

Comparison of EL and Non-EL Students Passing Florida's ELA Assessment

Grade level	EL students (%)	Non-EL students (%)
3	32.3	63.0
7	10.8	55.2
10	6.4	52.9

Note. Data from Florida Department of Education (2023a).

EL Students' Graduation Rates

A gap also exists in the graduation rate between EL students and traditional students in Florida. In 2017, the state reported only 67% of ELs graduated within the first 4 years compared with 82% of non-EL students (Florida Department of Education, 2023a). These results parallel what is seen nationally; in 2017, 67% of ELs graduated and

84% of non-EL students graduated within 4 years (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). ELs are less successful in completing secondary education than are English-proficient students.

Sunderman and Payne (2009) explored the importance of providing ELs with access to high-quality programs and teachers. Previous research indicated all students should be provided with high-quality education, services, and programs that can engage them in rigorous education and promote higher-order thinking. Despite those suggestions, Sunderman and Payne found ELs are often excluded from college preparatory courses and other services and discussed the importance of providing testing and other accommodations to EL students to help them achieve more valid assessment results. Research, over time, has continually indicated very few ELs are qualified for higher-level college preparatory courses (Callahan, 2005; Kanno & Kangas, 2014). Therefore, ELs rarely take advanced courses in high school, such as AP or honors courses.

Accountability for EL Students

Beginning in 2017, all 50 states were required to submit reports to the U.S. Department of Education outlining how they identify and classify students for EL services and what criteria are used when students exit the subgroup. Many states have adopted new or revised English language proficiency assessments, which benefit the students who are not proficient in English yet as well as the school grade

All states are required to follow a two-step process for identifying EL students. When a new student is registered at a public K–12 school, the parent or guardian is to complete a home language survey on which they identify which language is primarily spoken at home. Then, the student is given a screening test to measure their ability to speak, listen, and write in English. Schools inform parents about the results of the testing

and provide information on how the student will be supported in school. Parents have the right to decline EL services for their children (Sugarman & Geary, 2018).

In Florida, students are identified as EL when the language spoken at home is something other than English and the student scores less than proficient on the screening test. A score below the 32nd percentile generally indicates a student lacks proficiency. Students identified as ELs are given the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 every year until they demonstrate proficiency. To be reclassified, a student must score a 4 out of 6 on the ACCESS assessment and must achieve a passing score (i.e., level 3) on the FSA ELA assessment (Sugarman & Geary, 2018).

State accountability systems track all schools and all districts to ensure students are achieving proficiency. Florida's students are expected to take no more than 5 years to achieve English language proficiency. In 2017, almost 60% met this criterion (Florida Department of Education, 2023b). The State of Florida's goal was to reach 66% proficiency by 2020 (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). In the Fall of 2019, 10% of students in Florida were identified as ELs (Florida Department of Education, 2023b). Accountability reports also include EL student achievement on all standardized assessments. As states move forward with reporting those data, policymakers are adjusting the existing regulations related to funding, teacher training, program requirements, and school administration (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). Florida's ELs totaled over 265,000 in 2022, which surpasses that of most states in the country; Florida is ranked third when it comes to its EL population (Florida Department of Education, 2023b).

Closing the Achievement Gap

The next section of this chapter is divided into seven parts, focused on strategies that previous research has shown to be effective in working with EL students and factors that affect their achievement, like parental involvement. The goal was to analyze the varied methods that produced positive results in previous research.

Quality of Instruction

Previous research indicated the quality of instruction and teacher preparation affect EL students' proficiency levels and academic achievement (Hall-Whittier, 2009). Teachers who are better prepared to provide EL instruction make a significant difference in an EL classroom (Skokut, 2009). Quintero and Hansen (2017) found that ESL certification for math teachers and preservice teacher training that focused on EL-specific instructional strategies predicted greater math learning gains for EL students in New York City. ESL teachers need the appropriate training to be able to meet their students' language and learning needs and to promote academic growth, yet most teachers lack this training (Samson & Collins, 2012).

Sandoval (2011) examined two schools in which leaders developed a plan to close the achievement gap between EL and English-only speaking students. The EL teachers at both schools received a monthly training focused on strategies for teaching vocabulary, comprehension, and checking for understanding. The teachers received at least 10 hours of professional development. Those schools also had a Teacher on Special Assignment working closely with teachers at both schools. Positive characteristics identified included collaboration between teachers and teachers feeling empowered and focusing on teaching students, which positively benefited EL students' academic achievement.

Nelson (2018) examined teachers' use of professional learning communities, instructional and assessment practices, knowledge of ELs' instructional needs, and perceptions of professional development in relation to EL students' underachievement, and found the following:

- Differentiation is critical for EL instruction.
- Instruction should be developed based on assessments.
- ELs benefit from evidence-based instructional strategies.
- Professional learning communities must support general education teachers.
- Professional development (PD) is inadequate to support the needs of ELs and teachers.
- PD is needed regarding EL students' backgrounds.

Hegde et al. (2018) examined kindergarten teachers' level of preparedness and training to teach EL students by assessing the strategies they employed in the classroom. They gathered data through phone interviews and teacher surveys. Many of the teachers felt ready and prepared to teach this population of students and were very committed but yet were not aware of the gaps in their choice of teaching methodology, Most were eager to attend various trainings and workshops relating to EL students. The research findings indicated a need for more teacher training so teachers are more prepared to teach in EL classrooms. The next part of this discussion focuses on different teaching styles and strategies that have been found to be effective in educating ELs.

Teaching Styles and Strategies

Teachers can employ different teaching styles and strategies in their classrooms to ensure the information they convey can be easily absorbed and understood by their

students. Ferlazzo and Sypniewski (2019) studied three different strategies used by teachers to teach English as a second language: (a) differentiating instruction, (b) encouraging students' intrinsic motivation for academic achievement, and (c) using an affirming form of correcting student errors. Several classrooms with different students were observed. Their findings indicated teachers need to speak slowly and clearly and provide students with enough time to formulate their spoken and written responses.

Ferlazzo and Sypniewski (2019) stated that because ELs are producing answers in two or more languages, waiting before calling on a student to respond is important, as they need time to think and process. The students benefited when their teachers gave them nonlinguistic cues such as visuals, pictures, and sketches and nonverbal cues such as gestures. The students were helped through the use of graphic organizers, where they drew definitions in English and their own language. Word puzzles, small group projects, and texts written for different levels were also effective. Another strategy Ferlazzo and Sypniewski observed was teachers working on building or strengthening their students' intrinsic motivation so they felt encouraged to study and motivated to achieve their goals. Last, their research showed using games was an effective strategy.

Peer Tutoring

Several studies have demonstrated gains from the use of peer tutoring with EL students. Bowman-Perrot et al. (2016) conducted an analysis of 17 studies focused on examining 363 EL students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Their research findings indicated ELs benefited from peer tutoring in many ways, including academically, socially, and linguistically (Bowman-Perrot et al., 2016).

Differentiated Instruction

EL students learn differently and have specific needs; therefore, differentiated teaching and learning needs to occur in the classroom. Parra (2016) used qualitative and quantitative research techniques to study students using the e-learning mode from the Pan-American University Foundation to identify learning strategies and styles for building personal learning environments. The three learning styles found to be effective were active, visual, and global. Each student learned differently, and their learning styles were influenced by the environment and the resources available to them. Additionally, Parra's research revealed the students had a tendency toward web searching, which was found to be an effective learning strategy.

Active Learning

Yew et al. (2016) described the importance of using active learning techniques to foster deep learning toward meaningful application of knowledge. Some active learning techniques they found to be successful included role-playing, student-led discussions, and debates.

Proise (2008) studied a school district in Illinois that experienced academic progress with their elementary school ELs. This success was based on many factors, including class size, curriculum, quality teachers and instruction, and a research-based literacy program founded on teaching English with Spanish support. One of the most important factors that contributed to that progress was parental involvement. The elementary school fed into two main high schools, one of which was among the most highly-rated schools in the country. The population of students was diverse, with 50% Latino and 40% low-income students, with 90% of the Latino population being classified

as low income. Many of the low-income families lived in small, single-family houses with multiple families living together. Until 2003, the EL program was unsuccessful at that school due to a shortage of bilingual teachers, especially bilingual reading teachers, as well as a lack of viable bilingual instructional curriculum materials. From 2003 to 2007, the school made considerable progress and EL student test scores improved by 100% on the reading test and 60% on the math test.

According to Prorise's (2008) research, one of the keys to this success was "Sheltered English," a research-based program in which teachers provided instruction in English with Spanish support only when needed. The school district also had a dual language (DL) program where 50% of students were English speaking and 50% were Spanish speaking. Parents had the option to enroll their students in those programs. The research revealed that when parents are offered such important choices, their level of involvement is more likely to increase. Sheltered instruction continues to deliver grade-appropriate and comprehensible instruction to EL students and is considered an important component of any EL program (Markos & Himmel, 2016; Saunders et al., 2010).

Dual Language Education

Two earlier studies (Dejesús, 2008; Prorise, 2008) revealed DL education is an effective strategy to implement to increase the academic achievement of EL students. Dejesús (2008) studied the impact of DL instruction on student achievement and found benefits for both ELs and native English-speaking students, such as cooperation and teamwork. In contrast to the transitional approach used in the United States, with the purpose being to transition EL students to mainstream education as soon as possible, the DL approach is designed to provide continued literacy and content instruction to two

groups, native speakers and EL students, as they learn together. Murphy's (2016) research confirmed that the goal of such programs is the continued creation of a learning environment that promotes bilingual language development and positive attitudes toward both languages and both cultures rather than quickly seeking only English language proficiency.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement within EL families has been a challenge for schools across the country for many years. The language difference, poverty, and family mobility are common issues for students and families within this population. In many cases, parents of EL students work low-wage jobs and therefore spend less time with their children (Kanno & Cromley, 2013).

Additionally, EL parents are more likely to tolerate low-quality teaching because they are unfamiliar with the concept of rating teaching and are unlikely to be comfortable enough to complain to the school system. They may be less involved for a variety of reasons and put little to no pressure on their children to succeed, which is the opposite of what many English-speaking parents do (Kanno & Cromley, 2013, 2015; Prorise, 2008).

Research has shown most EL parents place a high value on their children's education, although many immigrant parents have a very different relationship with their students' schools than do parents of traditional English-speaking students (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015). School leaders often struggle to meet the unique needs of these students and to effectively communicate with their parents. The parents often have very limited fluency in English, low levels of literacy in their own language, and some may

have considerably less exposure to formal schooling or even negative experiences with educational institutions (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015).

Wassel et al. (2017) studied the expectations of middle school teachers regarding parental involvement for Latino students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics classrooms. They found that even though the teachers were aware of many of the challenges EL students and parents face, they still expected EL parents to be as involved as non-EL parents by helping students with homework and communicating regularly with teachers.

Good et al. (2010) found five major themes when studying the gap between the parental involvement of EL students and non-EL students: (a) communication gaps; (b) culture clashes; (c) lack of a systemic, articulated district EL plan; (d) lack of teacher preparation in multiculturalism, language acquisition, and EL instructional strategies; and (e) a lack of support systems for families transitioning to new environments and a new culture. The researchers stated both the parent and teacher groups expressed frustration that the teachers in the district lacked the ability to speak the language of many of their students and had little to no understanding of their cultures.

Generally, the teachers who spoke another language believed they were undervalued or unappreciated. Both groups believed the lack of communication between parents and teachers negatively affected student learning. Good et al. (2010) stated that though EL parents expressed a desire to advocate for their children, they thought their schools would not want to hear their input. Minority parents believed school personnel failed to listen to them or respect their opinions. Those parents expressed that the school personnel were condescending, disrespectful, and discriminated against them based on

stereotypes. They felt uncomfortable, as if they were a problem in the school. They also felt disconnected from the culture in the United States, in the school, or in the community.

The majority of EL students have less-educated parents compared to non-EL students (Kanno & Cromley, 2013, 2015). Maxwell (2012) studied challenges to increasing the academic achievement of EL students in four southern states (i.e., Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina) and found there is a need for parental participation and for more bilingual staff members to improve student success. Kanno and Cromley (2013, 2015) also found that the lack of parental guidance affects EL students' achievement in school and in pursuing postsecondary education.

Summary

The issue of the achievement gap between EL students and native English speakers is complex and affects current education laws and policies, curriculum paradigms, professional development for teachers, quality of instruction, and the learning environment. This signifies a need for a shift in pedagogical approaches to increase learning outcomes for EL students. Despite the many services being offered to close the achievement gap, EL students are still underperforming. Research has shown they have the desire to go to college and their parents want to be involved, though many factors affect their ability to apply to college or even access resources that will help them attain college admission (B. W. Bergey et al., 2018; Tovar & Simon, 2006). EL students struggle to gain the language proficiency they need to be successful academically and professionally (Kanno & Cromley, 2015).

Research has shown not all ELs going through ESL programs are ready for college after high school graduation (Ardasheva, 2010; Johnson, 2021; Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Skokut, 2009) and EL students are often excluded from college preparatory courses and other services geared toward college readiness (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). ELs rarely take advanced courses in high school, and very few ELs qualify for higher-level college preparatory courses (Callahan, 2005; Kanno & Kangas, 2014). Factors that contribute to creating the achievement gap include student background (Ardasheva, 2010; Cohen, 2008; Kanno & Cromley, 2013, 2015), parental involvement and the lack thereof (Kanno & Cromley, 2013, 2015; Prosise, 2008), and the quality of instruction and teacher preparation (Cohen, 2008; Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2019; Hall-Whittier, 2009; Sandoval, 2011).

There is a need for more research regarding EL students' academic achievement and their attainment of postsecondary education because there is a shift occurring in education that relates to what students should be learning, how they should be taught, and how teachers should be evaluated. EL students are a unique group that requires special attention because of their growing numbers and their low academic performance relative to their native English-speaking peers. By implementing appropriate teaching methods and school-wide interventions, building positive relationships, and creating a positive, accepting school climate, these students can thrive, make gains in their academic achievement, and possibly attain a postsecondary education.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used to conduct this research study. It describes in detail the procedures set in place to find participants, identify the sampling method, and collect and analyze the data. Limitations and delimitations are also detailed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative, phenomenological study involved exploring educators' perceptions with teaching and engaging with ELs at the high school level in three public schools in Pinellas County, Florida. Research in this area has shown an achievement gap exists between EL students and traditional students (Ardasheva, 2010; Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019; C. W. Gibson, 2016; Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Shin, 2018), and many factors may affect their academic achievement and attainment of higher education (A. L. Cook et al., 2015; G. Cook, 2010; Johnson, 2021; Martinez, 2017). The qualitative, phenomenological research method was used because it enables researchers to focus on examining patterns within individuals' subjective experiences. The focus of this study was to obtain participants' experiences and perspectives and to answer the research question: What beliefs and experiences do school administrators, school counselors, and teachers from Pinellas County public high schools have regarding the achievement gap between ELs and native speakers in pursuing higher education?

Research Design

The qualitative research design used in this study aided in examining educators' experiences of working with EL student populations. Data collection was accomplished through both Zoom and email interviews using questions that related to EL students and their access to postsecondary education and participation in college preparatory courses and programs, such as dual enrollment, AP, or Early College. The semi-structured interviews ran for approximately 30 minutes and were conducted conversationally with one person at a time or via email. The dialogues that occurred during the interviews did

not lead to unforeseen conversations and issues (Williams, 2015) and the researcher ensured the interviews stayed on topic.

Data reflected the experiences of assistant principals, teachers, and counselors related to engaging with and teaching EL students at their schools. Their perceptions on why ELs are participating less than their English-speaking counterparts in college preparatory programs were examined. The researcher also investigated what teachers, school counselors, and assistant principals think schools can do to encourage and help more EL students to pursue higher education. The study included examining factors such as family, culture, and SES that influence EL students' decisions to pursue a college degree.

Sampling and Participants

The purpose of a qualitative sampling approach is to draw a representative sample from a larger population so the results of the study can be generalized to the entire population (Creswell, 2013). The size of the sample depends on identifying an optimum number of participants to enable valid inferences to be made about the population. Creswell (2013) suggested collecting extensive details about a few cases or individuals. For phenomenological studies, he proposed three to 10 participants. Creswell and Poth (2017) stated that when selecting participants, taking participants' ability to express their personal experiences regarding the subject of the study under consideration is essential to collect valid data.

Selected schools contained in the sample were all public high schools in Pinellas County, where English is the primary language in which instruction is given. The chosen schools have the highest number of ELs in the county. The nine participants in this

research study were selected from the from the total population of school counselors, assistant principals, and general education teachers (English, math, social studies and science, or ESOL teachers) at the three schools. The sample included three participants from each of the three groups (one of each from each school).

A purposeful sampling method was employed to recruit participants who had different experiences and expertise regarding EL students, and who had worked in the chosen school system for at least 1 year. The researcher had access to a list of all members of schools in Pinellas County and their contact information. The list was condensed to only assistant principals, counselors, and teachers employed at three selected schools. From the list of faculty employed at the three schools, the researcher then compiled a list of all participants who matched the criteria. Those individuals were then categorized into one of the three groups, and the first three people from each group were contacted. Because the researcher was employed by the school district and had access to all the staff contact information, the participants were directly emailed from a personal email to request their participation in the study. The first person who responded to the email from each group (counselor, teacher, assistant principal) was selected for the study, for a total of three participants from each school.

The research included all participants, regardless of their culture, language, religion, race, disability, sexual orientation, linguistic proficiency, or age. The interviews were conducted either online or via email. The intent was to interview both male and female participants. All participants chosen for this study had at least a bachelor's degree and had been in their position in schools in Pinellas County for at least a year.

Informed Consent

Consent was obtained by first sending a letter to the district (Appendix A) stating the intent and the purpose of the study. When the district allowed the study to be conducted in the three chosen high schools (Appendix B), then an email (Appendix C) was sent to the potential participants to ask them to take part in the study. That email informed them about the purpose of the study, the requirements of their participation, the methods of data collection, and instructions to complete the participant consent letter (Appendix C). That consent letter was used to inform participants of their ability to cancel and withdraw from the study at any time. The form also contained details about the security of research data retention and the timeframe for storing data.

Face-to-face interviews were preferred; however, due to time restraints and the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom and email interviews were used. Before the interviews, the participants were reminded about the details of the study and the ethical principles, which included confidentiality and anonymity. This information was provided in the email to participants, and each participant was reminded at the beginning of each interview.

To ensure the well-being of participants, all were encouraged to refrain from placing any personally identifiable information on any research protocols to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were assured that all data would stay anonymous. Written documents and all descriptive notes were stored in a locked file cabinet accessible only to the researcher. Data recorded during the interviews were stored on the researcher's personal password-protected laptop. All recorded data will be deleted 3 months after the completion of the study. As per National Louis University's IRB

requirements, all other data will be stored securely for 3 years. After that timeframe, all written or electronic data will be shredded or deleted.

Confidentiality was attained by excluding any identifying values that would link the participants and the information they provided. To ensure anonymity, the participants were given a letter and number for presenting their responses to the interview questions: C1–C3 for counselors, T1–T3 for teachers, and AP1–AP3 for assistant principals.

Process

The Zoom interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim to protect the study outcomes against bias. The transcription was done by a speech-to-text software. Descriptive notes were made during and after the interviews to record any observations, thoughts, and ideas pertinent to this study. Email answers were combined into a Word document and saved on the researcher's private computer. To minimize the potential bias of participants, no interview questions implied that there was a right or wrong answer, and no question-order bias, where one question may influence the answer to the next question, was present (Brito, 2017).

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Individual interviews were scheduled, conducted, and recorded after permission was granted from the National Louis University IRB. Zoom and email interviews were used for the purpose of data collection regarding the experiences of selected educators to explore their beliefs on a specific matter and to attempt to understand the social phenomenon on a deeper level (Jamshed, 2014). All email interview questions were sent to the participants on the same day. Two responses were received that same day, and one

email response was returned the next day. Email interviews consisted of the same semi-structured, open-ended questions.

The intent of using semi-structured, open-ended interview questions was to encourage participants to produce free and honest responses. Some questions were supported by a follow-up question if there was a need to clarify the responses and explanations produced by participants. The follow-up questions were presented either during the Zoom meetings or via additional emails to the assistant principals. Interview questions are contained in Appendices D, E, and F. Participants were not provided with a copy of the interview questions in advance to avoid any preparation of responses prior to the interview. The Zoom interviews were recorded using a recording function in that program.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of several key questions that aided in defining the areas that were being explored in this study. This approach allowed the interviews to be steered in a direction to pursue an idea in more depth and to discover or elaborate on information that was pertinent for the researcher (Jamshed, 2014). To keep the participants at ease and to build up their confidence during the interviews, the process started with easier questions first and then moved to the more difficult or sensitive questions.

Methodological Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The researcher attempted to recruit participants with the highest number of years of experience; however, the minimum requirement was 1 year. An assumption was made that teachers, counselors, and assistant principals who had been employed in their current

positions for several years would have more experience working with EL students than would those who had been working for the minimum of 1 year.

The counselors were assumed to have a more positive outlook on the academic achievement of EL students than teachers because school counselors work with students in different settings than teachers and have opportunities to meet with students one-on-one to discuss matters related to their academic achievement or social and emotional development. The assistant principals were anticipated and proved to be under more time constraints than the teachers and counselors, which is why their interviews were conducted through email.

The study included data from only three schools in Pinellas County because those schools have high populations of EL students. The other 13 county high schools were excluded because there are insufficient EL students in their populations. Therefore, the assumption was that those teachers, counselors, and assistant principals would have little to no experience working with ELs, so they were excluded from participation in this study.

This study examined the experiences of three different groups of participants. The assumption was that counselors, teachers, and assistant principals would have different experiences with EL students and would have different attitudes toward that population.

Limitations

Limitations in a qualitative research study relate to validity and reliability. “Because qualitative research occurs in a natural setting it is extremely difficult to replicate studies” (Wiersma, 2000, p. 211). The primary sources of the limitations in this

study were associated with the sampling method and both the interview method and the timing of the study.

The main limitation to this study was the time and circumstances that affected people in the United States and globally. The study occurred during a great global pandemic related to the COVID-19 virus. That pandemic had a significant impact on the educational community during the timeframe of conducting the study. In Pinellas County, virtual/distance learning programs were incorporated and there was no physical contact between students and teachers. That situation resulted in engaging with participants only through virtual platforms to conduct the interviews, rather than face-to-face discussions.

Educators' perceptions regarding teaching and serving students may have been affected by the pandemic. Teachers nationwide experienced many difficulties with virtual teaching; some may have been more frustrated than others. Their perceptions of students and teaching, in general, could have been affected by COVID-19. Connelly et al. (2013) noted "people may have selective memories and may get timing of events wrong (telescoping), attribute positive events and outcomes to their own actions and negative events and outcomes to external forces and exaggerate the significance of actions and events" (p. 211).

to prevent "telescoping," all participants were asked to recall experiences relating to ELs that occurred before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another limitation to this study related to selection bias was the use of convenience sampling. Members of the population were chosen based on certain practical criteria, such as (a) accessibility, (b) availability, (c) geographical proximity, and (d) willingness to participate. Convenience sampling is affordable and easy. The members of

the target population were assumed to be homogenous so there would be no difference in the results obtained from a random sample, or a nearby sample. A convenience sample lacks representation of the entire population (Etikan et al., 2016).

A limitation to this study was personal bias associated with conducting a study at a high school that was the place of employment for the researcher, who was a full-time school counselor working with traditional students (non-Academy) in Grades 9 through 11. This may have caused participants to feel uncomfortable being interviewed by their immediate colleague. To prevent that situation from happening, the interviewees from this particular school consisted of an assistant principal and a counselor who were associated with a separate magnet program within the same school.

The researcher maintained awareness of the cultural bias threat, in which assumptions about motivations and influence are based on the values and standards of the researcher's own culture during the data collection, analysis, and reporting process. "A cultural bias is a tendency to interpret a word or action according to culturally derived meaning assigned to it" (Haddad et al., 2019, p. 2). To avoid the threat of cultural bias, the researcher engaged in unconditional positive regard and was aware of personal cultural assumptions throughout the interview process and the data interpretation.

The experiences of the participants regarding the same phenomenon were assumed to benefit the study and the field of education. Additionally, all participants were assumed to provide honest answers to interview questions. The researcher also anticipated participants preferring to answer questions only through electronic means, which would prevent seeing participants' facial expressions or their body language. As the researcher was unable to conduct face-to-face interviews, the preferred method was

conducting interviews via Zoom, or Microsoft Teams, which allowed for video conferencing. Due to time restraints, assistant principals were interviewed via email. Collecting data via video or email has its own limitations. These include the inability to observe vital body cues, which can help to understand how the participants feel about the topic (Steber, 2018).

Delimitations

Some delimitations were implemented to create boundaries and limit the scope of the study. Delimiting factors included the choice of objectives, the research question, the theoretical perspectives adopted to serve as the framework for this study, and the participant population that was chosen. The study was confined to educators in three public schools Pinellas County. Out of the 16 high schools in the county, the three schools selected for the study each had one of the highest populations of EL students in the county.

Delimitations that relate to educators included (a) working at one of the three schools, (b) holding at least a bachelor's degree in education or a related field, and (c) the ability to use a virtual platform for a meeting. A virtual platform was used because conducting in-person interviews was impossible due to COVID-19 and social distancing.

Data Collection and Analysis

Each individual participant received an electronic letter/email asking them to partake in this study and each participant was provided with an informed consent that had to be signed and returned. Data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews through an electronic platform. Data collection occurred simultaneously with data analysis, and specific steps related to coding and classifying data were provided.

The Zoom interviews were recorded using a digital recorder via a phone or a laptop computer and data collected during the interviews were transcribed using the voice-to-text function in Microsoft Word. Data analysis was done using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets where data from each interview question were transferred from Microsoft Word to Excel and then organized into categories and themes. An interview protocol was followed and an observational protocol was used to record information whenever it was possible to observe participants via Zoom or Teams. This required a single piece of paper with a dividing line down the middle to separate descriptive notes. The purpose of the descriptive notes was to record and remember verbal portraits of the participants, a description of the physical setting, a reconstruction of the dialogue, and reflective notes (e.g., researcher's personal thoughts, speculations, ideas, and impressions; Creswell, 2013).

Data analysis was conducted as the data were being collected. The first step was to organize and prepare the data for analysis. This step involved transcribing the interviews, typing up notes from the observational protocol, and arranging data into different types and categories depending on the information source (Creswell, 2013). The next step was to re-read all transcripts and to reflect on the collected data and the overall meaning. This reflection included examining and assessing the general ideas the participants were conveying, the tone of those ideas, and the impression of the overall depth and credibility of information (Creswell, 2013).

Categorizing, classifying, and labeling were done manually using the Excel spreadsheets that were created for that purpose. The responses from the interviews were grouped together and assigned categories by finding the most appropriate and descriptive

wording for the topics and were turned into themes (codes). Classification enabled the researcher to observe patterns and relationships between data and assisted in focusing on properties of groups, which aided in analyzing the large amounts of data collected (MacDonald, 2016).

To clearly convey the findings of the analysis, a narrative passage was used that discussed the chronology of events and a detailed description of the themes, subthemes, and interconnecting themes. An interpretation of the findings was provided, and the narrative outcome was compared with theories and the general literature on the topic.

Validity and Reliability

To determine that the research approach was reliable, Yin (2009) suggested a qualitative study needs to contain documentation of the study procedures and as many of the steps followed as possible. Gibbs (2007) outlined two qualitative reliability procedures: (a) check transcripts for any mistakes, and (b) check the meaning and definition of codes during the coding process by constantly comparing data with the codes.

A reasonable study validation was achieved through providing participants with an interview transcript upon completion of the individual interviews as a means for them to check their answers. They were asked to confirm that what they said was what they meant, and that what they said actually resonated with what they experienced.

Verifying participants' answers enabled testable instrument reliability related to the interview questions (Casey & Murphy, 2009). Similarity in responses among the participants throughout their interviews ensured the research instrument's accuracy (Stevenson & Mahmut, 2013). Harvey (2015) suggested a continuous member checking

process be employed as part of the reliability process. Member checking is a technique used to explore the credibility of the results. Data or results are returned to participants to ensure accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Cho & Trent, 2006).

Ethical Research

Integrity is a critical component in research. Creswell (2013) stated integrity relates to the moral character of the researcher and their commitment to intellectual honesty and responsibility for their actions and practices. According to Creswell (2014), there are three principles of ethical research: “(1) respect for persons (i.e., privacy and consent), (2) concern for welfare (i.e., minimize harm and augment reciprocity), and (3) justice (i.e., equitable treatment and enhance inclusivity)” (p. 280). All participants signed an informed consent prior to engaging in interviews. Participants’ privacy was honored, first, by providing them with confidentiality and anonymity. Second, all their personal information was held in secure places, which only the researcher could access. All electronic data collected during the interviews were securely maintained in both written and digital formats exclusively by the researcher. No participants in this study were excluded based on their culture, language, religion, race, disability, sexual orientation, linguistic proficiency, or age.

The anticipated risk in this study was minimal. Risks to participants are minimized when appropriate procedures are in place to ensure the magnitude of possible harm is kept low (Shaw & Barrett, 2006). Any participation in research can create a level of discomfort for participants, which in this research was not greater than the possible discomfort felt during a typical everyday interview or meeting. Participants were provided with an informed consent letter to ensure they understood that they were taking

part in a research study and what the research required of them. To keep risk at a minimum, all participants were provided with detailed information regarding the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 presented the methods employed to conduct this study. It detailed the data collection method, process, instrumentation, sampling, and participant selection. The chapter also illustrated the limitations and delimitation of the study, discussed data analysis, and reviewed the principals related to ethical research. The chapter also contained information regarding the safety and confidentiality measures used to protect the well-being of participants and the validity of results.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Restatement of the Purpose

This study was designed to bring awareness to the problem of ELs being unprepared for postsecondary education by studying the perceptions and experiences of secondary school counselors, general education teachers, and assistant principals as to the reasons for this underachievement. Previous research indicated students whose first language is other than English are willing to pursue education beyond high school, yet the majority do not (Kanno & Cromley, 2015). Some services are offered at schools or across school districts to close the achievement gap, yet EL students are still underperforming. Past research conducted by Kanno and Cromley (2015) demonstrated many factors beyond language acquisition and linguistic proficiency affect EL students' pursuit of higher education, such as cultural and societal, and lack of knowledge of applying to and choosing colleges.

The qualitative research question for this study was: What perceptions and experiences do school administrators, counselors, and teachers Pinellas County public high schools have regarding the achievement gap between ELs and native speakers in pursuing higher education? The educators' beliefs toward and experiences with EL students and their academic achievement and access to higher education were examined and analyzed.

Sample

The study consisted of nine participants from three Pinellas County high schools: three school counselors (C1–C3), three teachers (T1–T3), and three assistant principals (AP1–AP3). One counselor, one teacher, and one AP from each school were interviewed;

each had been employed at their school for at least 1 year. At the time the study was conducted, T1 taught science, T2 taught English, and T3 taught Algebra 1. Two participants were male (22.2%) and seven were female (77.8%). Total years in their current position varied among the nine participants, with counselors having the longest average tenure (17.3 years), followed by APs (12.7 years) and teachers (6.7 years).

Data Collection

Interviews served as the primary source of research data in this study. Each group was asked a different set of questions. Four main themes emerged from the data analysis. Replies from the spoken interviews were transcribed using a Microsoft speech recognition application called Dictation, and the email replies were compiled into one Microsoft Word document. The transcripts were analyzed for emerging themes and then coded by theme and question number. Then they were transported into an Excel spreadsheet.

Results

Table 2 shows the themes and subthemes that emerged and the related questions for each of the participant groups. The following sections of this chapter contain sample responses from each group (i.e., counselors, teachers, APs) and a discussion of each of the four themes: opportunities, access to higher education, school initiatives, and supporting ELs.

Table 2*Thematic Organization of Similar Themes Across Groups*

Themes	Subthemes	Counselor questions	Teacher questions	Assistant principal questions
Opportunities	Awareness of the problem	4, 5, 6, 9	5, 9, 10, 16	1, 4
Access to higher education	Barriers to higher education	6, 8	3, 4, 5, 6, 17	2, 3
	Parental and socioeconomic factors			
School initiatives	Lack of cohesiveness	7, 11, 12, 13	14, 18, 19	2, 6, 7, 8
	Training			
Supporting ELs	Strategies	5, 10	10, 11, 12, 13, 15	5, 9, 10
	Understanding ELs			
	Integrated classrooms			
	Assessment and accountability			

Thematic Analysis of Counselor Interviews

All three counselors worked with the EL population on a daily basis, providing them with counseling, advising, and a safe space. The analysis of their responses and questions is presented in this section divided into the four themes and subthemes.

Theme 1: Opportunities

Four questions that were asked of the counselors correlated with the theme of opportunities. The questions are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1*Counselor Questions for Theme 1: Opportunities*

CQ4: Does counseling EL students differ from counseling traditional students? How are EL students different/alike?

CQ5: What strategies are you implementing to ensure that you provide services to EL that meet their needs?

CQ6: What are your thoughts on English Language Learners' access to post-secondary education? Do you think ELs and their English-speaking counterparts are given the same opportunities? Why or why not?

CQ9: Are EL students just as likely as traditional students to pursue college level classes, like AP or dual enrollment? Why or why not?

Awareness of the Problem

Counselors seemed to be aware of the achievement gap and all agreed that EL students are presented with many challenges. All reported that communication is an issue and identified a few common resources used in their schools to help communicate with EL students and their families. C2 reported using various resources to achieve that goal: “We have two EL bilingual associates and many times I call them in to meet with me and the student to translate and check for understanding.” C2 reported Spanish as being the main language that required translation. Resources the schools and counselors use included (a) Lionbridge translation application, (b) bilingual tutoring after school, (c) teachers are given dictionaries as a resource to help students translate and complete work, and (d) various test accommodations.

Two counselors responded there were similarities but there were also differences between EL students and traditional students. C2 explained that “communication is a large barrier. It is hard to talk to them about their postsecondary plans and classes if we

don't speak the same language.” C3 said EL students are just like traditional students, as they are teenagers with needs, but it is different to work with them because of a (a) lack of parental involvement, (b) language barrier, (c) need for more support in the classroom, and (d) testing issues.

Counselors agreed that counseling EL students can be different and may present some challenges, especially if the student is a low-level EL or when the counselor does not speak the language of the student. In some schools, bilingual assistants provide much-needed support in communication and comprehension for EL students. Some counselors shared that they used technology such as Google Translator or Lionbridge to communicate with students when there were no EL aids available.

EL students are presented with the same opportunities as their English-speaking counterparts; however, the playing field is not always level for all students. EL students require more support from their schools to access those opportunities or to even know that such opportunities exist. A majority may not be getting the support they need. Another answer that was prevalent across the three groups was that EL students are unaware of all the opportunities available to them and need more guidance than traditional students to be able to recognize such opportunities. According to the counselors, this is where U.S. schools and ESOL services are lagging behind. Students are not being provided effective support services to access their full potential and to create a stable future (Clemente & Collison, 2000).

Theme 2: Access to Higher Education

Two questions that related to second theme are demonstrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2*Counselor Questions for Theme 2: Access to Higher Education*

CQ6: What are your thoughts on English Language Learners' access to post-secondary education? Do you think EL and their English-speaking counterparts are given the same opportunities? Why or why not?

CQ8: An achievement gap exists between EL students and non-EL students, and persistent low achievement scores among EL students in Florida demonstrate that more attention be given to this issue. EL Students in Florida perform lower on FSA than traditional students. Research demonstrates that many of them have the desire to go to college, but few attain admissions. Why do you think that is? What are factors that affect their academic achievement and access to postsecondary education?

These two questions were posed to understand whether educators perceive the gap in achieving higher education the EL students experience. All participants responded that, based on their professional experience, EL students are less likely to pursue college preparatory classes, and, when asked why, they identified a language barrier and struggle with testing. The next part of this section demonstrates the similarities and differences in the counselors' responses.

Barriers to Higher Education

Two main barriers were identified based on the data collected during the interviews: (a) language barrier, and (b) struggle with testing.

Language Barrier. All three counselors believed the language barrier was a major issue regarding EL students and their academic achievement and access to higher education. C1 reported the language barrier and a lack of parental involvement affect EL students' ability to pursue advanced coursework and college:

A lot of times they don't speak English, and their parents also don't speak English so it is very hard to communicate with the student and the parent. If their parents don't speak English, they don't have anyone to guide them.

C2 explained that “communication is a large barrier. It is hard to talk to them about their postsecondary plans and classes if we don't speak the same language.”

C1 believed that whether EL students are just as likely as traditional students to pursue higher education depends on how well they grasp English, and whether they are new to the country or have been here for a while. C1 explained: “If they are newer to the country then they are less likely to enroll in college classes, but if they are proficient in English, then they are more likely to pursue higher-level classes, like AP or dual enrollment.” C2 also believed that pursuing college courses depends on how well the students know English and how long they have been in the country. C1 added: “Traditional students and EL students are very alike, but the major difference is that they don't understand the American education system, they don't know which courses to take, and what they can pursue after high school.”

Struggle With Testing. Standardized testing presents many challenges for these diverse students. They may lack the necessary comprehension and vocabulary skills to show proficiency in a subject. They may lack knowledge about specific topics and struggle to write about these topics in their open responses. C1 reported that standardized state testing may not accurately assess EL students' knowledge and comprehension. At C1's school, there are test prep workshops organized before important assessments (e.g., the PSAT, SAT, and ACT). All students are invited but most EL students do not come. C1 stated: “They don't come because most of them take a bus home and can't stay after school.” C2 said: “We don't have appropriate assessments for them; how can they pass if they can't read in English?”

Parental and Socioeconomic Factors

Two of the three counselors believed parental involvement plays a major role in EL students' achievement and plans. C1 and C3 also assumed that EL parents do not speak English and are not able to guide their children toward college and a career after high school. C3 stated:

If their parents don't speak the language then how can they be involved? Usually, we see a lack of parental involvement in EL students' school work. We assume that communication is the problem, and parental involvement is a very important factor that has effects on their schooling.

C3 added that EL students are also unlikely to pursue higher education because most of the time their immigration status prevents them from enrolling in college after high school. Also, they are less likely than traditional students to have their own car or other means of transportation to attend information sessions regarding college or to attend dual enrollment classes at a local community college. "Sometimes their immigration status prevents them from applying to college, or they are afraid it might" (C3).

Some of the common themes that were prevalent across all participants in this group were the language barrier and parental involvement. These two topics were mentioned two to three times throughout the interview session. Language barrier was a theme that prevailed in all answers; therefore, it was identified as one of the main factors that prevent ELs from taking advantage of many opportunities relating to college.

Theme 3: School Initiatives

Counselors' questions for this theme are illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Counselor Questions for Theme 3: School Initiatives

CQ7: What interventions are implemented at your school to help EL students?

CQ11: What do you think the school can do to encourage more EL students to pursue higher education degrees after high school? What are some factors that influence EL students' decisions to pursue a college degree?

CQ12: What are some initiatives implemented in your school that help ELs with college planning?

CQ13: Are there any programs or initiatives implemented at your school that are supposed to help EL students' families with college planning process and provide answers to their questions?

All counselors reported some sort of school-wide interventions and initiatives being implemented at their schools. Table 3 shows the counselors' replies and highlights the initiatives that were common to two or three of the schools.

Table 3

School Initiatives and Interventions

Counselors	Interventions and initiatives
C1	Bilingual assistants, dictionaries, extra time on assessments
C2	Bilingual assistants, dictionaries, extra time on assessments, parent info nights in Spanish, translation services for teachers
C3	Bilingual assistants, hosting FAFSA nights in Spanish
Common initiatives	Bilingual assistants, dictionaries, extra time, and hosting info nights in Spanish

The research shows using dictionaries, providing students with extra time, and using translation services benefits EL students (Archer & Francis, 2006). Some other accommodations that were not mentioned by participants but can be found in previous

research are (a) simplified instructions in English, (b) taking tests in native language, and (c) DL test booklets (Archer & Francis, 2006).

All counselors were asked: “What do you think your school can do to encourage more ELs to pursue higher education?” The purpose of this question was to see whether participants had given this topic any thought and to examine what counselors believed could improve the outcomes for EL students. The answers were similar across all participants. The three counselors responded they had Spanish-speaking and Vietnamese-speaking assistants who worked directly in the classrooms with ELs. They also helped counselors, teachers, and administrators communicate with parents. All counselors would like to see more multilingual events, speakers, and family nights organized in their schools, especially events that could help families get information about postsecondary education. One of the counselors mentioned that they hold parents’ nights in Spanish, but they only have Spanish-speaking assistants at their school and would like to see bilingual assistants for additional languages such as Vietnamese, Portuguese, or Creole.

Theme 4: Supporting ELs

The questions shown in Figure 4 were asked to prompt counselors to discuss the specific methods they use with ELs and approaches they believe should be implemented across the school.

Figure 4*Counselor Questions for Theme 4: Strategies to Support ELs*

CQ5: What strategies are you implementing to ensure that you provide services to EL that meet their needs?

CQ10: Do you advocate on behalf of EL students and their families? Are EL students' families involved in their school life? Why or why not?

Based on the answers, Theme 4 is divided into two sections: (a) counseling strategies and (b) professional development. Findings demonstrate the counselors perceived three different methods they believe have the most impact on the academic achievement of EL students.

Counseling Strategies

Several strategies were identified as helpful to EL students during their transition from high school to college or the workforce: (a) proper course placement, (b) being culturally responsive, and (c) cultivating positive relationships with students.

Proper Course Placement. The participants believed placement in appropriate classes is crucial for EL students to learn and transition. “In our school EL students are tested and they get placed in ESOL English Development class for additional support” (C2). Proper and frequent testing seems to be beneficial for EL students because they need to be frequently tested as they develop their language skills to ensure an appropriate placement. This aligns to previous research findings (G. Cook, 2010; Johnson, 2021; Martinez, 2017) where more appropriate assessments brought better outcomes regarding appropriate placements for EL students. The counselors also believed EL students should be placed in higher-level classes as well as a support class that helps them with learning

English. C1 believed counseling EL students is like counseling traditional students:

“They are very alike, but they are not sure what courses are appropriate for them to take, and what their options are after high school.”

C1 said that talking to EL students about their options can help guide them to making appropriate choices. If they are doing well with grades, attendance, and tests, C3 pushed them to enroll in a dual enrollment course. “I talk to them about different college options, scholarships, and the process of applying to colleges, and for finding scholarships.” C1 also believed teachers need to be more involved in promoting college prep courses in their classrooms.

All participants agreed that counseling EL students differs from traditional students, but in general, they are similar as human beings. C3’s answer was representative: “They are similar in that all teenagers are similar, and have needs—physical, psychological, emotional.”

Being Culturally Responsive. Culturally responsive teaching means using students’ customs, characteristics, experiences, and perspectives as tools for better classroom instruction (Will & Najarro, 2022). For counselors, this can mean using posters of multicultural student populations and celebrating their holidays by acknowledging they exist. Educators can engage in Hispanic, Latino, African American, and other heritage months; learn how to say hello in their students’ languages; and engage in a short conversation about students’ culture and country. C2 said she communicates with her foreign students by using Google translation. All three schools have bilingual assistants who support Vietnamese- and Spanish-speaking students and Spanish associates who are available to assist EL students and their families. Being

culturally responsive requires understanding cultural differences, recognizing potential biases, and looking beyond differences to work productively with children, families, and communities whose cultural contexts are different from one's own (Will & Najarro, 2022).

Building Positive Relationships With Students. To build positive relationships with their students, counselors must be culturally aware and responsive. Their students should feel comfortable talking to them. Counselors reported communication is a barrier but there are strategies that can be implemented to break this barrier. All reported having bilingual support teachers who accompany students to the counselor's office, help them in the classroom, and assist with parent communication.

All counselors stated they would like to see more multilingual events, speakers, and family nights organized in their schools, especially events that could help families to get to know their counselors and teachers and get information about postsecondary options.

One of the counselors mentioned that they hold parents' nights in Spanish. They have only Spanish-speaking assistants at their school and would like to see bilingual assistants for additional languages such as Vietnamese, Portuguese, or Creole. C3 believed EL students are given the same opportunities to be successful, yet they are not getting the support they need.

Professional Development

All participants were ESOL-endorsed, though not all believed they had received sufficient training regarding educating culturally diverse students whose first language is other than English. One counselor declared that they would like to get more training on

culturally responsive counseling, but said they are so busy with multiple other tasks that finding time is challenging. C2 reported feeling confident working with diverse EL students. C3 stated everyone working at the schools should get more professional development on this topic, especially teachers. C3 also mentioned that she belongs to the ASCA and that they present many opportunities for counselors to get trained, in addition to many other resources.

The responses were very similar among the three counselors. All perceived a lack of language skills as an impediment when it comes to academic achievement and access to postsecondary education. Parental involvement and appropriate testing seem to play an important role when it comes to EL students' success in school. All counselors were aware of EL students' learning differences and knew that they can be successful with more support from educators, parents, and the school. Students' culture and lived experiences influence how they understand and make sense of the world and themselves and are an integral part of who they are as learners.

The next section of this chapter focuses on interview data collected from the teachers. Similar to the current section, teachers' responses were studied and organized around the same four main themes: (a) opportunities, (b) access to higher education, (c) school initiatives, and (d) supporting ELs.

Thematic Analysis of Teacher Interviews

This discussion focuses on the data collected during the interviews with three teachers.

Theme 1: Opportunities

This theme was based on four questions regarding opportunities. These questions are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Teacher Questions for Theme 1: Opportunities

TQ5: What do you think affects their decision to pursue/not pursue a college preparatory course? AP? Dual Enrollment? Or?

TQ9: Do you engage students in opportunities that lie within the student's zone of proximal development? What instructions/activities do you implement in your classroom that stretch each child's limits of capabilities?

TQ10: Do you engage your students in critical thinking and learning activities that focus on the learner within their social, historical, and cultural context? Are they the same for EL students and traditional students?

TQ16: What are your thoughts on English Language Learners' access to post-secondary education? Do you think ELs and their English-speaking counterparts are given the same opportunities? Why or why not?

Awareness of the Problem

These questions were asked to see how aware teachers were regarding EL students' underperformance and their perceptions regarding EL students accessing higher education. Various statements from the interviewees demonstrated that their perceptions were similar. They perceived a lack of school support for EL students in the classroom and also at home: "More challenging classes may sometimes be too hard for EL students to handle, especially if they don't get the support from their parents and family" (T3). "Those students have the same opportunities, but they don't pursue those classes on their own due to low expectations that educators have for them" (T2). Teachers assume that EL students' parents are not fluent in English and did not receive proper education

themselves to be able to guide and encourage their children to pursue higher education in the United States. It can be presumed that teachers are aware of the achievement gap and have ideas of their own on how to help their students, but they feel helpless due to the lack of resources and the mandated standardized curriculum they are required to implement at their schools.

Teaching Strategies

Question 9 was about the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1971). T1 said the activities and methods she uses in class align with Vygotsky's theory and stretch the limits of each child's capabilities: "Yes, we do a lot of group work, or work with a partner. I try to have ESOL students paired up with native speakers so that they can help them." T2 said scaffolding is crucial and teachers must be aware of their students' capabilities to be able to differentiate instruction to effectively teach all students. T3 mentioned that instructions must be differentiated to fit the needs of all students. T3 added that when class starts, she first explains the lesson to the whole class, and then while students are working, she stops by EL students' desks to make sure they are on track. The teachers also said they always encourage all students to ask questions. If students are too shy to ask in front of the class, T1 accepts alternative ways of communication, such as email or a note:

We use various scales in class to show them a representation of where they are and where they will be, we set goals and action steps and learning targets. I always start my lessons with going over what they will learn and what the goal of this lesson is.

Teachers reported they try to have positive relationships with EL students and they always encourage EL students to participate in higher-level coursework, although

placement in higher-level classes depends heavily on test data, which for ELs often means low scores and placement in remediation courses.

T1 mentioned the AVID program as a positive support for EL students taking harder classes because it teaches what is expected of them in high school and after to be ready to transition to higher education after high school. Students in the program get more personalized support, which may assist EL students with learning about colleges and universities and their admission requirements, acquiring academic language skills, and preparing them for mandated assessments.

Question 10 asked about social, historical, and cultural diversity in classrooms: “Do you engage students in learning activities that focus on learners within their social, historical, and cultural context?” T2 said they embrace diversity in their classroom and celebrate cultural awareness because the classes consist of very diverse student populations. T3 added that the texts they read in class are about different cultures and historical events. T1 said they try to sit EL students from the same country close to each other so they can help each other.

Theme 2: Access to Higher Education

Theme 2 was access to higher education. Questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 17 belong to this theme and are demonstrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6*Teacher Questions for Theme 2: Access to Higher Education*

TQ3: What do you experience as most rewarding when teaching students? Do students with limited English proficiency learn differently than traditional students? If so, how?

TQ4: An achievement gap exists between EL students and non-EL students, and persistent low achievement scores among EL students in Florida demonstrate that more attention be given to this issue might be beneficial. EL Students in Florida perform lower on FSA than traditional students. Research demonstrates that many of them have the desire to go to college, but few attain admissions. Why do you think that is? What are factors that affect their academic achievement and access to postsecondary education?

TQ5: What do you think affects their decision to pursue/not pursue a college preparatory course? AP? Dual Enrollment? Or?

TQ6: What affects ELs decision to pursue post-secondary education?

TQ17: Do you know if EL students in your classroom are making plans to pursue postsecondary education? What are you doing to encourage and motivate them to go to college?

Barriers to Higher Education

All three teachers, no matter how experienced, believed all students are given the same opportunities; however, most of the time the EL students do not know how to access them. ELs are unaware of those opportunities because they lack the language skills, information, guidance, and knowledge of where to find resources. One of the teachers believed EL students are too underprepared to take advantage of the college readiness opportunities because of the language barrier, and that is the reason why they are being left out from participation in higher-level classes: “Some of them feel intimidated to speak English because their accent is heavy, and they are afraid that teachers and classmates will not understand them” (T2).

The answers to Questions 3 and 4 were similar. All the teachers believed students with limited English proficiency learn slightly different from their English-speaking peers. Their views and perceptions differed slightly when it came to their years of experience teaching ELs. Two had worked at their schools for 5 years or less and one teacher reported 11 years of teaching experience. Those who worked in their current profession for less than 5 years provided a vague statement. For example, T1, with less than 5 years of experience, reported, “I think that we aim to treat them the same as other students, but sometimes people assume that they are less smart, or less capable, because of their limited language skills.”

Lack of Support

T2 reported that EL students require more support in the classroom and in school in general: “They require more support than an average student, and they most often require more time than traditional students to learn and complete assignments and tests.”

T3, with the most years of experience, could name specific supports and accommodations that are needed for EL students to succeed: “They learn differently, because of the language barrier. They usually require accommodations on testing and class work.” When asked about what specific accommodations were needed, T3 described:

They usually get more time on standardized tests, and they can use dictionaries to help them translate, but honestly, I don’t think that all of the EL students even use the accommodations that are granted to them. Sometimes they get unmotivated and don’t want to do anything.

Question 6 also aligns with the second theme—access to higher education—and probed teachers to think about the following: What do you think affects their decision to pursue, or not pursue a college-level course? Common factors are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4*Factors That Affect EL Participation in College-Level Courses*

Teacher	Factors reported
T1	Lack of vocabulary knowledge, inability to pass state exams
T2	Lack of language skills, lack of support/guidance at home
T3	Language barrier, parents lack education, lack of support at home, lack of funds to get a car to drive to college

All teachers mentioned language barrier as the biggest obstacle for EL students to access higher education. T3 also said parents are unable to guide their children because they themselves are not college educated, and most of the time do not speak English. T1 also mentioned the lack of skills to pass various assessments as one of the factors that affects EL students' participation in college preparatory classes (AP, dual enrollment). EL students are unable to pass state-required testing because of their limited English skills, and most of the time students who are recruited to participate in college level or dual enrollment classes must have the passing scores on state testing.

The answers to Question 17 were similar among all teachers. They perceived a significant lack of family engagement. Teachers also believed the lack of involvement is caused by parents' lack of English skills and not understating how the school system works. The schools the parents attended might have been poles apart. T3 said the following about EL students: "They are shy to ask questions, and don't feel confident about their language skills, so they choose not to engage in their students' education, although we encourage them to do so."

Theme 3: School Initiatives

Three questions were asked, and they are illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7*Teacher Questions for Theme 3: School Initiatives*

TQ14: Do you believe that teachers receive enough professional development to teach EL students?

TQ18: What do you think the school can do to encourage more EL students to pursue higher education degrees after high school?

TQ19: What can the school do to encourage parents to be more involved?

School initiatives relate to the many strategies and programs that are implemented at the school and district level. Participants reported similar practices. The findings indicate schools and educators rely on professional development and use various classroom strategies to get to EL students. The two major initiatives are professional development and support for ELs in the classroom.

Professional Development

Teachers responded they feel comfortable working with EL students. All of the participant teachers were ESOL certified. T1 said AVID schools get a lot of resources to help educators with diverse student populations. Schools that participate in AVID have access to professional learning, a great number of tools and resources to use in the classroom, and a direct line of support to regional teams, data tracking, planning guides, and self-assessments to help schools measure their success and create changes that are sustainable, backed by research, and responsive to campus needs (Pinellas County Schools, 2019). T2 also mentioned AVID: “I feel that with the support they get from AVID they are able to teach all students, including EL students.” T1 believed teachers get the professional development through AVID, but not all staff are willing to participate in those workshops: “We do have weekly and monthly AVID instructional workshops

offered at our school, after school, but they do not all take advantage of it.” When asked whether they feel they received enough professional education to teach diverse populations, T1 responded:

I have, and I am ESOL endorsed. I am pretty confident in what I’m doing. I understand that they may learn differently so differentiating instructions is something that needs to be done. And I enjoy working with diverse student population.

All teachers reported being ESOL endorsed, which means they completed all the necessary training to be able to work with the ESOL population. This training, however, is required only one time, at the beginning of employment.

Support for EL Students

Questions 18 and 19 related to what teachers perceived the school can do to get more students involved in higher-level, college preparatory courses and their parents more involved in school activities. T1 believed being able to communicate with parents in their native language could be beneficial; for example, emails and letters can be sent home in Spanish or Vietnamese. Also, all parents have access to a student portal where they can see their students’ grades; they can ask someone to translate if needed. A few different strategies were identified: (a) having Spanish-speaking teachers and aids help to translate, (b) using translation services when calling home (e.g., Lionbridge) to translate all languages, (c) sending letters/flyers home in English and in Spanish, and (d) scheduling students into AVID for extra support. Two of the three teachers mentioned AVID as a viable support for students and for teachers, which can indicate this county’s schools are familiar with and some have implemented AVID strategies and initiatives. T3 reported that their school already holds many parent night events, but they could use more bilingual assistants.

Theme 4: Supporting ELs

Five questions were related to Theme 4. This section delineates teachers' responses to these interview questions, which are presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Teacher Questions Theme 4: Supporting ELs

TQ10: “Do you engage students in critical thinking and learning activities that focus on the learner within their social, historical and cultural context?”

TQ11: “What do you do to ensure that students engage in active, goal-oriented and self-regulated learning?”

TQ12: “What strategies do you use to build positive relationships with students?”

TQ13: “Have you engaged in professional development that focuses specifically on EL students? What are some key strategies that you learned from it that you implement in your classroom that address EL students' unique needs?”

TQ15: “Are EL students' parents involved in their students' learning? Why or why not? Do they contact you often? Do they request parent-teacher conferences?”

All participants agreed that schools must employ various comprehensive strategies to support the needs of all students, including ELs. They were aware that more support means school districts would have to allocate more financial resources toward EL student underachievement. Two of the three teachers mentioned the AVID program as a means to support EL students in accessing higher education by taking higher-level courses, helping with financial aid, and also the process of admissions. Teachers were also asked about different strategies they use in the classroom and how they understand and use these methods in their classrooms.

All interviewees also discussed the various tactics employed in their schools or classrooms. T1 described several strategies used in their classroom so the appropriate level of scaffolding is applied to all students. One is demonstrating or modeling first what the students will be learning. For example, if students are to complete a science experiment, they demonstrate how it needs to be done before the students are asked to do it themselves. T1 believes:

This strategy is great for all learners, as all of them have unique gifts and sets of skills. I often teach by dividing the lesson into smaller mini-lessons, where the content is broken down into a series of mini-lessons. This, I think, encourages students and ensures that the content of the mini-lesson is understood before we move on to the rest of the material in the lesson.

Schools assume that students who speak English as their second language should not be placed in harder classes because of their limited English but ESOL kids would benefit from AVID supports. That way they could have assistance when taking college classes.

Visual aids were employed by two of the teachers. T1 uses visual aids and allows all students to take pictures of the lesson notes so they have all the important points down before she moves on: "I also find it helpful, especially with EL students, to speak slowly and check for understanding often. I also make sure to repeat the instructions a few times." T2 described the use of a calendar that is created on the board at the front of the class:

The calendar does not disappear from the board ever. It has important dates, new concepts, vocabulary and objectives and goals for each lesson. This helps students recognize what will be taught and how to prepare for the class.

Teachers were also asked about learner-centered teaching, which was Question 11: "What do you do to ensure that your students engage in active, goal-oriented and self-regulated learning?" Teachers' answers were similar. All teachers reported they always start their lesson by demonstrating what they will be doing first. T3 said they demonstrate

first on the board and the whole class works together in a large group, then break out to small groups, and then come together to discuss. Two of the three teachers mentioned that they set goals and action steps with their students. T2 said: “I always start my lessons with going over what they will learn, and what the goal of this lesson is.”

The goal of Question 12 was to get teachers thinking about their relationships with students and to explore whether they treat EL students differently from traditional students. T1 tries really hard to build and keep relationships with students, especially ELs. She responded: “I try to talk to them, to make sure that they know that I’m here to support them and help them.” T1 also reported that this strategy works well because there are more ELs coming to her after class or during lunch to ask for help. T3 uses similar strategies to build relationships with her students: “I always greet them at the door and say ‘hi’ whenever I see my students in the hallway.” T3 reported that she tries to remember their names, “but sometimes it is so hard because I have so many students, so I make a seating chart for each group.”

This section focused on the analysis of teachers’ interview data by studying their beliefs and experiences. All teachers agreed that the language barrier is the biggest obstacle for EL students to access higher education. Teachers also perceived that ELs’ home life affects them greatly, and some parents may be unable to support their students’ education past high school because they themselves may have not been educated and do not speak English well.

Teachers’ perceptions were similar to counselors’ perceptions regarding the language barrier, lack of support from parents, and difficult home life. Those insights and perceptions align with the findings in previous studies relating to students’ backgrounds,

family, home life, and parents' education level, and how those factors affect EL students' education (Callahan, 2005; Callahan & Gándara, 2004; Workman, 2015). Lack of support from parents aligns with the notion that parents often are unable to help, not that they are unwilling. Often, parents would like to help and be a positive influence on their students' education, but they may lack the language skills, knowledge of the process of going to college, and resources, including time, transportation, or academic skills. In the past research findings, it was also noted that EL students may be helping to provide financial support for their families by working part time or full time after school and on the weekend. They often must help with taking care of younger siblings or other family members (Dabach et al., 2018; Gifford & Valdés, 2006).

Teachers, similar to counselors, pointed out no specific strategies that their schools use (besides using dictionaries, translators, and hosting parent nights) as a means to encourage families to be more involved. The schools from which the participants were selected for this study seemed as though they did not explore strategies to build a multicultural, minority-friendly culture. Good et al. (2010) studied barriers to academic achievement for Latino English language learners. Similar to this study's findings, their results revealed barriers related to communication gaps; culture clashes; poorly articulated EL plans; lack of teacher preparation in multiculturalism, language acquisition, and EL instructional strategies; and a lack of support systems for families transitioning to a new environment and culture.

Good et al. (2010) recommended systemic planning, more professional development, EL program articulation, encouraging parental involvement, and promoting culturally responsive support for families. School teams should incorporate identifying

gaps in achievement between ELs and traditional students and creating positive solutions in their future planning. Lack of multiculturalism negatively affects student learning. The teachers who participated in this study believed the few strategies they use to bridge the gap (e.g., giving students dictionaries, communicating with parents in their native language, holding parent nights with translators, etc.) are sufficient, and may be the only strategies they are willing to be aware of and investigate. Many teachers in past studies demonstrated they are unprepared to teach the EL population (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Although this group of participants believed they are well prepared, more research is needed to assess whether teachers are appropriately prepared and what effective strategies they use and what other innovative strategies they may be lacking.

The next section of this study contains a thematic analysis of the interviews with the APs. Their answers were analyzed by the same four themes: opportunities, access to higher education, school initiatives, and supporting ELs. Similar to the section above, each theme's questions and answers are listed under each theme's heading.

Thematic Analysis of Assistant Principal Interviews

This section provides data from the AP interviews, analyzed by examining the four main themes. The APs were asked fewer questions than the teachers and counselors and most focused on school initiatives and classroom supports. Questions that aligned with each theme are illustrated in the accompanying figures.

Theme 1: Opportunities

Two questions were posed for APs that were relevant to this theme as presented in Figure 9.

Figure 9*AP Questions for Theme 1: Opportunities*

APQ1: “Do you think that ELs and their English-speaking counterparts are given the same opportunities?”

APQ4: “Are EL students just as likely as traditional students to pursue college level classes? Why? Or Why not?”

Awareness of the Problem

The purpose of these questions was to examine whether the APs perceived any differences in the ways in which ELs and traditional students learn and participate in education. All APs agreed that opportunities are available to ELs, but they are not offered appropriate support to take advantage of these opportunities. AP1 said: “I think the intention to provide same opportunities is present, but the follow through is not.” AP2 said, “Yes, I believe the opportunities are available to them, however, just as with ESE and 504 students, ELs need accommodations and support, and that sometimes is not consistent with every classroom teacher.” AP3 responded that the opportunities are available, however,

most of them [EL students] are not aware of such opportunities, and the language barrier and socioeconomic status provide additional challenges. For example, they are unlikely to have a car to be able to take dual enrollment classes on a college campus.

A follow-up question was posed to all participants: What supports do you think we can provide ELs with that would make them be more aware, and take advantage of such opportunities? AP2 responded that more testing is needed to ensure ELs are appropriately placed in courses that will support them. AP1 said school counselors need

to be more involved in advocating for ELs and teachers need more professional development focused on strategies to support ELs.

All three APs believed all students are given the same opportunities; however, EL students are not given the same support as other students. AP1 expressed it this way:

EL students should be treated similarly to students who have accommodations approved under the 504 plan or who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and receive ESE services, which grants students with disabilities accommodations in order to level out the playing field, so that all students have the same opportunities.

Barriers to Higher Education

Question 4 also aligned to this theme: “Are EL students just as likely as traditional students to pursue college level classes? AP? Dual Enrollment?” APs listed a few factors that affect EL students’ academic achievement, as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5

Factors Affecting EL Participation in College Preparatory Courses

Assistant principal	Factors reported
AP1	Testing, inability to pass the reading assessment
AP2	Home life, work, lack of transportation, immigration status, no Social Security number
AP3	Language barrier, parents’ language barrier, parents’ lack of college education

The APs reported different factors that affect ELs’ decision to pursue college-level courses. Most were similar to the factors reported by the teachers. One factor noted by AP2 was not mentioned in the teacher or counselor groups: immigration status and lack of a Social Security number. Not having a Social Security number hinders their ability to enroll in college.

The purpose of this research was to study whether APs believe ELs are just as likely as are English-speaking students to participate in college-level courses. Again, the responses were similar. These participants believed EL students can participate in all the same courses and college prep programs as do traditional students; however, they do not because they are lacking the guidance, support, and language skills. The fact that their parents may not be college educated, or even high school educated, may hinder their success as well. Past research demonstrated the challenge has been the language difference and also poverty and family mobility. In many cases, parents of EL students work low-wage jobs and therefore spend less time with their children (Kanno & Cromley, 2013, 2015; Prosise, 2008). EL parents have been said to be more likely to tolerate low-quality education. That claim was supported in previous research and was also mentioned by two participants in the current study.

Theme 2: Access to Higher Education

Figure 10 contains the questions for the second theme.

Figure 10

AP Questions for Theme 2: Access to Higher Education

APQ2: What interventions are implemented at your school to help EL students?"

APQ3: "What are factors that affect their academic achievement and access to post-secondary education?"

Several interventions and strategies were reported by the three APs. They had very similar views regarding this issue. AP2 stated:

We have an ESOL chair who facilitates assessing students' learning proficiency and reviews students' schedules to ensure that they are appropriately scheduled.

The ESOL chair also teaches two language learning classes and manages three bilingual assistants who work with students in small groups.

AP3 mentioned that content-area special EL training was provided to all staff, along with the district-provided translation service Lionbridge. AP1 stated college and career awareness is necessary starting in ninth grade. AP1 explained: “We have to make sure that they have access to college-level classes starting in freshman year.”

AP1 and AP3 agreed on most factors that affect the academic achievement of EL students. The common factors reported included (a) family income/SES, (b) parental involvement, and (c) the low expectations held by educators regarding ELs. AP1 also reported culture as a factor that affects EL students’ academic success: “Their culture, I mean, sometimes they are encouraged to work, to get a job after high school, so that they can help with supporting their family.” AP2 believed a lack of scaffolding and differentiated instruction affects EL students’ success: “Access to postsecondary education is equitable in my opinion. However, if ELs are not provided adequate instruction resulting in a lack of achievement, it could affect their ability to qualify for postsecondary opportunities.” A follow-up question was posed to examine whether the APs believed the inadequate instruction at their schools was because teachers were not appropriately trained or were unwilling to take the extra step and modify the curriculum and instruction to help their EL students comprehend the material better. AP2 believed both factors came into play—some teachers were just unwilling to change their teaching style to ensure equality in the way children learn. AP1 believed teachers may feel confident in what they are doing but insufficient ESOL training in classroom instructions and supports is offered:

Mandatory trainings are offered once or twice per year. There is more professional development available for teachers and other staff, but there is little incentive for them to take courses on their own time, and not be paid for it.

EL students require more assistance than traditional students and their lack of language skills is sometimes seen as a disability. AP3 mentioned that ESOL students, just like 504 and Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students, require their own educational plan and should get official accommodations.

Theme 3: School Initiatives

Theme 3 was school initiatives, which reflected educators' perceptions regarding school-wide interventions and strategies meant to increase EL students' achievement.

Four questions were contained in Theme 3 as presented in Figure 11.

Figure 11

AP Questions for Theme 3: School Initiatives

APQ2: “What interventions are implemented at your school to help EL students?”

APQ6: “What do you think the school can do to encourage more EL students to pursue higher education?”

APQ7: “Are there any programs or initiatives implemented at your school that are intended to help EL students' families with college planning process and provide answers to their questions?”

APQ8: “Are there any programs or initiatives implemented at your school that are intended to help EL students' families with college planning process and provide answers to their questions?”

AP2 stated school leaders need to make sure they provide equal access to college-level courses to all students. EL students should start taking higher-level courses at least in ninth grade. “We need to provide college and career awareness to students starting in

elementary school and continuing in high school” (AP2). AP2 also believed school counselors are the best advocates for ELs and need to be more involved with EL students. AP1 believed bilingual assistants are very helpful. The school also allows students to use dictionaries in classes and sends letters and flyers home in Spanish. The participants reported that closing the gap should start early, in middle school. The assessment of language proficiency should be revamped, and all school staff should work together to create an accepting, diverse, and supportive school culture that will ensure all students thrive.

Regarding the initiatives implemented, AP3 responded that they had many teachers and administrators who were Spanish speaking: “We let them use translation services whenever they have trouble communicating and we send letters home in their native language.” AP1 responded that they had interpreters for Spanish and Vietnamese, who assisted in parent events, such as Freshman orientation or FAFSA nights.

All AP participants agreed that language was a barrier to parent contact. Even though some parents want to be involved in their students’ education, some do not speak English. AP1 mentioned that parents may not be familiar with how the U.S. school system works and some parents do not complete college themselves. AP3 reported: “They don’t know about some opportunities offered because their parents may not have gone through high school education in U.S.”

Theme 4: Supporting ELs

Three questions related to this theme were asked of participants. Figure 12 illustrates those questions.

Figure 12

AP Questions for Theme 4: Supporting ELs

APQ5: “What do you do to advocate for ELs? Are their families involved in their school life? Why or why not?”

APQ9: “Do you believe that teachers are sufficiently trained?”

APQ10: “What strategies have you observed teachers implementing in their classrooms to make sure that they meet the needs of all students?”

School Initiatives

Various statements from the interviewees demonstrated that there is a lack of support for EL students present in the classroom. They require more assistance than traditional students, and their lack of language skills is sometimes seen as a disability.

AP1 believed student achievement is affected by family income and low expectations of EL from educators, community, and the family. AP1 stated the following:

Some students are expected to go to work and help provide for the family, instead of pursuing higher education. The importance of going to work vs. continuing education in each culture affects EL students’ decision whether to pursue higher education or not.

AP2 explained that:

The most profound effect on ESOL students’ education and achievements is lack of support in the classroom and in school. ESOL students have access to all the same resources and opportunities as their English-speaking counterparts; however, if they are not told about these resources and how to access them, they cannot be successful.

Some of the participants (teachers and APs) mentioned AVID as one of the great strategies to help students become college and career ready. AVID training covers all core content areas and all grades in topics that relate to culturally relevant teaching, digital instruction, and learning and academic language and literacy (AVID, 2022).

Schools that participate in AVID have access to lesson plans, classroom activities, and learning videos and get help with implementing instructional practices to provide support to students that need it (AVID, 2022).

All three schools in this study have implemented the AVID curriculum. When asked about what strategies should be implemented to help support EL students, AP2 answered:

We definitely need to advertise more and encourage them to participate in the AVID program. I feel that with the support they get in AVID they can take those challenging courses because they get the support and assistance from AVID teachers. They also get that push to take on more challenging classes.

Professional Development

Question 9 aligned with professional development. AP2 believed some teachers were well prepared; however, the majority received insufficient training. AP1 responded that the teachers at their school all attended required EL training and were sufficiently prepared: “I believe some of our teachers are sufficiently trained but not the majority, because we still have several ELs not accessing college level courses or higher education.”

AP2 responded that at their school, some of the teachers were sufficiently trained, but many were still lacking the necessary skills to teach the EL population. Some ignored training and chose not to participate in such trainings. AP1 noted academic achievement is affected by a lack of scaffolding and differentiated instruction, which could be a result of a lack of adequate training.

AP3 believed access to postsecondary education was equitable. However, EL students should be provided with appropriate instructions and support to help them access different opportunities. The inability to speak fluent English affects their ability to qualify

for postsecondary opportunities. “We need to provide college and career awareness to students starting in elementary school and continuing through high school, providing support to those students through programs such as AVID.”

The AVID program is popular among schools in Pinellas County. Various AVID strategies and instructions are implemented across all three schools. Not only was AVID reported as a viable program for students who need extra help to prepare for college, it was also deemed as a meaningful tool for teachers, as it provides professional development, many resources, and instructions.

Summary of Perceptions of Counselors, Teachers, and Assistant Principals

The next section of this chapter presents an analysis of counselors’, teachers’, and APs’ perceptions regarding EL students and examines similarities and differences in beliefs and experiences based on job title. The section is divided into four parts: counselor perceptions, teacher perceptions, AP perceptions, and a comparison of their perceptions and experiences.

Counselor Perceptions

Interview questions differed slightly across groups, but four themes were prevalent across all. Participants were asked questions about opportunities, factors they believe affect EL students’ access to higher education, school initiatives, and supports in classrooms for ELs. All participants believed ELs are given the same opportunities, though they need more support to access those opportunities. One support the schools use that was mentioned in the interviews with all three groups is support with language proficiency by implementing strategies to target specific learning needs. Counselors believed that for ELs to be successful they must learn the language first, teachers must be

adequately trained to support ELs, and teachers are responsible for advertising advanced coursework in their classes. It seems the counselors feel no responsibility for contributing, or not contributing, to EL students' language skill gains. Saying they must learn the language first poses a number of questions: How do we make sure they learn the language? Who should be responsible to provide them with support? Teachers? Parents? Counselors? Or perhaps the whole school and family?

Teacher Perceptions

J. J. Gibson (1951) defined perception as “the activity by which we pick up information about environmental objects and events” (p. 88). For many years, those in academia have widely employed this perception framework and found that teacher perceptions and beliefs of their students may differ among each other, and that they also influence instructional decision making and student performance (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1994). Teachers believe EL and traditional students have access to opportunities and higher education. They also believe that EL students, more than traditional students, need scaffolding and guidance to reach those opportunities. Teachers feel no responsibility for making school-wide decisions or initiatives, but they do apply various strategies and supports in their own classrooms to aid in student learning. All teachers are aware of all of their students' English language capabilities and are able to apply strategies to accommodate ELs in their classrooms. Teachers discussed some of the methods they use as reflected in Table 6.

Table 6*Common Teaching Strategies*

Teachers	Teaching strategies
T1	Scaffolding, building positive relationships with students, using various scales
T2	Remembering names, sharing class goals, demonstrating things on board
T3	Building positive relationships with students and parents, accommodations (extra time)

Participants in the teacher group agreed that parents are less involved and ELs' home lives may not always be conducive to learning and planning for college. Their home situations and their responsibilities to their families affect their academics and willingness to pursue college after high school. Some parents try to be involved; however, the language barrier and the long work hours make that very difficult, even when translators are available to assist. Teachers agreed that increasing parent involvement should be one of the most important school goals.

The teachers seemed very engaged with EL students and their perceptions were overall very positive. Though they believed they are sufficiently trained and are confident about teaching a diverse group of students, this may be an effect of the lack of incentive for more professional development that was mentioned by AP1 in the previous section of this chapter. APs reported that more training is needed for teachers. Whether or not teachers should be incentivized to take more courses is an area that requires more research.

Assistant Principal Perceptions

APs, similar to teachers, believed ELs need more support in classroom and at home. They strongly believed differentiating instruction is crucial. Supports and instructions must be designed based on the results of proper assessments. APs reported they feel the teachers at their schools would benefit from more training. They also reported that not all teachers are willing to differentiate their instructions to make sure all students understand the material and learn.

Among the many factors that affect student performance, research indicates the quality of teachers has a significant impact on the educational success of all students (Boyd et al., 2009; Loeb et al., 2014). Overall, the APs believed teachers need more training. Some of the APs also reported that they believed school counselors can make a difference in all students' education, and especially when it comes to EL students. One of the participants mentioned that school counselors need to be involved and should be the ones advocating for ELs with regard to placement in higher-level courses and dual enrollment.

Educators' Beliefs and Experiences Regarding ELs and Their Achievement

One belief that was prevalent across all three groups was that a lack of English language skills impedes EL students' academic achievement and access to higher education. Participants seemed to be familiar with the factors that affect EL students' academic achievement, and all were willing to provide students with extra attention and assistance. It is often assumed that teachers are mostly responsible for EL students' academic achievement and need to be properly trained, as they are the ones who are evaluated by principals. The APs in this study also reported that more training is needed.

Teachers, however, feel very confident in their work with EL students and believe they do not require additional professional education when it comes to the use of proper methods for educating diverse students.

Summary

All educators have different experiences and beliefs when it comes to different student groups. From the qualitative data collected from the interviews, the four themes that were prevalent were (a) opportunities, (b) access to higher education, (c) school initiatives, and (d) support for ELs.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings of this research study that were analyzed in the previous chapter in an attempt to answer the research question: What beliefs and experiences do school administrators, school counselors, and teachers from Pinellas County public high schools have regarding the achievement gap between ELs and native speakers in pursuing higher education?

The chapter is divided into several parts, with each part illustrating the results, implications of findings, and recommendations for future research.

Problem

This qualitative research study was conducted to analyze the attitudes of counselors, teachers, and APs regarding EL students' academic achievements. EL students attending schools in United States are underperforming compared to traditional students. They also access higher education at a lower rate compared to their English-speaking peers. This is an issue that needs more attention. Every school in Florida offers some type of ESL program but they seem to be ineffective because fewer ELs graduate from high school than their English-speaking peers. Also, fewer ELs apply to postsecondary education institutions. Data show they have difficulty passing the state exams that are needed for graduation, and fewer ELs access and attain higher education.

This major achievement gap has existed for many years, and with the EL population growing each year, more attention should be given to this issue. In 2019, ELs comprised 10.4% of the K–12 student population in the United States, up from 10.2% the previous year (Ferlazzo, 2022). EL students are a large part of student population in U.S. schools, yet they continue to fall behind.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to study the perceptions of educators as to if and why they believe EL students are underperforming. The data collected through interviews were examined to determine whether counselors, teachers, and APs share similar views on EL students, their academic achievement, factors they believe affect their schooling, and strategies their schools use to close the achievement gap.

EL students tend to underachieve when compared to their English-speaking counterparts. It is important to bring more awareness to the fact that ELs exist in large numbers in U.S. schools, and, therefore, represent a large portion of the general student population. Just like other students, they need to be supported, encouraged, and guided by educators who understand their backgrounds and needs. EL students have trouble accessing higher education at higher rates than traditional students, and need services to assist with the transition from high school to postsecondary institutions.

Research Question

What beliefs and experiences do school administrators, school counselors, and teachers from Pinellas County public high schools have regarding the achievement gap between ELs and native speakers in pursuing higher education?

Description of Methodology

A qualitative research method was used along with a purposeful sampling method to recruit nine participants who had different experiences and expertise regarding EL students and who had worked in the chosen school system for at least 1 year. The school district consented to the recruitment of participants, and participants consented to being included in the study. Data were collected by Zoom or email interviews.

The interviews with teachers and counselors were performed by Zoom, recorded, and then transcribed verbatim to protect the study outcomes against bias. The transcriptions were accomplished with speech-to-text software. Interviews with APs were collected by email. Questions were sent in a Word document and the APs responded by typing their answers in the same document and sending it back to the researcher. Descriptive notes were made during and after the interviews to record any observations, thoughts, and ideas pertinent to this study.

Discussion

The study was conducted to discover what perceptions educators have regarding ELs and their achievement. It was assumed that the study would benefit the field of education through bringing more awareness to the issue of the underperformance of ELs and encouraging educators, school district leaders, and policymakers to be more aware of cultural diversity and how it affects data. The four main themes of the research study are discussed in this section.

Opportunities

All three groups of educators were asked similar questions regarding opportunities. The purpose was to examine whether the educators believe EL students have the same opportunities in high school as traditional, English-speaking students. All agreed that the same opportunities are presented to all students; however, EL students need extra support and guidance from educators to reach those opportunities. A gap exists between EL students and accessing available opportunities. What is needed is a bridge between students and college opportunities. This bridge can be a teacher, counselor, administrator, or parent. This finding aligns with Vygotsky's theory about learning and

the concept of the zone of proximal development, or the distance between what a learner can do unsupported and what a learner can do with a supportive adult or peers (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). This concept is widely used to study children's mental development in an educational context. The zone can be seen as a scaffolding, a structure of "support points" for performing an action, which can refer to the help or guidance received from an adult or more competent peer to permit the learner to work within their zone of proximal development.

In spite of efforts and funding, EL students are still left behind. Current pedagogical methods and support programs for EL students are not working. The analysis of teachers' beliefs and experiences showed educators are aware of the problem of ELs underperforming, but there is not much being done at the school level to help these students access college. All interviewees are aware of the achievement gap between ELs and traditional students. They also know that ELs perform worse than traditional students on various state assessments and fewer ELs attend college after high school. Educators know that EL students learn slightly differently than traditional students. Teachers reported classroom use of some techniques and strategies that were mentioned in the research. None of the educators mentioned funding being a problem.

Access to Higher Education

Earlier research revealed that the transition to postsecondary education presents many challenges for EL students (Callahan, 2005). All participants in this study understood that EL students are unable to access higher education as easily as are traditional students. Many said the main obstacle is the language barrier; however, there are also other factors, such as parental involvement, immigration status, teacher-student

relationships, and teacher training. When asked about opportunities that are presented to this population of students, all agreed that they get the same opportunities, but there is a gap between graduating from high school and enrolling in a college. The findings of previous research and this study indicate there needs to be more support for EL students when it comes to accessing higher education (Connelly et al., 2013; A. L. Cook et al., 2015; Dabach et al., 2018; Hall-Whittier, 2009).

Many educators expect that EL students will just know how to enroll in a college, and participants reported that there is insufficient support in place for these students. Research shows EL students need more assistance to get through the first year of college because they lack the appropriate support (Harrison & Shi, 2016). They are unable to acclimate to college life and academics as quickly as are native-speaking students (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). The numbers of EL students on college campuses are a lot smaller than the numbers of traditional students, which demonstrates that the methods applied in U.S. secondary schools lack effectiveness, and more needs to be done to minimize the achievement gap. Cultural awareness and understanding are essential in creating a welcoming, culturally inclusive atmosphere in schools, and effective school initiatives can positively influence EL students and their families on the road to college (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016).

School Initiatives

School-wide initiatives, where faculty work together as a team, positively support EL students (Nelson, 2018). A lack of cohesiveness among teachers, counselors, and assistant principals negatively affects EL students' learning (Takanishi & Menestrel, 2017). School initiatives were important to explore as a theme because past research

(Nelson, 2018; Ottow, 2019). showed programs that are school-wide and involve all staff produce the best results. Many educators are underprepared to reach and teach EL students despite the intention and training they receive. Far too often, the responsibility for supporting EL students falls to those who are already specialized and mobilized to meet these students' needs—the English learner department (Ottow, 2019). “While there may be a wider sense of urgency to address English learners’ underperformance issues, there may not be a shared sense of responsibility across the entire school” (Ottow, 2019, p. 16). The professional training and quality of teachers and educational administrators (counselors, principals, superintendents) is a variable that distinguishes between more- and less-effective schools (Lindholm-Leary, 2015). Among the many factors that affect student performance, research indicates the quality of teachers has the most significant impact on the educational success of all students (Boyd et al., 2009; Loeb et al., 2014; Samson & Collins, 2012). A lot of research focuses on examining teachers’ involvement and how it affects students’ decisions to pursue higher education, and more relevant training for educators is suggested (Blanchard & Muller, 2015; Callahan & Gándara, 2004).

Supporting ELs

Nelson (2018) found that differentiating instruction is crucial; instructions must be designed based on proper assessments. Previous research showed EL students benefit from evidence-based instructional strategies (Nelson, 2018). Therefore, more testing should be done to ensure a correct placement for EL students. There is a lack of proper assessment according to T1 and AP1. Both participants expressed that the language survey given to families is insufficient to assess EL placement.

It should be noted that the teachers who participated in the study reported using some of the successful models and strategies studied by Vygotsky (1971), Bruner (1961), and Huynh (2017). For example, they were differentiating instruction, scaffolding, positive relationships, sending letters home in students' native language, and having ESOL aids in the classroom. AP1 also mentioned having an ESOL chair who was able to teach in students' native language (Spanish) as well as co-plan with general education teachers. However, there is no guarantee that teachers who know these appropriate strategies effectively apply them in their classrooms. AP2 reported that she knew her teachers were trained, though she believed some teachers apply the strategies in their instructions and others are unwilling to do so. The implication is that for schools to be effective in educating and embracing a diverse student population, the whole staff needs to work together. Educators must be well-trained and willing to accept the challenge of teaching EL students. Their classrooms and schools need to reflect the cultural diversity of the student body. This can be done by using posters, pictures, and quotes representing the culturally different students who are present on that campus.

Past research demonstrated that teachers and other educators must be well-prepared to teach diverse classrooms. Harrison and Shi (2016) believed that to achieve educational success, EL students must have access to appropriate curriculum delivered by highly-qualified teachers using a variety of highly-appropriate resources that match the students' needs and grade levels. "ELLs are often concentrated in low-performing schools with untrained or poorly-trained teachers. The shortage of teachers who can work with this population is a big problem in a growing number of states" (Sanchez, 2016, p. 86). The study participants were only required to take the ESOL endorsement training

when they started working in their professions. Some educators mentioned that training is available and recommended but is not required, and not many teachers and other educators believe they need more training. Teachers and administrators who worked at AVID schools said there was a lot of training geared toward EL students and culturally-diverse classrooms. AVID training takes place on school campuses and is advertised online and through email and flyers. Teachers and other educators can come train at any time, but not all of them do.

“Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes an entire school community to help English language learners (ELLs) succeed” (Colorin Colorado, 2022, para. 3). Counselors, teachers, and APs need to work together to implement school-wide programs and bring more cultural diversity on campus. Previous research showed schools with a cohesive group of educators working together exhibit more gains (Lindholm-Leary, 2015). None of the participants reported a school-wide initiative that has positively affected EL students. Participants from the same schools did not work closely with each other, and it seemed the responsibility to support ELs was shifted between counselors, teachers, and APs.

When asked about whether EL students take the same challenging classes, participants had different answers. One of the counselors reported that she believed teachers need to advertise their courses more to encourage EL students to register for them. Teachers, when asked the same question, mostly responded that EL students need more support from counselors and AVID. APs agreed that their teachers were insufficiently trained and not all followed the appropriate instruction to teach diverse classrooms. They believed more training is needed. Two of the three APs noted that

school counselors should be students' best support and should be responsible for the placement of EL students in college-level classes. One AP reported that if the counselors would advise EL students to take on more challenging courses, then these students would be accessing higher education at a higher rate. The ASCA (2012, 2015) reported that school counselors need to be a part of the learning process for EL students, but it is the whole school community that must be involved to create a supportive atmosphere in which all students can thrive.

When examining the responses from the three different groups of educators, what emerged was a lack of cohesiveness within their schools. They did not report any school-wide programs where all staff participated and everyone worked as a team. Collaboration between faculty and teamwork, as well as school-wide interventions, are most effective in educating EL students because it makes those students feel as though everyone is a part of a team and they have many supports to ask questions of or request assistance.

A whole-school approach is supported by research (C. Lopez et al., 2022). As indicated by the participants, school counselors can be an effective resource. A learning environment that calls for a total-school approach with the collaboration of APs, teachers, and school counselors has been advocated as a positive, inclusive, and enriched environment for EL students to develop academically and socially (Clemente & Collison, 2000). "The role of the school counselor is to support the academic, career, personal, and social needs of all students, while maintaining confidentiality, trust, and multicultural competence" (ASCA, 2012, p. 27).

Multiculturally competent school counselors advocate for equity and resources for all students (ASCA, 2012). Most schools in Pinellas County have some initiatives to help

EL students and their families get more involved in school (Pinellas County Schools, 2019). Schools mostly use translation services, have bilingual assistants, and send letters home in students' native language. Previous research also showed that to increase parental involvement, schools should be offering more ESL, bilingual, or family literacy programs to the families and using bilingual staff and integrating bilingual and multicultural materials in school displays (C. Lopez et al., 2022).

When asked about what the school currently does and should do more of to encourage parents to be more involved, educators reported that they relied heavily on ESOL assistants to translate or used translation services promote a positive school environment that embraced cultural diversity. "We have many Spanish-speaking teachers and administrators; we let them use translation services whenever they have trouble communicating and we send letters home in their native languages" (C1).

All the participants' responses on how they communicate with families, how they were aware of ELs, and all the strategies that they use seem to be somewhat effective. One thing missing from the reports about services, strategies, instructions, and initiatives was cultural awareness. Cultural awareness on campus and in the classroom helps EL students to feel more comfortable and supported (C. Lopez et al., 2022). Although some participants mentioned school-wide events, none of the nine participants said anything about cultural awareness or about celebrating diversity.

Recommendations

This study adds to the current research about ELs and their academic achievement and access to postsecondary education. Based on the insights from this study, recommendations for the future are presented in this section related to a holistic

approach, celebrating diversity and multiculturalism, teaching the whole person approach, quality of instruction and educators' preparation, integrated classrooms, state and local funding allocation, and assessment and accountability measures.

Holistic Approach

A holistic approach to education engages the whole person in the learning process; that includes their intellect, emotions, and creativity. That can be an effective tool when learning a language because it supports each learner's individuality and encourages them to find their true potential. "Holistic learning is considered one of the best educational practices, especially when teaching children. The holistic methods of education are concentrated on improving just the right personality attributes without altering the learner's identity and characteristics" (BeFluentNow, 2021, Benefits of a Holistic Approach to Education section, para. 1).

To address all the factors in a student's life, schools need to be communicating with the families of ELs early, instead of only testing the students for English proficiency. "School administrators and teachers need to meet with families and get a more holistic understanding of the student, including their strengths, goals, expectations for education, challenges and fears" (Shapiro, as cited in Sanchez, 2016, p. 84). EL students are not only the responsibility of the EL teachers and the EL department. The entire school staff, including teachers, counselors, secretaries, administration, and everyone else working at the school, should embrace the cultural diversity of students and celebrate the successes of EL students, along with their peers. Calderón et al. (2011) emphasized the importance of a whole-school approach as well as getting families involved. All EL educators should participate in the support system's establishment and

sustainability (Calderón & Slakk, 2017). Teachers need to receive coaching from master coaches, administrators, and instructional support staff as well as conduct peer observations and self-reflective observations (Calderón & Slakk, 2017).

Previous research demonstrated that school counselors' involvement in advising and scheduling EL students into higher-level classes is important because they are the ones who work with students directly and who decide, together with the students and their parents, which classes would be most appropriate for the students to take (Kanno & Grosik, 2012). With no substantial access to advanced classes, students' opportunities to partake in college preparatory courses is affected, which lowers their academic achievements (Kanno & Grosik, 2012). School counselors also work directly with the parents and families of EL students so it is important that they advertise those opportunities to students and encourage parents to be more involved. When school counselors in the study were asked about parental involvement, their answers were similar to those of teachers—parents were not as involved as they would hope.

Celebrating Diversity and Multiculturalism

Public schools today are becoming increasingly diverse. They are made up of students of many different ethnicities, backgrounds, and language-speaking abilities, including young ELs who are developing proficiency in the English language.

It is important to keep in mind that there are strong individual differences between young ELs in terms of age, cognitive, social and emotional development and language proficiency in their home language, and English, as well as diverse experiences in terms of formal education. (Dombi et al., 2022, p. 9)

Though ELs graduate from high school at lower rates, Shapiro said the problem is not that they are learning English, it is that the education system views their lack of English

as a deficit rather than considering what they have to offer, including their first language, their culture, and their academic abilities (as cited in Sanchez, 2016, p. 83).

Teaching the Whole Person Approach

It is important to mention that all students should be treated as unique individuals. Every student should be looked at as a whole person, which means a person with unique needs, feelings, desires, culture and background, biases, and dreams and hopes for the future. The future of education must take that approach into consideration when planning, assessing, and implementing new curricula to educate future generations. Educating the whole person requires getting to know the students and their relationship to the community. Huynh (2017) explained that teaching to the whole person involves tapping into students' cognitive, affective, physical and spiritual development.

Quality of Instruction and Educators' Preparation

To decide what skills to teach and what methods to use, students' current levels of content knowledge must be assessed first. The best approach is to design assessments that recognize and value the knowledge and experience students bring to their education. This includes allowing them to use all their language resources in the language they speak at home through a process known as translanguaging to demonstrate what they know and can do in different subject areas. It allows students to use language practices they already possess and is essential to providing important confidence (C. Lopez et al., 2022).

Schools must provide an inclusive learning environment for all. This can be done by following the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework of instruction and methods that guides the design and development of curricula and lessons

to make learning environments inclusive, inviting, and effective for all students (C. Lopez et al., 2022).

The UDL framework is rooted in three distinct principles: (a) provide multiple means of representation, (b) provide multiple means of action and expression, and (c) provide multiple means of engagement. The framework is a reminder for teachers to offer variety in their instruction and to exercise flexibility so EL students are able to demonstrate what they know and are able to do (C. Lopez et al., 2022).

Schools must keep students' families involved because learning continues even after the end of the school day. Parental support is a key factor in students' academic success (C. Lopez et al., 2022).

Other effective strategies include DL education, sheltered immersion, full immersion, and ESOL pull-out method (Huynh, 2017). DL education is the most socially inclusive because it focuses on having all students learn in one language for half of the day, and then switch later in the day (Huynh, 2017). The schools that were contained in the sample were using methods similar to sheltered immersion. This model is often used to provide intensive content instruction to ELs by trained ESOL teachers who provide extensive scaffolding and differentiation based on language needs. The English immersion practice has been found to be the least effective because it is socially isolating (Huynh, 2017). "Sheltered immersion is the 'preferable' model for secondary schools because it doesn't outsource content instruction to ELs. Instead, the EL teachers co-plan to share strategies that scaffold instruction and facilitate interaction with the tasks" (Huynh, 2017, p. 83). Another model mentioned in previous research is transitional bilingualism, where teachers who are ESOL-endorsed and highly trained teach ELs in

English and in their native language. The role of the teacher should be to facilitate and assist in the learning process so learners are able to construct their own knowledge (McLeod, 2019).

Bruner, just like Vygotsky, emphasized the social nature of learning, citing that other people should help a learner develop skills through the process of scaffolding. Bruner's (1961) concept of discovery learning proposes that learners construct their own knowledge and do this by organizing and categorizing information using a coding system. Bruner believed the most effective way to develop a coding system is to discover it rather than being told by the teacher. Bruner, just like Vygotsky, highly emphasized the concept of scaffolding (McLeod, 2019).

Integrated Classrooms

Sanchez (2016) believed students who are learning English should, as much as possible, be integrated into classrooms with students who are English proficient. But this rarely happens. High school students who are learning English are funneled into separate sections of courses like math, reading, and history with other EL students. These classes have the same credits and description as the mainstream classes, but lack the same academic rigor. This approach greatly affects EL students' readiness for college.

Teachers should include students' culture and diversity in the classroom by respecting students' backgrounds and cultures. They can integrate children's home cultures, family practices, and first languages into everyday routines and experiences such as greetings, or post pictures of students' families and posters about their culture (Martinez, 2017).

State and Local Funding Allocation

A lack of state funding should not be contributing to the underperformance of EL students. The Florida Department of Education's Bureau of Student Achievement Through Language Acquisition supports over 265,000 ELs in school districts across Florida (Florida Department of Education, 2023a). The Bureau is also responsible for ensuring these students receive comprehensible instruction by monitoring schools and districts for compliance with state and federal rules. Additionally, the Bureau manages a Title III grant, currently more than \$43 million, that is dispersed to eligible districts. This federal funding focuses on providing supplemental professional development to teachers of ELs and on providing scientifically research-based academic programs to assist ELs in their language acquisition (Florida Department of Education, 2023b). Yet, educators from the chosen county reported they have very limited resources and insufficient training. They also reported that current professional development regarding ELs is not helping them and they lack the incentive to attend those training sessions because they do not get paid for their time. Some schools have teacher aids speaking in foreign languages, yet some schools do not have aids for their students who speak Portuguese or Haitian. Only one school reported having an ESOL coordinator to help teachers to plan lessons and activities that support EL students (Pinellas County Schools, 2019). Perhaps more attention should be brought to the fact that the funding exists, but what happens with the money if the schools report so few resources are available? It is either that the funding is allocated somewhere else or educators at school level are not aware of the resources available to them. As noted in previous research (Huynh, 2017), sheltered immersion was

found to be effective in improving the academic performance of these students, yet in this study the majority of the participants reported a lack of EL co-teachers and bilingual aids.

Assessment and Accountability

Research shows assessments designed primarily for native English speakers are not as reliable for EL students. Linguistic complexities unrelated to the content measured, test anxiety, and vocabulary limitations can all limit the effectiveness of standardized tests. The legislature indicates every student should be involved in testing, including ELs and students with disabilities. The intent is to provide appropriate assessment based on the same high standards and ensure all students are part of the indicators used for school accountability (Liu et al., 2017). Many instructional decisions that will be made can have negative consequences for EL students if their knowledge and skills are inappropriately tested. Proper assessment can improve the quality of instruction and assessment for these students. Abedi (2006) indicated “students learning English are likely to fail when they do not have access to an effective education of English as a second language (ESL) program” (p. 2288). Lack of access to effective and appropriate education may also affect their assessment results. “Research has clearly demonstrated that assessments designed and normed mainly for native English speakers may not as reliable and valid for ELL students” (Abedi, 2006, p. 2289).

Discussion

The beliefs and experiences of all participants were found to be similar across all three groups of educators and findings were supported by past research. Educators believe all EL students are offered the same opportunities, but the language barrier hinders their ability to become college-ready. The opportunities and resources for

students to participate in college readiness courses and programs are there, though schools lack the resources needed to guide these students on the right path. EL students need someone to encourage them and guide them toward these opportunities. Parents often are unable to speak English and there is no one at home who can motivate EL students to pursue college preparatory courses and programs. Some families need their high school students to work to help support the family. Educators believe the parents of ELs did not attend college and do not speak English. One participant also mentioned that some ELs lack a Social Security number. Therefore, for some EL students, there are fewer opportunities available because they cannot work, go to college, or have a driver's license.

Educators blame students' home life, lack of parent involvement, and language barriers for adding to the existing achievement gap. Uncaring and uninvolved parents, according to Augustin (2018), is a myth and needs to be debunked. Augustin (2018) found parents want to be involved in their child's education; however, educators must take into consideration the cultural factors and language barriers before they make any assumptions. Mees (2012) explained that teachers must increase their awareness of parents' perceptions of authority and the role of their first language for success in their children's English literacy. Teachers also need to understand parents' role as co-teachers at home. All educators should be more aware of the cultural differences among their students. The lack of support from educators, schools, and parents is what puts EL students behind, creating achievement gaps.

The U.S. education system must operate within the confines of law. Some laws may have consequences that prohibit cost-effective solutions to close the achievement

gap and deny EL students opportunities to improve their academic proficiency while their English proficiency develops. Deficiencies in the system can be seen in lower graduation rates, which leads to fewer opportunities for ELs (Mees, 2012).

Significance of the Research Study

This research study was conducted to explore and study the beliefs and experiences of high school educators regarding EL students and the achievement gap, and to answer the question: What beliefs and experiences do school administrators, school counselors, and teachers from Pinellas County public high schools have regarding the achievement gap between ELs and native speakers in pursuing higher education?

The study is significant because of the researcher's experience as an EL student in high school herself and her significant struggle to access higher education and college prep programs. As a Grade 10–12 student in high school, the researcher was not aware of the opportunities and supports available, and despite being a good student with a high GPA, was not recommended that the researcher try more challenging coursework. The researcher was able to access and attain higher education after high school; however, many EL students miss opportunities and are unsuccessful. This research is significant and important because it has the potential to inspire other EL students to pursue opportunities in higher education.

Implications of the Study

Based on the data collected, teachers may be insufficiently educated and lack the skills to provide EL students with enough support, even though all are ESOL endorsed. When asked about professional development, all three teachers said they were sufficiently trained. When the APs were asked a similar question about teacher

professional development and readiness, all responded that not all teachers are sufficiently trained and the majority lack teaching strategies geared toward the ELs in their classrooms. This discrepancy in their responses indicates school districts lack proper professional development for teachers and all educators.

It is obvious that all the courses and programs the schools offer are available to all students. Course descriptions and requirements can be found on each of the school's websites or through the guidance office. There are student services staff (i.e., counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses) available to answer questions and provide the needed support at all times. Teachers are open to student questions and comments, are flexible, and usually can be reached by email, school messenger, or in person. These opportunities and supports exist for all students; however, they are less accessible for students who are new to the country and those who are not proficient in English.

The findings are in line with Vygotsky and Cole's (1978) sociocultural theory, which describes learning as being derived from interacting with people. Vygotsky believed that language, culture, social interactions, and thought are all connected. Based on his theory, to learn and develop, students must acquire culturally valuable skills through collaborative activities involving more knowledgeable adults who can guide them. If there is no social interaction occurring and inadequate support from adults is given, learning is less likely to occur. Also, if teachers are unaware of this construct and lack adequate training, then EL students will be left out because educators are unaware of their needs. All teachers in the current study stated they feel confident regarding teaching and differentiating instructions; however, the APs believed teachers need more training for ELs. Past research showed many teachers are unprepared to accommodate the varying

linguistic abilities of students in their classrooms and often are unaware of other methods and strategies (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Rizzuto, 2017; D. Rodriguez et al., 2010).

Previous research demonstrated that school counselors' involvement in advising and scheduling EL students into higher-level classes is important because they are the ones who work with students directly and who decide, together with the students and their parents, which classes would be most appropriate for the students to take (Rizzuto, 2017). With no substantial access to advanced classes, students' opportunities to partake in college preparatory courses are affected, which lowers their academic achievement (Kanno & Grosik, 2012). School counselors also work directly with parents and families of EL students so it is important that they advertise those opportunities to students and encourage parents to be more involved.

The results are important because they demonstrate the perceptions and biases of educators who are school based and work face-to-face every day with students. Educators can use these results to assess the needs of schools and ELs from a different perspective. By taking state-wide assessments, students' achievement and proficiency are measured by scores. Teachers' effectiveness is also measured by collecting data. This study brings insight into what goes on in schools and in classrooms from a new perspective. This should help stakeholders with making decisions related to the allocation of funds, Common Core curriculum, assessment and accountability, and professional development.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study examined the achievement gap through the lens of educators, and results supports previous research findings completed in this area (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Kanno & Cromley, 2013, 2015; Kanno & Grosik, 2012; Rizzuto, 2017; D.

Rodriguez et al., 2010). Educators' preparation is important for student success, and all three groups of participants should be getting adequate training. An often made assumption is that teachers are mostly responsible for the academic achievement of EL students and need to be properly trained because they are the ones who are evaluated by principals. Teachers, however, feel very confident in their work with EL students and believe they do not require additional professional education when it comes to proper methods for educating diverse students. A recommendation as a result of this study is that educators get more training in a holistic approach to educating students, as well as teamwork. Better relationships should be established among students, teachers, counselors, and APs. All parties must work together to be effective.

There is a need for teachers to be prepared to teach ELs effectively. Teachers need to be made aware and trained in the best practices for teaching ELs in their classrooms; however, they are not the only educators working with EL students. All staff in a school should be properly trained and well-equipped in the skills needed to support students from various demographic backgrounds. Previous research supports a school-wide holistic approach to educating ELs (Kanno & Cromley, 2013, 2015; Kanno & Grosik, 2012; Rizzuto, 2017). Educators must be educating students using different modalities and methods. This relates to teaching them vocabulary acquisition, providing individual and small group support, providing opportunities for EL students to learn the written and the oral language, and encouraging them on their way to college. Perhaps more culturally relevant training needs to be provided for all staff in U.S. schools.

The results demonstrate that the most significant obstacle for EL students to be college ready is their lack of the fluency in the English language. This denotes the

importance of studying the language acquisition and ESL theories. Educators would benefit from being more aware of how a second language is learned and familiar with the most important theories of language acquisition, as well as the stages of becoming fluent in a second language. This approach would help all educators understand that being academically ready for college can go hand-in-hand with acquiring a second language.

Faculty and staff preparation programs must be designed to include the identified best practices to teach and support ELs effectively and holistically. Linking all faculty preparation and best practices for ELs will indeed have a positive impact on the efforts to commence the closing of the achievement gap that currently exists between ELs and native-speaking students in U.S. schools. Also, schools must focus on the implementation of best practices throughout the school year. Best practices for ELs need to be evident and visible in the school-wide goals and there needs to be an implementation plan in place to follow through with the faculty and staff.

Conclusion

Based on the collected data, it can be stated that despite the awareness of the issue and the implementation of some interventions, programs, and accountability measures, ELs lack the support they need and they are not accessing higher education at the same rate as their English-speaking counterparts. Educators are aware of EL students' struggles, the achievement gap, and the factors that create this gap. Family and culture background, SES were also identified as factors affecting EL students' education in previous studies (Sheng et al., 2011). Perhaps the current strategies are not effective, or the interventions, programs, and accountability measures are not being studied and evaluated accurately, or less attention is given to this underachievement crisis overall.

Educators believe this is mainly due to the language barrier and home life. Many EL students and their parents have high aspirations about college, but they have many misconceptions and limited information about college preparatory courses and programs (Kanno & Cromley, 2013), which demonstrates the lack of resources. EL students and their families need more awareness of such programs and services.

Many EL students are unaware of what information and assistance are available to them. They may be unfamiliar with the role of a school counselor, as many newcomers had no counselors at their previous schools. That is why public education and its processes need to be reassessed, and programs such as ESL reinvented. By looking at education from a holistic point of view, with an all hands on deck approach, the chances of students being heard will increase and the achievement gap may decrease.

Research in education indicates educators and leaders of educational institutions should use a holistic approach to teach diverse students (Loeb et al., 2014; Samson & Collins, 2012). Teachers and all staff must be sufficiently trained in appropriate areas and should be able to work as a team to provide ELs with proper instructions and supports.

Teachers in general education areas, including English, math, and reading, get accessed at least a couple of times per semester, yet EL classes and EL teachers are not treated with the same importance as general education teachers. Even though EL students' scores on statewide assessments affect the overall school grade, most schools rely on the "2-year waivers" that EL students may use in place of a passing score on the required statewide assessments. Students who are in the United States for less than 2 years and pass at least one semester exam in any English class with a "D" are waived from the state-required reading and Algebra assessments. Even though we cannot expect

ELs to read proficiently after being in the United States for less than 2 years, I am not sure if giving them a waiver and forgetting about them is how they should be served. They still need to learn how to speak and read proficiently.

As an EL learner and an educator myself, I can see the issue from two different perspectives. I can say that not much has changed since the time I was in high school receiving EL services to now, seeing my students struggling because inadequate attention and assistance is all that is offered to them. They are usually grouped together in the same low-level courses, labeled as if English language learning was a disability, and no one questions their aspirations about the future. Their pursuit of postsecondary education, or choosing to enter the workforce early, may be influenced by their background and culture, but not providing them with information and resources regarding their options is adding to the achievement gap, a gap that exists in the most diverse and culturally rich country in the world—the United States. They may be newcomers, immigrants, U.S. born or not, all are part of the society and all belong to the U.S. school system. They deserve equal access to education and resources to assist them with options after high school.

More research is needed in this area, especially regarding holistic school practices, evaluating best practices, and assessing EL students' skills and knowledge. Also, there needs to be more awareness of the achievement gap, and school and district leaders must find efficient ways to reinvent the programs and initiatives currently employed to positively affect student outcomes.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Permission to Conduct Research Study

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Mr. XXX:

I request permission to conduct a research study at XX High School, XY High School and XZ High School. I am currently enrolled in a Doctoral Program at National Louis University in Tampa, FL, to earn a Doctoral Degree in Administration of Higher Education, and am in the process of writing my Doctoral Dissertation. The study is entitled "English Language Learners and Their Access To Post-Secondary Education: Examining Their Achievements And College Readiness."

I hope that you will allow me to recruit a minimum of 6 participants from each of the three schools to anonymously complete interviews regarding their experience with English Language Learners and their access to college preparatory courses and programs. Due to the nature of the study, my intent is to interview at least one assistant principal, one counselor and one teacher from each school.

If approval is granted, I will contact the participants directly. Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at my email address: [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Anna Kalinowska

National Louis University, Tampa, FL

APPENDIX B

Approval Letter



Vision:
100% Student Success

Mission:
"Educate and prepare each student for college, career and life."

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ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
301 Fourth St. SW
P.O. Box 2942
Largo, FL 33779-2942
Ph. (727) 588-6000

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December 15, 2020

Anna Kalinowska
National Louis University
Re: Proposal number 005-2021

Dear Ms. Kalinowska:

We are pleased to inform you that all required documentation has been received and reviewed. Your research project titled, "*English Language Learners and Their Access to Post-Secondary Education: Examining Their Achievements and College Readiness*" has been approved. Approval is based on the application submitted to this office for review.

Researchers are responsible for ongoing requirements while conducting approved research. Ongoing requirement responsibilities include obtaining prior approval from the PCS IRB for any modifications of the previously approved research before implementing any proposed modifications, including notifying the PCS IRB of any changes in study personnel. Ongoing requirement responsibilities also include participation in the continuing review process. The continuing review process allows the PCS IRB to monitor progress of the study and ensure the study continues to meet the requirements of approval.

This approval expires one year from the date of this letter. If the study extends beyond one year a request for continuing review will need to be submitted at least 60 days prior to the expiration of the current study for approval for the following year. Please include any modifications/changes to the current study in the application.

Upon completion of the research study, researchers/study investigators are responsible for supplying the Office of Assessment, Accountability, and Research with a written summary of their findings and confirmation of data disposal timeline. AAR reserves the right to provide input that the author will consider prior to dissemination of the results. In addition, if the anonymity of participant(s), school(s), or the district is compromised, AAR reserves the right to restrict dissemination of the results. Any publications resulting from the research including journal articles, book chapter, or dissertation must be submitted to AAR promptly. Researchers/study investigators may be requested to report detailed research findings to interested district personnel at a meeting arranged by AAR.

Due to the COVID-19 health crisis, capacity to participate in research activities will be limited. PCS must prioritize the health and safety of the students, staff, and communities we serve, as such any research activities involving in-person student or staff contact, or school-based visits are not permitted. PCS IRB final approval does not require schools/staff/students or families to participate in any proposed research; participation in the aforementioned project remains at the discretion of the PCS contact (i.e., principal) and must be voluntary for any intended participants. Any electronic or virtual data collection activities must be completed outside of the PCS assessment calendar and cannot interfere with core instructional time.

If there are any questions or if additional information is needed, please contact the AAR office at 727-588-6253.

Best

Astrum M. Frei, Ph.D.
Executive Manager, Evaluation - Assessment, Accountability, & Research
Pinellas County School District

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Letter to Participants

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Anna Maria Kalinowska and I am a doctoral student in the College of Administration of Higher Education at National Louis University in Tampa working on my dissertation. This study is for research purposes only and will not be used in any organizational decision making.

I invite you to volunteer your participation in my dissertation research. The purpose of the study is to examine teachers, counselors, and administrators' experiences regarding working with English Language Learners. The study will focus on a question: What beliefs and experiences do school administrators, school counselors and teachers from Central Florida Public High Schools have regarding the achievement gap between English language Learners and Native Speakers in pursuing higher education?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate in this research, you will be asked to schedule and complete a Zoom interview with myself at a time that is convenient for you within the following 30 days. Research interviews will begin immediately and are targeted to conclude in the next 30 days. Each personal zoom based interview is expected to run for no longer than 60 minutes. The interview answers will be recorded.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences, and employed to inform coaching practices at National Louis University but participants' identities will in no way be revealed (data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants).

The information you provide for this research will be treated confidentially, and all data collected will be kept securely. Also, codes instead of names will be used when reporting the research data, to maintain your anonymity.

To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure recordings, transcripts, and field notes in a locked cabinet in her home office. Only the researcher will have access to data. Recorded data and transcribed data will be stored on my personal password protected laptop. After the completion of the study all data, including recordings and transcriptions of recordings will be stored securely for three years, as per National Louis University's IRB requirements. At the end of the three years, all data and other information will be deleted, and all written data will be shredded.

There are no anticipated risks or benefits, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to Pinellas County Schools and other schools and school districts looking to initiate or refine induction coaching.

You also have the right to review the results of the research. If you decide to do so, you can contact me at [REDACTED] or phone-[REDACTED] I will email you a copy of the study.

Additionally, should you have specific concerns or questions, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Marguerite Chabau at National Louis University - Tampa, by phone at 1-800-366-6581, or at 941-504-6187, or by email at mchabau@nl.edu, or the Co-chairs of NLU's Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth; email: Shaunti.Knauth@nl.edu; phone: (312) 261-3526; or Dr. Kathleen Cornett; email: kcornett@nl.edu; phone: (844) 380-5001.

Thank you for your consideration.

I have read and understand the information explaining the purpose of this research and my rights and responsibilities as a participant. My signature below designates my consent to voluntarily participate in this research, according to the terms and conditions outlined above.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions for Counselors

1. Which grade do you work directly with?
2. How long have you been working at XYZ high school?
3. Are you aware of the number of EL students at your school? Do you work directly with them?
4. Does counseling EL students differ from traditional students? How are EL students different/alike?
5. What strategies are you implementing to ensure that you provide services to EL that meet their needs?
6. What are your thoughts on English Language Learners' access to post-secondary education? Do you think EL and their English-speaking counterparts are given the same opportunities? Why or why not?
7. What interventions are implemented at your school to help EL students?
8. An achievement gap exists between EL students and non-EL students, and persistent low achievement scores among EL students in Florida demonstrate that more attention be given to this issue. EL Students in Florida perform lower on FSA than traditional students. Research demonstrates that many of them have the desire to go to college, but few attain admissions. Why do you think that is? What are factors that affect their academic achievement and access to post-secondary education?
9. Are EL students just as likely as traditional students to pursue college level classes? AP? Dual enrollment? Why or why not?
10. Do you advocate on behalf of EL students and their families? Are EL students' families involved in their school life? Why or why not?
11. What do you think the school can do to encourage more EL students to pursue higher education degrees after high school? What are some factors that influence EL students' decisions to pursue a college degree?
12. What are some initiatives implemented in your school that help ELs with college planning?
13. Are there any programs or initiatives implemented at your school that are supposed to help EL students' families with college planning process and provide answers to their questions?

All interview question responses will be evaluated as to whether a follow up question will be required.

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions for Teachers

1. What class do you teach and how long have you been a teacher at XYZ High School?
2. How many of your students are considered English Learners? How are they doing in your classes?
3. What do you experience as most rewarding when teaching students? Do students with limited English proficiency learn differently than traditional students? If so, how?
4. An achievement gap exists between EL students and non-EL students, and persistent low achievement scores among EL students in Florida demonstrate that more attention be given to this issue might be beneficial. EL Students in Florida perform lower on FSA than traditional students. Research demonstrates that many of them have the desire to go to college, but few attain admissions. Why do you think that is? What are factors that affect their academic achievement and access to post-secondary education?
5. What do you think affects their decision to pursue/not pursue a college preparatory course? AP? Dual Enrollment? Or?
6. What affects ELs decision to pursue post-secondary education?
7. Do you think that students born in US to immigrant parents have the same needs and abilities as students who come from other countries?
8. Do you perceive a difference in academic achievement in Latino? Asian? European students?
9. Vygotsky's theory, the zone of proximal development, describes the gap between what the student knows and what he/she does not yet know. The process of closing this gap involves the student possessing skills that he/she may not yet have but will develop with the help of a more knowledgeable instructor. This concept is similar to scaffolding. Do you engage students in opportunities that lie within the student's zone of proximal development? What instructions/activities do you implement in your classroom that stretch each child's limits of capabilities?
10. Current educational designs recognize that every learner is different and unique, and that he/she is affected by their embedded context. Do you engage your students in critical thinking and learning activities that focus on the learner within their social, historical and cultural context? Are they the same for EL students and traditional students?
11. Learner-centered teaching prepares students to become autonomous learners, who assume responsibility for their own learning. What do you do to ensure that your students engage in active, goal-oriented and self-regulated learning?

12. What strategies do you use to build positive relationships with your students?
13. Have you engaged in professional development that focuses specifically on EL students? What are some key strategies that you learned from it that you implement in your classroom that address EL students' unique needs?
14. Do you believe that teachers receive enough PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT to be prepared to teach EL students?
15. Are EL students' parents involved in their students' learning? Why or why not? Do they contact you often? Do they request parent-teacher conferences?
16. What are your thoughts on English Language Learners' access to post-secondary education? Do you think EL and their English-speaking counterparts are given the same opportunities? Why or why not?
17. Do you know if EL students in your classroom are making plans to pursue post-secondary education? What are you doing to encourage and motivate them to go to college?
18. What do you think the school can do to encourage more EL students to pursue higher education degrees after high school?
19. What can the school do to encourage parents to be more involved?

All interview question responses will be evaluated as to whether a follow up question will be required.

APPENDIX F

Interview Questions for Assistant Principals

1. What are your thoughts on English Language Learners' access to post-secondary education? Do you think EL and their English-speaking counterparts are given the same opportunities? Why or why not?
2. What interventions are implemented at your school to help EL students?
3. An achievement gap exists between EL students and non-EL students, and persistent low achievement scores among EL students in Florida demonstrate that more attention be given to this issue. EL Students in Florida perform lower on FSA than traditional students. Research demonstrates that many of them have the desire to go to college, but not many attain admissions. Why do you think that is? What are factors that affect their academic achievement and access to post-secondary education?
4. Are EL students just as likely as traditional students to pursue college level classes? AP? Dual enrollment? Why not?
5. What do you do to advocate on behalf of EL students and their families? Are EL students' families involved in their school life? Why or why not?
6. What do you think the school can do to encourage more EL students to pursue higher education degrees after high school? What are some factors that influence EL students' decisions to pursue a college degree?
7. What are some initiatives implemented in your school that help ELs with college planning?
8. Are there any programs or initiatives implemented at your school that are intended to help EL students' families with college planning process and provide answers to their questions?
9. Research findings indicated a need for more teacher training, so that teachers feel more prepared to teach in EL classrooms. Do you believe that your teachers are sufficiently trained to teach diverse student population? Why or Why not?
10. What strategies have you observed teachers implementing in their classrooms to ensure that they meet the needs of all students?

All interview question responses will be evaluated as to whether a follow up question will be required.