

AN INVESTIGATION OF ENGLISH LEARNERS' ACQUISITION OF ACADEMIC  
LANGUAGE TO OBTAIN READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

Liberty University  
November, 2012

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## ABSTRACT

This collective case study explored how third-grader English learners (ELs) acquire academic language to learn reading comprehension skills in a classroom setting. Many ELs have acquired basic interpersonal communication skills, but have not mastered cognitive academic language proficiency, or academic language. The researcher selected six third-grade ELs who functioned as developing and expanding learners. Although many of these students can read text and use problem-solving strategies to blend words and read fluently, they may experience difficulties understanding academic language. Data was collected through observations, interviews with the ELs' two mainstream teachers, document analysis, and field notes. Using open coding, the researcher reviewed the collected data to determine common trends and categories. The researcher observed that the two mainstream teachers demonstrated all the reading comprehension strategies through modeling and small-group instruction. If mainstream teachers use the appropriate strategies and techniques to help develop EL's academic language and reading comprehension skills, the researcher believes these students will become successful learners.

## **DEDICATION**

This qualitative collective case study is dedicated to all the ELs whom I have instructed throughout the years. You are resilient because you keep striving to achieve academic success. I am delighted to have served as your teacher because you are willing to learn and achieve academic success.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge my family, friends, and colleagues who assisted me through this educational journey.

I would like to acknowledge my Liberty University family for praying for me through this journey.

I would also like to acknowledge my principal, Dr. Williams; my assistant principal, Lynn Odom; and the elementary school's media specialists, Mrs. Trammell and Ms. Whisenant. Thank you for continuous support.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my chair, Dr. Harrison, and my committee members, Dr. Lannom and Dr. Cooper, for offering their support and guidance throughout this process.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION .....	4
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	5
LIST OF TABLES .....	9
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	10
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	11
Problem Statement .....	16
Purpose Statement.....	16
Significance of the Study .....	17
Limitations and Delimitations.....	18
Research Plan.....	19
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	22
Theoretical Framework.....	22
Review of the Literature .....	26
Academic Language and Reading Comprehension .....	28
Oral Language and Reading Skills .....	31
Reading Text.....	36
Summary .....	43
Definition of Terms.....	47

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	50
Research Design.....	50
Setting .....	52
Participants.....	52
Researcher’s Role/Personal Biography.....	54
Data Collection .....	56
IRB Procedures .....	59
Data Analysis .....	59
Credibility .....	62
Ethical Issues .....	63
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS .....	65
Participants.....	65
Research Question 1 .....	72
Research Question 2 .....	76
Research Question 3 .....	81
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	87
Summary of the Study .....	87
Discussion.....	92
Common Factors Contributing to Academic Success .....	102
Limitations .....	105
Implications.....	106
Recommendation for Further Study.....	109

Conclusion .....	110
Summary .....	110
REFERENCES .....	112
APPENDICES .....	119



## **LIST OF TABLES**

	Page
Table 1. Teachers' Interview Questions and Their Basis in the Literature .....	60
Table 2. Participant Demographics.....	72
Table 3. Students' Reading Comprehension Scores .....	98

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

- Adequate yearly progress (AYP)
- Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS)
- Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)
- College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)
- Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT)
- Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)
- English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)
- English intervention program (EIP)
- English language proficiency (ELP)
- English learners (ELs)
- English Second Language (ESL)
- Native language (L1)
- No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)
- Response to intervention (RTI)
- Second language (L2)
- The World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA)
- Zone of proximal development (ZPD)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The immigrant population is increasing in the United States (August, 2003; Nakamoto, Lindsey, & Manis, 2008). Within the last decade, a large number of English learners (ELs) have enrolled in the American school system. Ariza, Morales-Jones, Yahya, and Zainuddin (2006) stated that the term *English learners* is “widely employed to refer to students who are in the process of acquiring English in schools which English is the primary language of instruction” (p. 294).

In 2000, there were more than 9.7 million non-native English speakers residing in the United States (Pang & Kamil, 2004). Lucido, Marroquin, Reynolds, and Ymbert (2007) reported that 50 years ago, immigrants to the United States came from Germany, Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, or Italy. Today, immigrants to the United States come from Mexico, India, China, the Philippines, and Cuba. From 1997 to 2003, a 50% increase in EL enrollment occurred in Georgia schools and Hispanics represent the largest group of immigrants to enroll into U.S. schools (Ariza et al., 2006). The U.S. Census Bureau’s (2010) American Community Survey Reports from 2007 found that 19.7 percent of the United States’ population spoke another language other than English at home.

Educating non-native English speakers is a consistent challenge because most of these students have difficulties acquiring English language skills. Many ELs have acquired basic interpersonal communication skills, or social language, but they have not mastered cognitive academic language proficiency, or academic language. Cummins (2008) believed that academic language becomes more difficult to comprehend in

intermediate grades because many of the content area vocabulary words are not usually used in daily conversations.

Baumann and Graves (2010) defined academic language as the language used in a specific content area. Students who do not acquire academic language will most likely not achieve academic success because they will not understand the skills and the vocabulary related to the curriculum. Bauman and Graves added, “Therefore, it is critical for learners to acquire the vocabulary of specific academic domains if they are to understand and learn the body of domain knowledge” (p. 6). Egbert and Ernst-Slavit (2010) reported that components of academic language include vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. To become a proficient reader, all students must learn (a) content area and general vocabulary, (b) grammar and sentence structure, and (c) discourse. Vocabulary includes “general academic vocabulary that students may encounter in a variety of content areas, specialized academic vocabulary that is specific to a content area, and technical academic vocabulary necessary for discussing particular topics within a content area” (Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010, p. 9). Grammar and syntax structure are critical components of academic language because each subject area arranges and presents information in different ways (Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010). Discourse refers to the different types of organized text and the way they are used, for instance, plays, speeches, and reports (Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010). Many ELs have not developed academic language to read and comprehend text and as a result, they are falling behind in the classroom. Academic language is the language used in schools to communicate in class discussions and read texts (Freeman & Freeman, 2009).

August (2003) reported that children between the ages of 1 to 3 acquire 1,000 to 3,000 words in their primary language. ELs appear to be academically behind because they do not have the same English language experiences as native English speakers. Cummins (2008) reported that, “Children with normal language development come to school at age 4 and 5 fluent in their home language” (p. 1). Most ELs are not academically prepared and ready for kindergarten because English is not spoken at home. Strickland, Ganske, and Monroe (2002) reported that,

When a child’s home language or dialect is other than standard English, the likelihood of reading difficulty increases, particularly when the differences between the child’s dialect and the dialect of instruction are not taken into consideration or when the child’s language is viewed in a stereotypical way to make judgments about his or her learning capacity. (p. 8)

Numerous studies have been conducted to determine how ELs acquire language but there is still a gap in the literature on the way ELs acquire academic language to learn reading comprehension (August, 2003; Freeman & Freeman, 2009; Pang & Kamil, 2004). Pang and Kamil suggested that, “Much of the research on reading pertains to the reading of monolingual speakers of English that is L1 (native language) reading” (p. 3). To acquire reading comprehension skills, ELs must first acquire academic language. Research has indicated that students who have vocabulary knowledge can also comprehend text (Hippner-Page, 2000).

Mainstream educators are frustrated because they did not acquire training or skills to teach ELs how to read. Owocki (2003) explained, “Comprehending is an active process of using everything we know to construct a meaningful text, and filtering what

has been written through our own knowledge and experiences” (p. 3). Many ELs experience difficulties comprehending text because it is “a complex interactive process that begins with identifying words by using knowledge outside the text, accessing word meaning in context, recognizing grammatical structures, drawing inferences, and monitoring oneself to ensure that the text is making sense” (Sousa, 2011a, p. 195). Thus, mainstream educators must use different instructional strategies to teach these students how to read.

The educator’s role is to integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking into their daily instruction to help these students develop English language proficiency (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006). ELs may face more challenges acquiring academic languages than students who acquired English at birth. Many English learners find it difficult to participate successfully in school-based literacy activities (Strickland et al., 2002). Learning how to read a second language is a complex process because ELs must process information in their first language. The new information from the second language has to connect with the old information from the first language. Sousa (2011b) found that learners recycle information from one language to another. Then, they must transfer the information to the second language. Pang and Kamil (2004) stated that,

While it is true that many of the cognitive processes are shared in L1 (first language) and L2 (second language) reading, a key finding that emerged in the present review is that transfer does not take place automatically, at least not for many struggling L2 (second language) readers. (p. 24)

Thus, mainstream teachers instructing ELs must possess strategies and techniques to teach these students how to read, especially struggling readers. Cummins (2008)

recommended strategies to help ELs acquire academic language. He suggested that scaffold instruction is the best way to help ELs learn how to read. Newcomers can first write in their primary language and then, gradually begin writing in English

Strickland et al. (2002) reported that educating these students is not a simple task because ELs must adjust to the English language. Strickland et al. recommended six principles to help these students experience success in a classroom setting. These principles included (a) do not make the material too easy, (b) utilize visuals, (c) employ oral and written strategies, (d) review and practice vocabulary instruction, (e) allow smooth transitions, and (f) motivate and encourage students' progress.

Marzano (2010) stated that teachers have to differentiate instructions based on the ELs' instructional needs because they may have different academic experiences. Marzano added that ELs are placed into three categories. Marzano's three categories were "Those newly arrived in the United States but well prepared in the schools in their homeland; those newly arrived in the United States but not well prepared; and those who have been in the United States" (p. 6).

Educators enroll in ESL endorsement programs available throughout Georgia to acquire an ESL certification or endorsement to instruct ELs. These ESL endorsement programs provide strategies and instruction to teach English learners. The sheltered instruction observational protocol is used as a framework to teach language instruction through content areas (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). By using the sheltered instruction observational protocol framework, teachers are encouraged to compose content and language objectives to improve students' language and academic skills. The framework also encourages teachers to use language or speech that is appropriate to the

ELs' English language proficiency. Teachers may need to repeat and rephrase concepts to help these students comprehend text. Instruction should be provided or presented in alternate forms including visuals, multimedia, graphic organizers, and models (Echevarria et al., 2008).

### **Problem Statement**

English learners (ELs) are lacking the academic language needed to become proficient readers in American schools. These students have not acquired cognitive academic language proficiency to help them function effectively in the classroom. When ELs enter third grade, many of them are struggling to acquire academic success in reading because they may not have learned significant reading comprehension skills. Owocki (2003) stated that when proficient readers approach text they tap into their background knowledge and make a connection with the text. Proficient readers bring prior knowledge and new ideas together to interpret the text.

Brown and Perry (1991) shared that most native English speakers acquire about 3,000 words per year. ELs have to acquire more words per year than native English speakers do to be better proficient readers. Because most ELs are academically behind, they may experience difficulties achieving academic success in the classroom.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to determine how ELs acquire academic language to become successful readers in a classroom setting. This study was conducted because many ELs are experiencing difficulties developing reading comprehension skills. ELs enrolled in intermediate grades are experiencing difficulties acquiring academic language because the grade-level texts consist of high-level terminology and complex grammar



structures that are not used in daily conversations (Cummins, 2008). As a result, these students are severely falling behind.

During the 2011-2012 school year, the state of Georgia requested permission to replace the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) with the College and Career Ready Index (Department of Education, 2012). The NCLB Act is “a comprehensive plan to reform schools, change school culture, empower parents, and improve education” (Ariza et al., 2006). The NCLB states, all students, including ELs, are administered a yearly standardized assessment in math, reading, and English/language arts. Under the College and Career Ready Index, schools will be assessed in three areas, Achievement Scores, Progress scores, and Achievement Gap Closure Scores. All students will obtain the academic skills need to function and compete in the evolving workforce (Department of Education, 2012). ELs must become proficient readers to acquire career development skills and compete globally in today’s society.

In the state of Georgia, the World-Class Design and Assessment (WIDA) is used as a screening tool to assess ELs’ English language proficiency levels (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2011). After ELs are assessed and assigned an English language proficiency level as determined by WIDA, mainstream educators must provide meaningful and effective instruction. ELs are experiencing difficulties obtaining reading comprehension skills because they have not acquired English language proficiency. This population is a student-group in many Georgia schools. There are approximately 8,000 ELs enrolled in this study’s particular school district. The district has 110 schools and it serves 106,000 students.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it investigated how ELs acquire academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills. It attempted to provide understanding on how to educate ELs effectively so they can experience academic success. Because educators are required to provide ELs with a quality and meaning education, this study helped explore how these students learn reading comprehension skills. The researcher explored how ELs acquire language acquisition skills to learn academic language, resulting in the development of successful reading skills. Numerous researchers have stated that ELs acquire language in different stages (August, 2003; Chiappe & Siegel, 2006; Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009; Cummins, 1999). Therefore, the following questions guided this study:

1. How do English learners develop academic language proficiency to comprehend text?
2. How can English learners' utilization and comprehension of the academic language used during literacy instruction help them improve their reading comprehension skills?
3. What instructional strategies are effective in enabling English learners to develop academic language to comprehend text in a classroom setting?

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study was limited to English learners attending a single Title 1 elementary school. It addressed these students in a single grade level, the third grade. Another limitation was that a small sample of a minority group was selected as participants. A final limitation was that the English learners' general education teachers may not have obtained an ESOL endorsement or certificate.

This study was delimited to six English learners functioning on the English language proficiency levels of 3 and 4. According to the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research (2007), Level 3 (developing) conveys that students are beginning to use academic language in content areas. They are able to state sentences that are more complex. Errors are still present in their speech but their speech is comprehensible. In Level 4 (expanding), students are using particular academic language related to subject areas. Students functioning on the fourth level are able to verbalize a variety of sentences; however, their speech includes errors. According to Egbert and Ernst-Slavit (2010), “At this level students may have difficulty understanding and using some idioms, figures of speech, and words with multiple meanings” (p. 27).

Selecting students who are functioning on Level 3 and Level 4 was critical to this research because they are still learning academic language. Even though these students could communicate information in the classroom, they experienced difficulties acquiring academic language and grade-level content and vocabulary. The purpose of this study was to determine how English ELs acquire academic language to become successful readers in a classroom setting. Because ELs who are functioning on Level 3 and Level 4 will experience difficulties acquiring academic language to communicate in the classroom, the researcher can explore and gather a thick description about their language experiences during literacy instruction. Students who are functioning on Level 3 have acquired general and specific academic language related to content areas. Students who are functioning on Level 4 have acquired specific and technical language related to the content areas (Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2011).

### **Research Plan**

According to Creswell (1994), qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human procedure, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informant, and conducted in a natural setting” (pp. 1–2). A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because it allowed the researcher to explore ELs’ academic language skills and their reading comprehension skills in a literacy instructional classroom setting.

The researcher did not select a quantitative research design because a quantitative study will not allow the researcher to explore the participants in a natural, holistic setting. Merriam (1988) reported that, “The aim of descriptive research is to examine events or phenomena” (p. 7). Students were observed in a natural classroom setting while they were interacting with their teachers and peers. A collective case study research design was selected because an issue, the ELs’ acquisition of academic language, was explored but several cases illustrated the issue. Creswell (2006) shared:

In a collective case study, the one issue or concern is again selected, but the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue. The researcher might select for study several programs from several research sites or multiple programs within a single site. Often the inquirer purposefully selects multiple cases to show different perspectives on an issue. (p. 74)

Each of the six English learners was considered a case. Observations, field notes, document analysis, and teacher interviews were used to explore how ELs acquire academic language to learn reading comprehension skills. By selecting students functioning on different English language proficiency levels, the researcher was able to explore the techniques students use to learn language. Collecting data on students

functioning on different English language proficiency levels will also “maximize what we can learn” (Stake, 1995, p. 4). A collective case study design produced a detailed, holistic description of how ELs acquire academic language to learn. This research plan will lead the researchers to understand how ELs acquire language because collective cases will be studied to determine a single issue, the ELs’ acquisition of academic language. Merriam (1988) reported that, “By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), this approach aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon. The case study seeks holistic description and explanation” (p. 1).

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This review consists of literature gathered to discuss the ways ELs acquire academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills during literacy instruction in a classroom setting. Information was collected on past and recent studies on how ELs develop language and reading skills. The researcher collected studies on (a) basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency, (b) academic language and reading comprehension, (c) the relationship between oral language and reading, (d) phonemic awareness and phonics, (e) phonemic awareness and language acquisition, (f) vocabulary instruction, (g) reading comprehension, and (h) response to intervention (RTI). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study. These resources helped guide this research study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist, described how biological factors and sociocultural elements enable students to develop mentally (Lantolf, 1994). Vygotsky hypothesized that students learn language through social interaction with adults and other individuals. Vygotsky believed (a) students learn language through social interaction, (b) language is a vehicle for thought, (d) learning occurs before development, (e) language occurs in a space called the zone of proximal development, and (f) learning is mediated (Walqui, 2006).

Students acquire language through interacting with others (Freedman, Delp, & Crawford, 2005; Lantolf, 1994). ELs learn social language skills by interacting with others in a social context. Social language is referred to as basic interpersonal communication skills. ELs can acquire cognitive academic language proficiency or

academic language through interacting with the teacher and other students. Lantolf (1994) added, “As children participate in these collaborative interactions, they appropriate for themselves the patterns of planning, attending, thinking, and remembering” (p. 419). Soon, the students become independent learners through imitation and by socially interacting with others. Walqui (2006) stated, “Vygotsky considers all language, spoken and written, as dialogical rather monological. This means that the basic unit of language is conversational interaction, not sentence structure or grammatical pattern” (p. 161).

Vygotsky’s theory suggested that language is a vehicle of thought. Vygotsky believed that language begins in a social setting (Evensen, 2007; Walqui, 2006). Vygotsky believed that thought and language are separate functions that merge together (Walqui, 2006). For instance, Vygotsky stressed the importance of thinking aloud, or private speech. He described how children talk to themselves to organize and think about a task. Walqui found that,

The internalization of social speech, of dialogue, is mediated by private speech, as when a child speaks to herself to facilitate a difficult task. For example, she might be thinking to herself, “Hmmm, let’s see... what if I ...no, no, no, that wouldn’t work, but what if I ... and so on, clearly using language that is social in origin. (p. 161)

Vygotsky’s perspective on learning supports the way ELs learn language because he believed that students’ learning can occur before they are developmentally ready to learn. His view on learning suggested that learners must think and challenge themselves.

ELs must challenge themselves to learn and acquire new vocabulary to acquire English language proficiency promoting academic success (Walqui, 2006).

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is often used in the English learners' classroom because the ESOL teacher interacts with the students by asking them questions and scaffolding the information or the skill in a small-group setting. Zainuddin, Yahya, Morales-Jones, and Ariza (2007) found that, "In this theory, Vygotsky explained that through interaction, children will move from their zone of actual development to their zone of potential development through adult's expert guidance" (p. 190). Vygotsky stated that learning occurs in a space where teachers provide scaffolding to help students easily attend a concept or a skill (Walqui, 2006). A teacher sits closely with the students and presents them with a task. The teacher uses scaffolding to offer instructional support. The students work collectively in a group; however, eventually they will complete the task on their own. The ZPD promotes learning because the learners demonstrate a task or a skill with the teacher's guidance (Walqui, 2006). Thus, the students imitate the teacher's behavior and action. Finally, the student completes the work independently. According to Ajayi (2005), "Child development is a series of transitions from one ontogenetically leading or dominant activity to another: from play to formal learning, from formal leaning to peer activity, from peer activity to work" (p. 187).

Using Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, Ajayi (2005) conducted a qualitative study to determine if 20 second-grade students will learn academic language using small-group vocabulary activities in a classroom setting. Led by the teacher, the students performed small-group vocabulary development activities. Ajayi stated, "At the core of Vygotskian sociocultural theory is the centrality of the human activities in language



acquisition” (p.187). Students are motivated to learn academic language to participate in class assignments. Ajayi shared, “An activity is doing something that is either motivated by a sociological need or a culturally constructed need” (p. 187). Learners are motivated sociologically to learn academic language to mingle and communicate with their classmates during a class activity. Ajayi reported that, “Learners are motivated to learn the target language in order to acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources to enhance their social identifies” (p. 193). Students learn academic language to communicate with their classmates during class discussions and student-led activities.

Finally, Vygotsky’s theory stated mediation is an essential part of learning because by using language as a mediation tool students can organize their thoughts and remember information. A child can ask a question to receive a response. For example, individuals can use language to generate a shopping list to help them remember items (Lantolf, 1994). Evensen (2007) stated,

Vygotsky claimed that individual learning basically happens twice. First, things to be learned are rudimentarily mastered through social interaction. As this learning is consolidated by interactive repetition, social imitation, and semiotic mediation, mastery starts occurring even in individual action; it is being internalized. Through a mediating process of increasing individual control, learning moves from intermental to the intramental, from between persons to within persons. (p. 336)

When students are learning a new concept, their learning can move from *intermental* to *intramental*. First, the students observe and practice the concept with the teacher’s assistance. The teacher scaffolds the activity or skills by offering strategies or

teaching tools to help them understand the concept. During this time, the students may demonstrate the think aloud strategy. The students may talk to themselves to monitor their learning process. In the end, the students will complete the skill or activity independently (Evensen, 2007).

The sociocultural theory was useful to this study because it allowed the researcher to view how ELs learn academic language by interacting with other students and the teacher. Because this study explored how the students acquire academic language in a literacy instructional setting, most instruction was conducted in a small literacy setting. This intimate instructional setting promoted the ZPD because students experienced learning in a small, non-threatening environment. The ELs were able to imitate their teacher and other learners. Children who are actively involved in conversations with adults can remember information and achieve a high level of cognitive development (Zainuddin et al., 2007).

### **Review of the Literature**

Language development occurs in different stages (August, 2003; Chiappe & Siegel, 2006). As a result, children learn language skills during different stages of their lives. August reported that, “At an early stage, the young infant learns to produce phonemes necessary for first language speech” (p. 3). Throughout a child’s life, he or she progresses through many stages of language development. For example, before children are 3 years old, they have mastered 1,000 to 3,000 words (August, 2003). Before the age of 5, a child learns how to speak simple sentences. A child’s language begins to become complex between the ages of 5 to 8. During this time, students learn extensive academic language.

Children enter kindergarten speaking fluently in their first language (Cummins, 2008). Cummins added that students' earlier years in school are critical because they are developing their language skills. In the intermediate grades, many students experience difficulty with reading complex text. Because English language learners often perform below level, they may have trouble with academic language. Many ELs acquire basic interpersonal communication skills through interaction with peers in a social setting. Cummins conveyed that ELs experience language difficulties because "the vocabulary load in content texts ... include many low frequency and technical words that we almost never use in typical conversation, many of these words come from Latin and Greek sources" (p. 2). Students easily acquire social language because this language is generally used in everyday conversations. Consequently, students only use academic language when they read text or write in a school setting. Cummins added, "We can function well in most familiar everyday situations with a relatively small vocabulary of high frequency words" (p. 2). Individual can also determine speech through body language and facial expressions. Vocabulary used in academic language cannot be easily determined through body language or facial expressions (Cummins, 2008).

### **Learning How to Read**

The brain changes as it learns. As the brain learns new information, it expands. Sousa (2011a) stated, "The brain will hardly run out of space to store all that an individual learns in a lifetime" (p. 83). Each time learning takes place brain cells expand. Students learn how to read using three neural systems: (a) the visual processing system, (b) the auditory processing system, and (c) the frontal lobe. Sousa explained, "The visual processing system scans the printed word, the auditory processing system sounds it out in

the head, and the frontal lobe integrates the information to produce meaning” (p. 195).

The reading process is more difficult for ELs because these students first interpret the text in English and determine the meaning of words with multiple meanings. For example, the word *ball* has two meanings; it can represent an object or a dance. ELs may also experience difficulty inferring because they have to use their background knowledge and the information in the text to make an inference (Sousa, 2011a).

Another reason ELs may experience challenges reading is that they do not spend adequate time practicing the act of reading. Miller (2009) found that, “Students in remedial settings read roughly 75% less than their peers in regular reading classes” (p. 25). ELs will not become proficient readers unless they are motivated to read at home and in school. Miller found that if students do not establish sufficient reading habits in the earlier grades, their reading habits will begin to decrease significantly in upper grades.

### **Academic Language and Reading Comprehension**

There are two categories of academic language, specific language and general language (Johnson, 2009). Specific language refers to the content language or vocabulary that is typically used in specific content area. It is difficult for ELs to read content area text because content areas possess technical words and phrases related to the subject area. Students learn the academic language of a content area to comprehend specific information about that subject area. Examples of specific content language include democracy, landforms, addition, subtraction, authors’ purpose, plot, and character. General academic language is “the language that is used by teachers and students for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills” (Johnson, 2009, p. 5).

These words include *recognize, connections, function, evidence, repertoire, analyze, evaluate, compare, and contrast* (Johnson, 2009).

A teacher must determine the students' English language proficiency level before teaching academic language. Students who have not acquire basic high frequency words, such as *of, a, the, and do* will not be able to acquire academic language (Coxhead, 2006). Academic language is the language needed to read and comprehend content area text and communicate effectively in the classroom (Freeman & Freeman, 2009). It is difficult for students to communicate using academic language in the classroom because clearly the language in the classroom is not social language, instead it is academic language. Students must develop a particular register for classroom discussion (Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010). When a teacher asks a student a story element question such as, "Who is the main character in the story? And where is the setting in the story?" an EL must first determine the definition of the terms *main character* and *setting*. The vocabulary words *main character* and *setting* are not commonly used in social language.

Freeman and Freeman (2009) reported that, "The register used in content area classrooms require a different vocabulary and syntax than those used in other contexts" (p. 50). Exposing ELs to nonfiction texts helps them improve their reading comprehension skills because these texts contain grade-level information (Freeman & Freeman, 2009). A student who reads about the life of President Theodore Roosevelt will learn about his life, his presidency, and the history of the United States. Then, through small-group instruction, the teacher and the students can discuss the information and answer questions.

Teachers can help ELs to become more confident about using academic language by allowing these students to speak more frequently about the topic or subject matter. Providing instruction by using Vygotsky's ZPD can help students develop academic language by creating small groups and allowing students to discuss content information with their classmates and the teacher. By scaffolding instruction, students will become independent and begin to use academic language (Freeman & Freeman, 2009). Teachers must also become aware of word choices and vocabulary used in the classroom. They may restate and rephrase concepts that are difficult for students to understand by provided examples and using visuals or pictures to build background knowledge. Teachers can make instruction more comprehensible by (a) using body language and visuals, (b) providing models, (c) previewing the information, (d) using multimedia, (e) repeating words or skills, and (f) using graphic organizers (Echevarria et al., 2008).

Teachers need to set goals to develop the academic language of ELs (Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010). ELs should be surrounded with language posted all around the room so that they can read it and learn the terminology. Many classrooms have word walls that include important terminology that relate to a content area. Conducting prereading strategies, such as activating prior knowledge or previewing content area vocabulary helps students acquire academic language because they will be prepared to discuss grade-level concepts. Using visuals and graphic organizers to explain nonfictional text information or concepts can help ELs understand what they are reading because they can visualize the information.

Guided reading, choral reading, literature circles, and story mapping can be used to help beginning readers become familiar with academic vocabulary. During guided

reading, the teacher supports the students by teaching them literacy concepts and strategies. Students read aloud collaboratively during choral reading to develop reading fluency. Literature circles and story mapping are used to help students discuss and explain the story. Intermediate readers can use think-aloud strategies, journal writing, and learning logs as tools to thoughtfully think and write information about the texts (Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010; Tompkins, 2003).

### **Oral Language and Reading Skills**

August (2003) reported that ELs experience difficulty learning academic language because they have not acquired reading and oral language proficiency. August reported that, “A recent study by Geva and Petrulis-Wright confirmed the position that oral English proficiency and literacy can develop concurrently, at least in young children” (p. 6). This study observed 31 ELs for a year. August found that students with limited language proficiency can learn how to decode and recognize words. However, August found that students who are learning a second language (L2 learners) need to develop their oral language before they can read. A recent National Research Council report and an International Reading Association resolution suggested that ELs should learn how to read in English only when they have acquired some oral English proficiency (August, 2003).

To become proficient readers, ELs must progress through different stages of reading. Chiappe and Siegel (2006) explained, “Numerous models of reading acquisition within one’s native language propose that children progress through a series of stages to learn to read” (p. 135). The stages include (a) the logographic stage, (b) the whole word approach, (c) the decoding stage, and (d) the orthographic stage. During the logographic

stage, students learn words by using visual representations. For instance, a child may learn a word by recognizing the shape of the letters. The decoding stage allows the students to decode words by recognizing letter sounds. A student functioning in this stage can blend sounds together to identify a new word. During the orthographic stage, students are able to apply problem-solving strategies to blend words. They are aware of word patterns, morphemes, and all letter sounds (Chiappe & Siegel, 2006).

Students who are literate in their first language will experience fewer difficulties when learning how to read another language (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006). Consequently, students without literacy in their first language will experience difficulties learning how to read because they need to receive instruction in a print-rich and a non-threatening, safe environment. Thus, many of these students may experience a silent period. They may not feel confident about reading or speaking.

### ***Phonemic Awareness and Phonics***

Eventually, ELs must acquire phonemic awareness to begin reading and comprehending text. According to August (2003), “Phonemic awareness is the ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes, the smallest units of spoken language” (p. 10). Many teachers believe that phonemic awareness is a predictor of the students’ literacy skills. If students are able to identify and manipulate sounds, they can blend letter sounds together to pronounce words. August suggested that early phonemic awareness training combined with letter-sound instruction will improve ELs reading skills because students develop knowledge of each sound and learn how to blend them together.

When students acquire phonemic awareness, fluency, and vocabulary, they will become proficient readers. Furthermore, when ELs’ oral language proficiency levels



improve, their oral vocabulary and decoding skills will expand. Phonetic instruction should occur in a small-group environment where the teacher is scaffolding the information (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006). ELs should not learn isolated sounds that are not associated with text. Bowyer-Crane et al. (2008) found that successful reading intervention for struggling ELs combines includes phonetic instruction and reading comprehension strategies.

### ***Phonemic Awareness and Language Acquisition***

Research indicates there is a crucial relationship between phonemic awareness and English language acquisition (Chiappe & Siegel, 2006). August (2003) reported, “Problems can occur for children who are not English speakers and have not broadened their listening skills to include English sounds. For example, for Spanish-speaking children from Latin American, there are eight English phonemes absent from Latin American Spanish” (p. 11). August referenced two studies that stated ELs can hear phonemes that are not present in their language. The Kansas study consisted of 15 Mexican American students in first, second, and third grade. The students learned 36 words. The researchers taught the students a new sound and word each day. The study found that it is essential to teach students how to recognize difficult sounds or phonemes (August, 2003).

According to Solari and Gerber (2008), “Nationwide, Hispanic students score below non-Hispanic White students throughout elementary school in reading related skills. By fourth grade, these students on average are 4 years behind their peers in reading” (p. 157). Providing a comprehensive curriculum that helps students learn how

to read, spell words, and write text will help students acquire language and become proficient readers (Solari & Gerber, 2008).

### ***Vocabulary Instruction***

Reciting or pronouncing words is not the only aspect of reading; ELs also need to acquire vocabulary skills to comprehend text. Vocabulary can be “categorized as single words, set phrases variable phrases, phrasal verbs, and idiom” (Zainuddin et al., 2007, p. 164). Vocabulary is difficult for English learners because they must identify the word in their first language (L1) and transfer it to the second language (L2). Then they have to store and retrieve the new vocabulary in their memory (Zainuddin et al., 2007).

Hippner-Page (2000) reported that ELs must acquire a sufficient amount of vocabulary to become a proficient reader within 4 years. Hippner-Page added that students must acquire more than 150,000 words to become proficient readers. Brown and Perry (1991) suggested that retaining vocabulary depends on how the individual processes the information. Information moves from short-term memory to permanent memory. Brown and Perry added that teachers need to teach ELs strategies to help them remember the vocabulary.

Klepper (2003) conducted a study to assist fourth-grade ELs acquire vocabulary utilizing BINGO. Klepper reported that, “Vocabulary knowledge is critical to reading comprehension. Students struggling in reading comprehension will not only struggle in reading and language arts but in all areas of the curriculum as well” (p. 15). The study found that students who participated in BINGO retained more vocabulary because they received more word reinforcements. The vocabulary instruction allowed the words to move from the students’ short-term memory to their long-term memory. Hippner-Page

(2000) stated that, “Researchers argued that words are learned better when there has been explicit instruction about their meaning and forms” (p. 11). This process helps ELs retain vocabulary in their long-term memory. Having a well-developed vocabulary can increase ELs’ academic achievement because they will be able to decode text and comprehend it. Researchers have suggested that ELs successfully learn vocabulary in context (Brown & Perry, 1991; Hippner-Page, 2000). Learning new vocabulary is a difficult task for these students because they have limited oral proficiency.

### ***Vocabulary Strategies***

Hippner-Page (2000) reported that students must learn different vocabulary strategies to learn new words. They can group words together with similar meanings or they can group words together that are related to one theme. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) found that teachers must select different words to teach because some words are more important than other words. Words are placed into different tiers. Tier 1 words are basic words that young children may learn at home, such as *house*. Tier 2 words are advance vocabulary words that mature speakers may use, such as *commitment* and *communicate*. Tier 3 words relate to their specific content areas, such as *metamorphoses*. Beck et al. added that when deciding when to teach a Tier 2 word the teacher should determine (a) how often the students will view the word in the text, (b) how the word relates to the subject matter, and (c) how often the teacher and students will communicate the word. Vocabulary knowledge is a predictor that determines English learners’ reading comprehension ability (Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, & Vaughn, 2004).

## Reading Text

Zainuddin et al. (2007) found that when teachers and students interact while reading a book, students become more proficient readers. Comprehending text is a component that is difficult for ELs to master because the students must first read the text, next transfer the information to their first language, then determine the meaning of the text. ELs may have trouble when reading because they do not have English language proficiency, prior background knowledge, substantial grammar skills, and vocabulary to comprehend text (Zainuddin et al., 2007). Because these students did not acquire English as their first language, they need to process text first in their first language, and then transfer it to their second language (Pang & Kamil, 2004). Solari and Gerber (2008) explained, “Reading comprehension requires that students construct coherent representations of text by rapidly recognizing words, access a network of semantic relations associated with these words, and guided by syntax, detect or construct meaningful relationships among words” (p. 155).

Many students can decode words but experience difficulties retelling or discussing a text because they do not understand what they are reading. When teaching these students how to comprehend text, the teacher needs to ask the students questions before they read, while they are reading, and after they have read (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006). This strategy gives the students a purpose for reading and helps them retell what they have read. Solari and Gerber (2008) commented that elementary teachers should focus on teaching young children reading comprehension skills as early as kindergarten. Thus, most kindergarten instruction focuses on phonemic awareness and phonics instruction.

Owocki (2003) explained that readers make sense of text by using different types of knowledge, such as knowledge about content, knowledge about text structure, sociocultural knowledge, and knowledge about the social and situational context. Having knowledge about content helps the reader to gain a deeper understanding about the text because he or she can build on prior knowledge. Using knowledge about the text structure will help readers comprehend the text because they will be able to recognize characteristics of different genres. Readers use sociocultural knowledge to determine cultural aspects or characteristics. By using the knowledge of the social or situational context, “the situation in which the reading occurs,” the proficient reader is encouraged to make sense of what he or she is reading (Owocki, 2003, p. 6).

### ***Fluency***

Maintaining fluency while reading is important because it will help students comprehend what they are reading. Begeny, Krouse, Ross, and Mitchell (2009) reported that, “40% of U.S. fourth-grade students are nonfluent readers” (p. 212). Students read fluently when they are able to “read text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression” (August, 2003, p. 16). When fluency is developed, students do not spend time blending letter sounds and the students’ reading can be interpreted. Many ELs struggle with fluency because they may not have a large vocabulary. August shared that non-readers are not equipped with strategies to help them recognize or blend unknown words. Some students will not develop their fluency because they are embarrassed. Then, the teacher has to determine if fluency is more important than accuracy when reading (Zainuddin et al., 2007).

ELs can develop fluency through read-aloud activities, choral reading, and literature circles. Students' reading fluency can improve by simply listening to proficient readers read text on tape or aloud (Begeny et al., 2009). Strickland et al. (2002) explained that some readers may achieve reading fluency and others may not because proficient readers tend to view reading as an enjoyable activity; whereas, poor readers do not enjoy reading. Proficient readers also spend more time reading independently and silently. Students became fluent readers when they practice reading aloud frequently and read a variety of genres on their independent reading level.

### ***Reading Comprehension Strategies***

Focusing on students' reading comprehending by instructing them in a small homogeneous group setting can improved reading comprehension skills (Linan-Thompson & Hickman-Davis, 2002). Small group instruction should focus on reading fluency, phonemic instruction, vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. Students should move to different groups as their reading skills improve. Linan-Thompson and Hickman-Davis believed that flexible small-group instruction can improve ELs' reading skills because teachers can focus on areas of weakness and strengths. Their research indicated that when ELs were instructed using a supplemental program that provided reading instruction in a small-group setting significant gains were made and the results were constant because teachers focused on a new skill each work. Some students will not practice reading aloud because they are not motivated.

Sturtevant and Kim (2010) suggested that teachers must use strategies to help students experience success in reading. Several instructional techniques help student become effective comprehenders. Owocki (2003) reported that teachers must (a) create

and encourage reading and reading comprehension; (b) model skills or strategies and perform think alouds; (c) provide students with opportunities to read with a partner, in groups, or independently; (d) expose students to variety of genres and book reviews; and (e) record anecdotal notes on students' progress.

Sturtevant and Kim (2010) conducted a study to increase students' reading comprehension and motivation. Using the ELs' parents and family members allowed the students to help their parents and smaller siblings with literacy activities. One student helped her father prepare for a literacy test. She read the material and asked him questions. The student experienced academic success because she helped her father and practiced reading and reading comprehension skills. Sturtevant and Kim reported that the study motivated the students to read and comprehend text because they understood the importance of reading and comprehending text.

ELs may experience difficulties implementing reading comprehension skills or strategies to comprehend text because these strategies encourage higher-order thinking. Making predictions, inferring, using context clues to comprehend unfamiliar words, making connections, visualizing, monitoring, evaluating, and retelling are effective reading comprehension skills. Proficient comprehenders must use all of these skills to understand text effectively. Students who acquire these strategies become strategic learners.

Mainstream educators can help ELs obtain reading comprehension skills by scaffolding the reading comprehension instruction. Owocki (2003) explained "Scaffolding refers to a style of interacting that is likely to move children to a point of thinking that is just beyond what children can do with guidance today, they are able to do

on the own tomorrow” (p. 35). Scaffolded reading comprehension instruction should involve collaboration and interaction between the teacher and the student. Attainable goals and objective must be established. The teacher must cautiously select content vocabulary and academic language to explain and model skills or strategies. The teacher should encourage the students to complete or accomplish challenging but realistic goals. (Owocki, 2003)

### ***Guided Reading***

Educators use guided reading instruction to provide scaffolded instruction to help students learn how to comprehend text. Guided reading is an instructional technique that enables children to become independent readers. The purpose of guided reading is to meet the needs of all students in a small-group setting; thereby, helping them to become more proficient readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). While the teacher and the students sit around a table, the teacher uses a variety of reading comprehension strategies to help the students comprehend the text. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) stated that,

Guided reading is a context in which a teacher supports each reader’s development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty. The teacher works with a group of children who use similar reading processes and are able to read similar levels of text with support. (p. 2)

By using this instructional technique, teachers can scaffold information to help students become independent comprehenders. Teachers can teach a variety of reading strategies while conducting a guided reading lesson. These reading strategies include summarizing, predicting, inferring, problem-solving, monitoring, and making connections (Fountas &



Pinnell, 2001). Teachers need to record effective notes about the students' performance to provide instruction. The teacher must collect work samples, record students' miscues, and note their strengths and weaknesses. Through goal setting, the teacher will be able to motivate the students to improve their comprehension.

### ***Response to Intervention***

Response to intervention (RTI) has become an effective intervention program used in many schools to help struggling students (Brozo, 2010). This federal mandate consists of three tiers. Owocki (2010) stated, "Students who are found to be performing outside the ranges deemed acceptable receive supplemental instruction, typically provided in tiers" (p. 2). Through this process, the progress of all students is monitored through ongoing assessments. Tier 1 is performed within the general education classroom because teachers use a variety of successful strategies to differentiate instruction to help struggling learner acquire skills and concepts. In Tier 1, the teacher provides instruction in small groups catering to the needs of the students. The assessment process within Tier 1 is ongoing. Teachers use assessments to determine the students' progress.

If students are not improving at Tier 1, they may progress to Tier 2. At this tier, specialized instruction is provided by the literacy coach or the teacher. This process caters instruction to the individual needs of the students. Owocki (2010) found that the general objective of Tier 2 is "on supporting and extending Tier 1 instruction with extra time, intensity, focus, and collaboration aimed at helping the student to be successful with Tier 1" (p. 4).

Students progress to Tier 3 when they have not made adequate progress in Tier 2. Instruction is usually provided by a specialist. However, collaboration between the teacher and the specialist is ongoing because the goal is to assist the student academically. During this tier, students are thoroughly assessed to determine special education placement. Owocki (2010) stated that the RTI approach provides a pathway to help students obtain supplementary instruction and support.

Some ELs are placed in the RTI process to determine strategies to help acquire reading skills. ELs who struggle with reading comprehension skill will obtain strategies to learn how to read (Owocki, 2010). Before recommending ELs for RTI, the classroom teacher must determine if classroom instruction and teaching strategies are effective for the students' developmental needs. All students should be assessed for reading challenges early because early intervention will help students make progress through the academic years (Echevarria et al., 2008). The teacher must also determine if a student has a learning disability or language acquisition deficit.

When a child does not progress academically in reading or math in spite of ESOL and classroom instructional support, the classroom teacher should recommend the student for RTI. The teacher should also provide classroom assessment and qualitative data such as anecdotal notes. During the RTI referral process, the teacher and the literacy coach will collect data or assessments on the EL student (Owocki, 2010). Early intervention, when the problem is first determined, is the key element that will help promote students' success. In addition, teachers should not assume that the interventions used with native English speakers would be effective with English learners. Teachers need to assess all

students individually and determine the best instructional strategies for the learner (Sousa, 2011b).

### **Summary**

The importance of basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency was discussed throughout this literature review. Research shows that many ELs have acquired basic interpersonal communication skills (social language), but they are experiencing difficulties acquiring cognitive academic language proficiency. Academic language is more difficult to understand because this content area vocabulary is not used in casual conversations. For example, students do not discuss factors related to multiplication in their conversations at home. The researcher collected studies on (a) basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency; (b) academic language and reading comprehension; (c) the relationship between oral language and reading; (d) phonemic awareness and phonics; (e) phonemic awareness and language acquisition; (f) vocabulary instruction, reading comprehension and fluency; and (g) RTI. These resources helped guide this research study.

Sousa (2011a) suggested that the brain is always expanding and reading involves three neural systems: (a) the visual processing system, (b) the auditory processing system, and the frontal lobe. Each system helps the brain to process and understand text. ELs experience difficulties acquiring academic language, the language used in the classroom, because they have a limited academic vocabulary. There are two types of academic language, general and specific language. Students need to acquire both categories of language because acquiring and using both languages enable students to communicate accurately in the classroom and to comprehend text. Teachers instructing ELs must set

goals to help students acquire academic language. Vocabulary and concepts listed in grade-level text are not commonly used in a social context. Egbert and Ernst-Slavit (2010) stated that, “To fully participate in school, English language learners need to develop all of the specific registers required to benefit from every aspect of schooling” (p. 5). Students can acquire academic language by reading nonfiction text and by discussing grade level texts in small groups. Prereading activities, like activating prior knowledge, will help ELs feel more confident about classroom discussions (Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010; Freeman & Freeman, 2009)

The relationship between second language oral proficiency and second language reading was also discussed. Some researchers believe that students must acquire oral proficiency before they can read text (Pang & Kamil, 2004); while others believe oral proficiency and second language reading can occur simultaneously (August, 2003). Young children, especially, can learn oral language and learn how to read simultaneously.

Researchers stress the importance of acquiring phonemic awareness and learning phonics (August, 2003; Chiappe & Siegel, 2006). Without phonemic awareness, ELs will not learn to read because they will not recognize phonemes from the English alphabet. Recognizing phonemes from the English alphabet is crucial because different languages have different phonemic sounds. For example, the Spanish alphabet and letter sounds are different from the English alphabet. Researchers admit that many ELs can successfully develop English language proficiency if they are literate in their own language. However, many ELs when first enrolled in the American school system are

illiterate in their first language because they lack resources to learn how to read (August, 2003; Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006)

After ELs have acquired phonemic awareness, these students need to build on their vocabulary skills. Research has determined that acquiring a well-developed English vocabulary is a crucial component that helps ELs successfully read and comprehend text (Hippner-Page, 2000). When these students understand the vocabulary in the text, they will be able to think critically about the information. Researchers noted that ELs must learn strategies to help them process and store vocabulary in their long-term memory (Brown & Perry, 1991; Klepper, 2003).

Beck et al. (2002) found that teachers must select particular vocabulary to instruct their students. Vocabulary words are divided into three tiers. Tier 1 words are basic terms. Tier 2 and Tier 3 words are more complex and related to content areas. These students must comprehend text and vocabulary to become successful readers.

However, many ELs are not actively engaged in reading (Guthrie, Meter, McCann, & Wigfield, 1996). ELs are experiencing difficulties comprehending text because they do not understand what they are reading. They have not acquired vocabulary to understand nonfiction text and they lack reading fluency. ELs cannot become proficient readers unless they understand the vocabulary in the text and read at a fluent pace. When rate and pace is inconsistent, it is difficult to comprehend what you are reading. Students must consistently monitor what they are reading to understand text (Strickland et al., 2002). Reading instruction, such as guided reading, helps students become proficient readers by modeling and scaffolding information and reading comprehension strategies through the text.

Even though there have been numerous studies on the way ELs acquire language, it was difficult to find research on how these students acquire academic language to learn reading comprehension skills in a literacy instructional setting. ELs face difficulties acquiring English language proficiency. Many of them learn how to recite words. Consequently, these students may face challenges comprehending text because they lack reading comprehension strategies. Sousa (2011b) found that ELs “are likely to lack the background knowledge necessary to understand texts” (p. 90). Some of these students may also have limited vocabulary. They may not understand the message the author is conveying because the language proficiency level of the text is more complex than the ELs’ English language proficiency level (Sousa, 2011b).

RTI is a process that promotes quality instruction in each classroom because all students will receive instruction that caters to their instructional needs. Tier 1 instruction, which occurs in the classroom, allows the teacher to differentiate instruction using small-group instruction and workstations. Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are given to students who are experiencing academic difficulties in the classroom. Students’ progress is monitored and assessed through frequent formative and summative assessments. Students who do not make progress throughout the tier process are screened for special education services (Owocki, 2010).

There is an academic gap between ELs and native English speakers in the area of reading comprehension because many ELs are not proficient readers. Educators cannot continue to educate these students using the same strategies as native English speakers because ELs did not acquire English as their first language at home. Thus, these students are already behind when compared to native English speakers. Echevarria et al. (2008)

explained that using the same reading strategies to teach all students is not effective because ELs' reading instruction should be appropriate for their English language proficiency.

ELs are having trouble mostly in third, fourth, and fifth grade because intermediate instruction consists of language that is more academic. Cummins (2008) suggested that, "Some students experience difficulties around Grades 3 or 4 when the conceptual and linguistic load of the curriculum becomes significantly more intense than in early grades" (p. 3). In early grades, students are taught decoding and phonetic skills. Consequently, students in the third, fourth, and fifth grades are faced with challenges because they have to learn academic language to function successfully in school. There is a gap in the literature because research does not address how ELs learn academic language in the content areas of reading and language arts to help them perform well in school. After reviewing reports from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Hickman et al. (2004) reported limited research on how to improve ELs' reading comprehension.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Basic interpersonal communication skill* is the language used when communicating with casually with family and friends (Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010).

*Cognitive academic language proficiency* or academic language is the language needed to communicate effectively in a classroom setting (Cummins, 2008).

*College and Career Performance Index (CCPI)* is an approach that will ensure that all students are globally prepared for our evolving workplace (Department of Education, 2012).

*Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT)* is a standardized test that interprets the learners' level of performance and weaknesses in the curriculum. This measurement compares the learners' scores to performance standards. This measurement is designed to measure how well students acquire and learn the knowledge and skills set forth in a specific curriculum or unit of instruction (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Georgia Department of Education, 2011b).

*English learners (ELs)* are students who are learning English as a second or third language (Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010).

*Early intervention program (EIP)* is an initiative that offers additional reading and math instruction to learners in the classroom. Direct reading and math instruction are provided by two teachers in a classroom setting (Georgia Department of Education, 2011b).

*English language proficiency (ELP)* is the ability to use oral and written language (August, 2003).

*English to speakers of other language (ESOL)* is a program designed to teach students with limited English skills (Georgia Department of Education, 2011b).

*Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)* is an assessment used to measure students' reading comprehension (Beaver, 2005).

*Response to intervention (RTI)* is a process that promotes quality instruction in each classroom because all students will receive instruction that caters to their instructional needs (Owocki, 2010).



*Sheltered instruction observational protocol* is a model used to guide teachers on how to language instruction throughout all content areas (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008).

*Zone of proximal development (ZPD)* is the space in which learning occurs under an adult's guidance (Walqui, 2006).

*World-Class Design and Assessment (WIDA)* is used as a screening tool to assess ELs' English language proficiency levels (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2011).

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to explore how ELs acquire academic language to become successful readers in the literacy instructional classroom setting. Because ELs did not acquire English as their first language at home, they are academically behind compared to native English speakers. In intermediate grades, ELs are experiencing difficulties acquiring academic language because these students have to comprehend and explain higher-order thinking tasks. Freeman and Freeman (2009) found that academic language is also difficult for ELs to acquire because the academic texts “contain a high number of words with Greek and Latin roots, such as transportation and sympathy” (p. 300).

### **Research Design**

A qualitative study was conducted to determine how ELs acquire academic language to learn reading comprehension skills. The participants’ academic language acquisition skills in the classroom were observed and documented. Patterns and trends on the way ELs acquire academic language to comprehend reading comprehension skills were explored. A collective case study research design was used because this design can produce a detailed, in-depth description of the students’ behavior in a literacy instructional classroom setting. This design allowed the researcher to explore how ELs acquire academic language in the classroom by using multiple cases to illustrate the issue. A collective case research design allowed the researcher to examine the students’ behavior, their history, and their environment. This research design was selected because an issue, the ELs’ acquisition of academic language, was explored but several cases illustrated the issue. Creswell (2006) shared:

In a collective case study, the one issue or concern is again selected, but the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue. The researcher might select for study several programs from several research sites or multiple programs within a single site. Often the inquirer purposefully selects multiple cases to show different perspectives on an issue. (p. 74)

Each of the six English learners was considered a case. Observations, field notes, document analysis, and teacher interviews were used to explore how ELs acquire academic language to learn reading comprehension skills. By selecting students functioning on different English language proficiency levels, the researcher was able to explore the techniques students use to learn language. Data was collected on the students' past academic history, the environment, and how they relate to each other in an academic setting.

The focus of this project was to explore how ELs acquire academic language to learn reading comprehension skills in a literacy instructional setting. Each student was considered a case. It was the researcher's intent to identify how ELs acquire language acquisition skills to develop academic language successfully, which is required to become proficient readers. The following questions guided this study:

1. How do English learners develop academic language proficiency to comprehend text?
2. How can English learners' utilization and comprehension of the academic language used during literacy instruction help them improve their reading comprehension skills?

3. What instructional strategies are effective in enabling English learners to develop academic language to comprehend text in a classroom setting?

### **Setting**

The elementary school for the study was selected because the researcher is an English learner resource teacher at the site. The school is a suburban Title I school in Georgia. The ethnicity of the 800-student population is 70% African-American, 22% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, 2% Caucasian, and 1% Asian. The school is divided into two schools—a primary school and an intermediate school. Both schools are housed in the same building. The primary school consists of kindergarten, first, and second grade. The intermediate school consists of third, fourth, and fifth grade. The site has a principal for each school. The administrators cluster most of the English language learners into two classes to accommodate scheduling concerns. There is a 20:1 student-teacher ratio in kindergarten through fifth grade. Each grade level has six classroom teachers.

### **Participants**

It was the researcher's intent to explore how ELs acquire academic language to learn reading comprehension skills. There were 39 ELs enrolled in third grade at the selected site. The researcher used maximal purposeful sampling and the performance definitions of the WIDA English language proficiency standard to select three students who were functioning on Level 3 and three students who were functioning on Level 4. The English Language proficiency levels range from Level 1 to Level 6 (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2011; see Appendix A).

1. Entering—students can use pictures to identify language. Students can answer “yes” or “no” questions. Students’ oral language may include phonological errors that may inhibit their speech.
2. Beginning—students can understand simple sentences and phrases. The students’ vocabulary is limited. These students experience difficulties when answering multiple-step questions.
3. Developing—students are beginning to use academic language in content areas. They are able to state sentences that are more complex. Errors are still present in their speech but it is comprehensible.
4. Expanding—students are using some particular academic language related to subject areas. Students functioning on Level 4 are able to state a variety of sentences. These students still have difficulties speaking. They can read and interpret paragraphs from different content areas.
5. Bridging—students make less grammatical errors. They are able to communicate using grade-level text and academic language.
6. Reaching—these students are not granted EL services at this particular school. Students functioning on Level 3 (developing) and Level 4 (expanding) were selected as participants for this study because they were still acquiring academic language to comprehend text. They had not acquired English language proficiency but they could communicate in a variety of sentences. Students who are functioning on English language proficiencies Level 3 and Level 4 can perform some reading comprehension strategies like locating the main idea and details and stating facts and opinions, but they

need assistance learning and practice the reading comprehension skills or concepts (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2011).

Students who are functioning on English language proficiency Level 5 are able to answer higher-order thinking questions from grade-level text. However, students who are functioning on English language proficiency Levels 3 and 4 cannot answer these questions (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2011). The researcher wanted to witness the students' academic growth and language experiences as they learned English language skills and reading comprehension skills.

The researcher interviewed two mainstream classroom teachers. Teacher A had been teaching for 20 years and currently was a third-grade teacher at the Title I school. The teacher's experience included third and fifth grades. Teacher A had eight English learners in her third-grade class. Teacher B had been teaching for 8 years. Currently a third-grade teacher, Teacher B previously taught first grade. Teacher B had eight ELs in her class. The teachers did not have an ESOL certificate or endorsement.

### **Researcher's Role/Personal Biography**

My role as a human instrument will be meaningful to this case study because I understand my participants' frustrations and difficulties. I was born on a beautiful West Indian Island called St. Vincent. However, when I was 2 years old, my family migrated to the U.S. Virgin Islands. We resided on St. Croix, the largest island, for many years. I attended elementary, middle, high school, and college in the Virgin Islands. While residing on St. Croix, I spoke the islands' vernacular, English Creole. I remember speaking Standard English while speaking in class or college. However, while

conversing with my friends, we spoke English Creole. During our conversations, we frequently switched from English Creole to Standard English.

When I migrated to the United States 10 years ago, I experienced difficulties pronouncing some English words and consonant blends. I began practicing difficult English words. I tried to dissolve the West Indian accent because it was difficult to comprehend. At night, I stood before the mirror repeating difficult words and consonant blends. For instance, the *th* sound was extremely tedious to pronounce. I began listening and imitating famous news journalists on television. I was determined to dissolve my accent!

A few months after I migrated to the United States, I accepted a temporary position as a receptionist for an insurance firm. After my first day, the manager terminated me because the customers could not understand my accent. I was very disappointed and determined to dissolve my accent and speak only Standard English. My experience motivated me to pronounce my words accurately. I diligently practiced speaking English daily. As a result, my grammar improved and my accent decreased.

Thus, I believe my experiences helped me become a human instrument for this study because I can fully understand and capture the students' language acquisition and literacy experiences. I understand the challenges these students experience when they are trying to acquire Standard English. In my ESOL classroom, I have to model Standard English consistently. When I ask ELs a question, it is difficult for them to generate an answer in Standard English. Their response is usually grammatically incorrect. As their ESOL teacher, I do not embarrass them because I understand what they are experiencing. Instead, I restate their answer, modeling correct grammar.

Moreover, as an ESOL teacher at the school, I feel compelled to determine how ELs learn academic language because learning academic language will help them acquire reading comprehension skills. I attained my ESOL certificate a few years ago by attending ESOL certification classes. I believe ELs can learn vocabulary and academic language effectively but parents and teachers must work together to support to them. Students cannot only practice academic language at school but also at home. Because ELs have not acquired English language proficiency, they may experience difficulties communicating in the classroom, especially in intermediate grades. Thus, students in the intermediate grades are required to communicate and express themselves using grade level vocabulary. Cummins (2008) admitted that, “The complexity of academic language reflects increasingly sophisticated grammatical constructions that again are almost never used in everyday conversational context” (p. 2).

### **Data Collection**

Data for the study were collected through observations, field notes, document analysis, and interviews. According to Creswell (2007), observation, field notes, and interviews are most often used as data collection methods when conducting a case study. Creswell reported that, “Case study data collection involves a wide array of procedures as the research builds an in-depth picture of the case” (p. 132). Creswell recommended that researchers use a protocol while collecting data from observations and interviews because they can use it to take notes during the interview or the observation.

#### ***Observations/Checklists***

The researcher visited the classrooms on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6:30–7:15 during early morning tutoring and from 3:00–3:50 during reading club. The school



district approved for the research to be conducted before and after school hours. The researcher observed the strategies the students used to develop academic language to learn reading comprehension skills. The researcher observed the students interacting with teachers and classmates during guided reading and center time.

Using the Berkin and Randinelli's (2007) checklists of good habits (see Appendix B), the researcher observed and recorded information about the way students developed academic language to learn reading comprehensions skills. The categories listed on checklist include all the dimensions of academic language, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. Using the checklist, the researcher observed the students developing vocabulary skills, comprehending and understanding text, identifying different types of discourse, and using appropriate grammar and sentence structure. Content area vocabulary, discourse, and grammar are all components of academic language. The researcher secured permission to use the checklists (see Appendix C).

The validity of the data collected by the checklist was established by (a) conducting long-term observations, (b) reporting data and interpretations back to the teachers and asking them if the information was plausible, and (c) involving participants (teachers) in all phases of the research. The reliability of the checklist was established by creating an audit trail that described in detail how the observations were conducted and how the findings were derived. Lengthy observations, descriptive field notes, and feedback from the teacher interviewees helped produce a valid research study.

### ***Field Notes***

While visiting the participants' classrooms, field notes were written. Extensive field notes were recorded about the setting, the participants' reactions in the classroom,

and the researcher's personal reflections about the experiences. The observer's notes were recorded in the observer comments section of the field notes (see Appendix D). A detailed description about the classroom setting and the students' interaction with the teachers and other students was recorded.

### ***Document Analysis***

The researcher secured permission from the school district and the school administrator to conduct research in the school. Students' permanent records and the developmental reading assessment (DRA) documents were explored (see Appendix E). This process revealed knowledge about the students' academic history. The permanent records revealed the students' report card information, EL services start date, and home life information. It also revealed information about the students' academic performance and the academic intervention procedures provided. Some students received services from the English intervention proficiency program teacher. Instruction is provided through the pull-out or push-in model. Recognizing that the students may have received additional services will help the researcher understand the students' academic history. The DRA reading assessment revealed information about the students' current reading levels and strengths, and weaknesses. The DRA is administered to all students to determine their academic reading level and their reading comprehension level. It assesses students' reading comprehension skills.

### ***Interviews***

Finally, the participants' teachers were interviewed. Five questions were asked about the students' academic performance (see Appendix F). Open-ended questions about the teachers' opinions about the participants' academic language and reading

academic experiences were discussed. Each teacher answered the same questions about the students' academic achievement. The open-ended questions provided an understanding of the students' academic language acquisition and reading comprehension skills. Table 1 lists the five interview questions and their basis in the literature.

### **IRB Procedures**

The researcher completed the paperwork required to gain approval from Liberty's and the school district's institutional review boards (IRB; see Appendix G). All IRB procedures were implemented carefully and ethically. After obtaining IRB approval, a letter was distributed to parents in their native language to request permission to use their children in the study (see Appendix H). The researcher conducted a meeting with parents of the participants, using an interpreter to explain the study. All communication was sent to parents in a language that the parents understood. The parents of the student participants signed informed consent forms (see Appendix H). The teachers were also provided with an informed consent form (see Appendix I).

### **Data Analysis**

Data were collected by reviewing documents, conducting observations, writing field notes, and interviewing teachers. While observing the six participants in a classroom setting, the researcher used Berkin and Randinelli's (2007) five checklists of good habits (see Appendix B) to record the students' learning behavior. The first checklist describes the participants' oral language behavior and skills. The researcher used this checklist when visiting the classroom each time. It was essential to use the speaking and listening oral language checklist because this checklist documented whether the participants were engaged into the instruction.

Table 1

*Teachers' Interview Questions and Their Basis in the Literature*

Question	Basis in literature
Tell me about the challenges or difficulties your ELs face when communicating in English?	It is evident that some ELs experience difficulties communicating in English because English is not their first language (L1) or the language spoken at home. ELs appear to be academically behind because they do not have the same English language experiences as native English speakers. Cummins (2008) believed, "Children with normal language development come to school at age four and five fluent in their home language" (p. 1).
<p>According to Egbert and Ernst-Slavit (2010), "Academic language requires the use of a wide range of specific vocabulary items, grammar and syntax constructions, and discourse" (p. 9).            Vocabulary consists of general academic vocabulary. Grammar includes syntax, mechanics, and sentence and paragraph structure.            Discourse is oral or written language that is organized in larger forms.            Share with me how you provide academic language instruction in your classroom?</p>	<p>Cummins (2008) conveyed that ELs experience language difficulties as a result of "the vocabulary load in content texts that include many low frequency and technical words that we almost never use in typical conversation, many of these words come from Latin and Greek sources" (p. 2).            Freeman and Freeman (2009) found that academic language is the language needed to read and comprehend content area text and communicate effectively in the classroom.</p>
What do you think is the most challenging reading comprehension skills for ELs?	<p>ELs experience difficulties comprehending text because comprehending text is "a complex interactive process that begins with identifying words by using knowledge outside the text, accessing word meaning in context, recognizing grammatical structures, drawing inferences, and monitoring oneself to ensure that the text is making sense" (Sousa, 2011a, p. 195).</p>
Share with me how you help ELs acquire reading comprehension skills in the classroom?	<p>Cummins (2008) recommended strategies to help ELs acquire academic language by stating, "We can promote literacy engagement among EL students and struggling readers by using scaffold or supports to make the input more comprehensible. It is important to scaffold students' use of language. Newcomer students, for example, can be encouraged to write initially in their first language (L1) and then work from L1 to English possibly with the help of classmates."</p>

The second checklist describes the use of problem-solving strategies, summarizing, and retelling strategies. The third checklist focuses on students' background knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, and their knowledge of the main idea. This checklist can be used to assess students' knowledge about a fictional or nonfictional text. The fourth checklist evaluates fictional reading comprehension components such as plot, character, and making predictions. The final checklist describes nonfiction text components such as nonfiction text features and text structure. The researcher entered the classroom with the five checklists and checked off the participants' learning behavior as she saw it. Descriptive and reflective notes were written in the corners of the checklist to explain the participants' behavior.

The researcher recorded field notes while visiting the classroom to observe the participants' behavior in the classroom. Descriptive notes were written about the lesson, the setting, and the participants' behavior. After collecting the data, the researcher became familiar with the data by rereading it and writing notes. Then, the data were organized so that it was readily available. All field notes and observations were typed into a Microsoft Word document. The school, participants, and teachers were given pseudonyms. The researcher read and reread the data and the notes written in the margin. Then, common themes were developed through the data.

Using open coding, patterns, themes, and common information were generated. Data were placed in tentative categories. Common trends and patterns were highlighted and placed together. Then, the data were placed in categories by common trends. This process helped the researcher understand the participants' experiences (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006).

After the data were categorized, the researcher summarized the information. The researcher reviewed all data with the same coding and summarized it. The researcher began connecting and grouping categories together. The results were interpreted and data explored to gain an understanding of how English language learners acquire academic language to learn reading and reading comprehension skills. The data must support the findings (Ary et al., 2006).

### **Credibility**

It was essential for this study to obtain credibility to become significant in the educational arena. Credibility was established by using multiple sources to collect data. The triangulation of data increased the study's validity. Ary et al. (2006) stated that, "A combination of data sources such as interviews, observations, and relevant documents and the use of different methods increase the likelihood that the phenomenon under study is understood from various points of view" (p. 505). The researcher established confirmability by frequently reflecting on the study's finding and by writing in a reflective journal. Merriam (1988) reported that triangulation can strengthen the study's creditability because the researcher is using multiple sources to confirm data. The researcher used field notes, observation, interviews, and document analysis methods to collect data.

Member checks were used to ensure the study's credibility. The researcher shared information collected during the study with teachers and administration to verify the data. Teachers stated their opinions about the findings. Their feedback influenced the credibility of the findings. The study became valid when the findings were consistent. The researcher took the gathered information back to the sources frequently.

Merriam (1988) reported that frequently informing the teachers and administrators about the data increases the validity of the study.

Dependability was established by using an audit trail. Documentation on all the procedures conducted in the study were noted and provided. The audit trail provided original information on the observations, interviews, and field notes. By providing documentation, another researcher can conduct the same research using similar procedures.

While conducting a collective case study, “Biases may result from selective observations, hearing only what one wants to hear, or allowing personal attitudes, preferences, and feelings to affect interpretation of data” (Ary et al., 2006, p. 507). Biases were controlled by reviewing and reflecting on the study’s findings to confirm that the observations, field notes, and teacher interviews were credible. The researcher allowed the two mainstream teachers to review and verify field notes, checklists, and interview transcripts. To control researcher bias, the researcher created an extensive audit trail describing how the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted.

### **Ethical Issues**

Because the study explored the language and reading skills of young children, the researcher addressed all ethical issues. First, the researcher acquired permission from the school system to conduct research in the school. This procedure was essential because the researcher reviewed confidential information about the six participants. Then, the researcher submitted a research proposal to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board. All IRB requirements were practiced. All participants were treated fairly and just.

The IRB approval took several months because the study involved confidential documents. Upon approval, parents, teachers, and administrators were notified about the purpose of the study. The researcher conducted a meeting with the parents to discuss the research. While collecting data on the six participants, the researcher became aware of cultural differences and different religious practices. For example, when communicating with the parents, the researcher paid close attention to family dynamics. An interpreter was used while communicating with parents. Students' permanent folders were stripped of all personal information. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants. During and after the study, all data were placed in a locked classroom.

As data were collected, the researcher asked the Lord to guide her procedures. The study was conducted in an ethical manner because my research will help ELs become successful students. The Bible announced, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16, NIV). The researcher asked the Lord for guidance to understand fully how ELs acquire language to learn. This research will provide information to help teachers adequately educate ELs to help them learn how to develop skills to become better readers.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

This chapter contains the results of the qualitative analysis of the data gathered from a collective case study. The study explored how English learners (ELs) acquire academic language to become successful readers in a classroom setting. This research was conducted because many ELs are experiencing difficulties developing reading comprehension skills. The study explored the language acquisition of six participants. Each participant was considered a case. Data were collected on each participant on several occasions. The researcher conducted observations using checklists, wrote field notes, and reviewed the participants' permanent records. A detailed description of the six participants is presented in this chapter. The findings related to how English Learners acquire academic language to become successful readers are described. The following questions guided this study:

1. How do English learners develop academic language proficiency to comprehend text?
2. How can English learners' utilization and comprehension of the academic language used during literacy instruction help them improve their reading comprehension skills?
3. What instructional strategies are effective in enabling English learners to develop academic language to comprehend text in a classroom setting?

### **Participants**

The participants' names were not used in the study. Instead, pseudonyms were used to conceal their identity. This section provides a detailed description about the six

participants. It contains information about the participants' academic history, their English language proficiency level, and their background information.

***Adam***

Adam, an 8-year old, Hispanic third grader has attended the Title I school since kindergarten, when he became eligible for ESOL services. Presently, he is an active ESOL student. Adam was born in the United States to Hispanic parents. Spanish was the first language he learned. In kindergarten, Adam was enrolled in EIP. This program is a one of Georgia's educational initiatives to improve student learning. Adam received extra direct instruction in reading. EIP instruction was provided by two trained teachers in a regular classroom setting.

Presently, Adam is functioning on the English language proficiency Level 4 (expanding). He is able to read fluently and accurately. He is able to find and state specific information from the text he is reading. He needs considerable assistance while understanding text because he does not understand all the context clues and multiple meaning of the words located in the text. However, he is able to express himself in a social setting (Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010). According to the WIDA can-do descriptors for reading (see Appendix J), a student functioning on an English language proficiency Level 4 can use a variety of graphic organizers, determine main idea and details, and identify fact and opinion (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2011).

At the beginning of the school year, Adam was reading on Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) Level 20. The third-grade level is 30. The grade-level equivalency for level 20 is second grade, third month. Adam is able to read silently most of the time, discuss character elements of a story, and use word analysis strategies to help

read unknown words. He is able to read high frequency words automatically. If modeled by a teacher, he is able to use some strategies to gain meaning from grade-level text. Because Adam does not fully comprehend text, he receives accommodations during classroom instruction. He receives extra time to complete his work and directions are consistently repeated (Beaver, 2005). Adam is very motivated to learn how to read and comprehend text. He constantly raises his hand to answer questions in the classroom. He enjoys reading different genres and texts.

### ***Amy***

Amy is a 9-year-old third-grade Hispanic student. She was born in the United States to a Mexican father and an American mother. Both parents are Spanish speakers. Spanish is Amy's first language. Amy became eligible for ESOL services in kindergarten. Amy is functioning on English language proficiency Level 4 (expanding). She is able to comprehend grade-level text with assistance. She can read fluently and with some accuracy. She can communicate socially with her peers. She is able to locate and recall information from text. According to the WIDA can-do descriptors for reading (see Appendix J), a student functioning on an English language proficiency Level 4 can use a variety of graphic organizers, determine main idea and details, and identify fact and opinion (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2011).

At the beginning of the school year, Amy was reading on DRA Level 24. She was reading slightly below a third-grade reading level. The grade-level equivalency of Level 24 is second grade, sixth month. Amy is able to read longer text, read a variety of genres, and comprehend difficult texts and ideas. Extra time to complete to test and

assignments is given to Amy as an accommodation because she needs time to process information (Beaver, 2005).

### ***Daniel***

Daniel is an 8-year-old third-grade ESOL student. Daniel was born in the United States to Hispanic parents. Spanish was his first language. Daniel became eligible for ESOL services in kindergarten. In kindergarten, Daniel was also enrolled in an early invention program. He received direct reading instruction from two teachers in a classroom setting. At the beginning of the school year, Daniel was reading on a DRA Level 28, which was slightly below third grade. He is able to read orally, with speed, and expression. However, he experiences some challenges using and understanding grade-level text (Beaver, 2005).

Daniel is functioning on the English language proficiency Level 4 (expanding). He is able to read with fluency and accuracy. However, Daniel still experiences some difficulties comprehending grade-level text, especially words with multiple meanings. Daniel may make errors that do not impede his ability to communicate orally (Egbert & Ernest-Slavit, 2010). According to the WIDA can-do descriptors for reading (see Appendix J), a student functioning on an English language proficiency Level 4 can use a variety of graphic organizers, determine main idea and details, and identify fact and opinion (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2007). Daniel enjoys reading for pleasure and particularly enjoys reading informational text. He also enjoys reading challenging nonfiction text and inquires about them.

## ***John***

John is an 8-year-old Hispanic male in the third grade. John became eligible for ESOL in kindergarten. Spanish was John's first language. Both of his parents speak Spanish at home. John was born in the United States to Mexican parents. John is currently functioning on the English Language Proficiency Level 3 (developing).

According to Egbert and Ernst-Slavit (2010), students functioning on this level become proficient readers when they have broad background knowledge about the information they are reading. John can comprehend and understand the information he is reading if he has prior knowledge about the subject or content. He may understand and use some academic language in the classroom but he needs specialized instruction. According to the WIDA can-do descriptors for reading (see Appendix J), a student functioning on an English language proficiency Level 3 can use context clues to determine the meaning of unknown words, sequence events in a story, and determine the main idea and details in a text (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2011).

At the beginning of the school year, John was reading on a DRA Level 20. His reading grade-level equivalency is second grade, third month. He was not reading on third-grade level because he was unable to read fluently and comprehend text. He needed assistance to understand grade-level vocabulary. He cannot accurately explain or use grade-level vocabulary or academic language. John is able to solve and blend unfamiliar words, summarize text, and read longer text (Beaver, 2005). John is very competitive; he strives to succeed in reading. He enjoys being competitive amongst his peers because he is consistently trying to excel in reading.

### ***Karla***

Karla, an 8-year-old Hispanic third-grader, has been an ESOL student since kindergarten. Karla was born in Mexico and her parents are from Mexico. Spanish was Karla first language. Karla's family speaks Spanish at home. At the beginning of the school year, Karla was reading on DRA Level 18. Karla was not reading on third-grade level. The grade-level equivalent for Level 18 is second grade. Karla is able to blend and problem-solve unfamiliar words in a text, share understanding of a story through discussions, and read silently for a long period. Karla is able to read fluently but she is unable to comprehend text without probing and asking questions (Beaver, 2005). Karla is functioning on English Language Proficiency Level 3 (developing). She is able to comprehend some technical language but her level of comprehension varies according to her background knowledge (Egbert & Ernest-Slavit, 2010). According to the WIDA can-do descriptors for reading (see Appendix J), a student functioning on an English language proficiency Level 3 can use context clues to determine the meaning of unknown words, sequence events in a story, and determine the main idea and details in a text (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2011). Karla is able to communicate orally with few grammatical errors. Karla receives extra time to complete her classroom assignments and assessments.

### ***Ken***

Ken, a 9-year-old ESOL third-grade student, transferred to the Title I school from another school district in first grade. He became eligible for ESOL services in kindergarten. Ken was born in the United States to Mexican parents. Spanish is Ken's first language and his family speaks Spanish at home. At the beginning of the school

year, Ken was reading on DRA Level 12, he was functioning significantly below third grade's reading level. Ken can decode and problem solve unfamiliar words, read a variety of text, and monitor his reading by looking at pictures and print. Ken cannot read fluently and he cannot comprehend text without using reading comprehension strategies (Beaver, 2005).

Ken was functioning on the English language proficiency Level 3 (developing). Ken had to acquire background knowledge of a given topic to comprehend what he is reading. He makes minimal errors while communicating. Ken is also receiving extra time as an accommodation to help him effectively complete assignments and assessments. According to the WIDA can-do descriptors for reading (see Appendix J), a student functioning on an English language proficiency Level 3 can use context clues to determine the meaning of unknown words, sequence events in a story, and determine the main idea and details in a text (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2007).

### ***Summary***

The participants' demographic information shows the participants are reading on different reading levels. They are also functioning on different English language proficiency levels (Level 3–developing and Level 4–expanding). The participants' first language was Spanish and they all speak Spanish at home with their families. Table 2 presents the demographic information of the six EL students.

Table 2

*Participant Demographics*

Name	Age	Years in ESOL	First language	English language proficiency level
Adam	8	4	Spanish	Level 4: Expanding
Amy	9	4	Spanish	Level 4: Expanding
Daniel	8	4	Spanish	Level 4: Expanding
John	8	4	Spanish	Level 3: Developing
Karla	8	4	Spanish	Level 3: Developing
Ken	9	4	Spanish	Level 3: Developing

**Research Question 1**

To explore the question, “How do English learners develop academic language proficiency to comprehend text?” the researcher observed the six participants while they engaged in reading comprehension instruction in the classroom. During the observations, reading instruction was presented in a small-group setting, while five to six students were seated around a kidney table. The teacher modeled the reading comprehension instruction or skills. For instance, if the teacher said to make an inference about the text, she read a passage to the students and modeled the reading comprehension skill.

**Oral Language Behavior**

During an observation, it was noted the participants functioning on an ELP Level 4 (expanding) were engaged listeners and speakers. While seated around a kidney shaped table in a group setting, the participants (a) followed simple and multiple-step directions, (b) listened in a small group, (c) listened to others courteously without interrupting, (d)



listened to stories read aloud, (e) expressed ideas clearly, and (f) participated in conversations and discussions. The teacher was conducting a lesson on the reading comprehension skill, main idea.

Amy, who was functioning on an English Language Proficiency (ELP) Level 4 (expanding), engaged in listening and speaking skills. Amy was enrolled in early morning tutoring during the middle of the school year because she was not performing well earlier in the school year. Usually, Amy used academic language in the classroom but occasionally she daydreamed. While observing Amy in early morning tutoring, she successfully engaged in the listening and speaking skills. Amy was able to comprehend the text. When Amy was given directions, she quickly responded and executed the directions.

Amy sat at the kidney table in a group with six other students and listened while the teacher said, “What does the term *main idea* mean?” Quickly Amy raised her hand and said, “The main idea is what the story is mainly about.” Next, the teacher said, “Now I need you to read the story and tell me what the main idea is.” Amy looked down at their story on *Same Looks, Different Personalities*, and then raised her hand. The teacher instructed them to read parts of the story aloud. Then she asked the students, “What is the main idea of the story?” Amy responded, “The story is about twin sisters who have different personalities. The teacher said, “That is correct!” Amy was engaged in the reading comprehension assignment because she exhibited active listening and speaking skills.

While conducting observations on another day, it was noted that John and Karla, two participants who were functioning on ELP Level 3 (developing), were experiencing

difficulty expressing their ideas clearly and effectively participating in conversations and discussions. John and Karla sat around a kidney table with three other students while the teacher presented reading comprehension instruction on the author's purpose. The teacher asked, "Why do you think the author wrote *The Good Night Sleep*? Was the author trying to entertain, persuade, or inform you?" John and Karla did not respond or answer the question. Finally, the teacher asked John to answer the question. John said, "Persuade you." The teacher said, "Can you explain what you are saying?" John said, "I don't know." The teacher began to provide examples of the author's purpose for writing text. Finally, John said, "The author is writing this story to entertain you because it is a funny fiction story." Karla also said, "I think the author is trying to entertain you because the characters in the story are not real and it made me laugh."

John and Karla could not express themselves clearly at the beginning of the lesson because they did not have the background needed to determine the author's purpose. The teacher needed to model and provide examples for them. In addition, the first time John gave a response, he did not communicate clearly, because he did not answer in a complete sentence. After the teacher scaffolded the information by providing examples, John and Karla were able to express their ideas clearly.

### **Comprehending Nonfiction Text**

A few days later, the researcher visited another classroom to observe how Ken, who was functioning on ELP Level 3 (developing) developed academic language to acquire reading comprehension skills. The teacher was teaching reading comprehension lesson on context text clues. Six students were sitting around a kidney table. Each student held a copy of the passage entitled *Lucky Brake*. Then, the teacher instructed the

students to read the text and use the context clues to determine the meaning of the word *stroke*. Ken immediately stated before reading the passage that *stroke* was a heart attack. The teacher redirected him to look at all the sentences around the word *stroke*. He began reading the question and he underlined the word *stroke* in the passage. Ken began looking at the answer choices that related to the meaning of the word choice. Then he realized that the word *stroke* means when a person has a circulation problem, because he found the answer in the story and highlighted it. Students functioning on an ELP Level 3 rely on their prior knowledge to help them comprehend text. Ken used his prior knowledge to help him determine *stroke* is related to a heart attack. However, his prior knowledge was incorrect. Ken was redirected by the teacher to use the context clues reading comprehension strategy the teacher was instructing. After redirection and scaffolding, Ken was able to determine the correct answer. Ken read the sentences before and after the word *stroke*, then found that the author listed the meaning of the word right there in the passage.

### **Comprehending Fiction Text**

The researcher observed Daniel and Adam who were functioning on ELP Level 4 (expanding) during guided reading instruction. Daniel and Adam were sitting around a kidney table along with four other students during guided reading instruction. The teacher was conducting a lesson on predicting, a reading comprehension strategy. She began to explain to the students that when we predict we make an educated guess. She asked them to read the title of the story *Revolutionary War on Wednesday* and the first sentence. Then, she asked them to make a prediction about what the story would be

about. Immediately, Adam said, “I think it will be able the revolutionary war and it is a realistic fiction story.”

The students began to read different pages in the story. Then the teacher began asking them questions about the text. She asked Adam to use his background information and context information to determine the meaning of the word *shiver*. Adam read the sentences next to the word *shiver* and then said shiver means to shake when you are cold. The students continued reading and the teacher asked Daniel, “Do you know why the solders are sad in Chapter 7?” Daniel replied, “They are sad because the soldiers will seize them.” The teacher replied, “What does seize mean?” Daniel read the section in the text quietly and replied, “It means to get them.” Clearly, the students used the strategies the teacher was teaching. They read the story; then they predicted story’s events. They also used context clues to gain an understanding of the text.

### **Research Question 2**

To explore the question, “How can English learners’ utilization and comprehension of the academic language used during literacy instruction help them improve their reading comprehension skills?” the researcher observed the participants’ behavior while engaged in reading comprehension instruction. Initially, the English learners lacked self-confidence while reading and comprehending text. The researcher returned to the classrooms on several occasions to note the ELs’ progress while using and comprehending academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills.

At the time of the observation, Adam had improved from a DRA Level 20 at the beginning of the year to DRA Level 34. The grade-level equivalent of Level 34 is third grade, six month. At Level 34, Adam was able to (a) comprehend a variety of text, (b)

read longer text, (c) read more genres and complex text, (d) read critically, and (e) make connections (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Adam, who was functioning on an ELP Level 4 (expanding), needed minimal assistance obtaining academic language because we were using some language in the classroom.

One day while the researcher observed Adam, it was noted that he was sitting by himself reading and answering questions about a poem entitled *Sara the Spy*. The researcher sat next to Adam and wrote that he quickly began using his reading comprehension strategies. First, he read the title and wrote a prediction at the bottom of the page. Next, he read the questions. Then, he underlined unfamiliar words in the questions. Adam began reading the passage. I noticed that each time he read an unfamiliar word, he underlined it. He read the questions again quietly and began answering them. I noticed that he looked for context clues to help him recognize unfamiliar words. Adam circled the word *careful* because he was trying to decide on a suffix to add to the word to make it mean in a careful manner. He immediately began circling the word *careful* in the story. Then, he began adding the suffixes *er*, *ly*, *est*, and *ous* to the word *careful*. He read the words aloud. Adam finally determined that *ly* should be added to *careful* to change its meaning to *carefully*.

While observing Adam, the researcher noted that he was very confident. He experienced academic success the first time he attempted his work because he successfully used all of his reading comprehension. He was motivated to learn because he eagerly began working on his assignment independently. Then, he returned to his teacher to check all of his answers. Adam answered all five of the comprehension questions correctly.

While observing Amy on several occasions, the researcher noted that she seemed more confident about her learning. Amy, who now functioned on a DRA Level 30, was focused and completed her assignment independently and accurately. Amy could now read longer text, decode more difficult words and vocabulary, understand a variety of genres, and make connections about the text. Amy possessed the capability to perform well. Throughout the researchers' observation, it was noticed that Amy began sitting by herself and completing her work quickly and independently. Amy sat at her seat and completed an assignment on identifying the homophones in the sentence. She read each sentence carefully and determined the correct answer for each sentence. Amy read, "We went away on vacation for a whole \_\_\_\_\_." She determined if *week* or *weak* was the correct answer choice for that sentence. Amy read the sentence once again and circled clues in the story such *vacation*, to help her determine the correct answer choice. Finally, Amy selected *week*. Amy's behavior through this process had improved. She is more focused and consistently working on task. Her listening and speaking skills had also improved.

Daniel seemed to be a very intelligent student who was not motivated to do his best work. At the time of the observation, he was reading on a DRA Level 34, a grade-level equivalency of third grade, six month. While observing Daniel, the researcher noticed that he enjoyed working independently. Daniel did not take a long time to complete a task and usually his reading comprehension answer choices were correct. Today Daniel was reading a story entitled, *The New Business*, and answering questions about the story. He quickly read the questions, and then he read the story. Daniel had to determine the meaning of the suffix *ful* in *harmful*. He immediately read the sentence in

the passage and determined the suffix *ful* means *full of*. He submitted his assignment to the teacher and received a perfect score on his reading comprehension assignment.

Daniel was able to complete reading comprehension assignments accurately because he was reading on the third-grade reading level. He was also performing on English language proficiency Level 4. Daniel needed to learn and practice effective reading comprehension strategies to become an effective comprehender. Now that Daniel was practicing reading comprehension strategies, like predicting the passage and using context clues, he comprehended the text.

At the time of the observations, John's DRA level was a 34, a grade-level equivalency of third grade six months. John can (a) comprehend a variety of text, read longer text, (b) read more genres and complex text, (c) read critically, and (d) make connections (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). John is now a confident reader because he is constantly reading books for pleasure. One day while the researcher was observing him, it was noted that he sat in the reading corner reading a book alone on the beanbag. Then, the teacher called him over to read a story entitled *Goosebump T.V.* John eagerly read the title of the story. Then, he made a prediction about the story and wrote his prediction on the bottom of the page. John read the questions and began reading the story. John approached an unfamiliar word and asked the teacher, "What do the words *geared to* mean?" The teacher directed him to read the sentences around the words *geared to*. John completed the six questions and answered three questions incorrectly. The teacher sent John back to check his answers. He carefully checked his answers and answered all of the questions correctly. John was able to check his answers and adequately review his answer choices until he arrived at the correct answers.

At the time of the observations, Karla was reading on DRA Level 30. She was able to read longer text, decode longer words, read different genres, and summarize text. Karla's DRA level's equivalency is third grade, third month. She was reading slightly below reading level.

One day while observing Karla, the researcher noted that Karla was sitting around a table with five other students while the teacher was instructing a guided reading level on the book *Selena*. Each student read quietly until the teacher asked each to read aloud. Karla read the section on Selena's childhood life. The teacher began asking Karla questions about the text to monitor her comprehension. The teacher asked, "Why do you think Selena's dad took her out of school?" Karla replied, "He wanted her to do well with the singing and her music." The teacher said, "Great inference." The teacher said, "Selena's dad did not teach her how to play music. So how did she learn how to sing?" Karla answered, "She began singing in front of her family and at their restaurant." The teacher replied, "Great job!!" Next, the teacher asked, "Why do you think the author wrote this story?" Karla answered, "The author wanted to inform us about Selena's life." The teacher replied, "That is an excellent answer." Karla read the text *Selena* and enjoyed reading it because she said her mom sings Selena's songs. Karla made a text-to-self connection with the book *Selena*.

Ken, who was reading on DRA Level 28, was reading below grade level. While observing Ken, the researcher noted that he enjoyed learning new words and had a large knowledge of grade-level words. While observing, Ken was reading a passage entitled, *Thanksgiving Day*. He was instructed to answer six questions about the text. Ken first read the questions and made predictions about the passage. He began to underline the



important words in the passage. He underlined the words *seasoned* and began to determine the meaning of that word. He read the sentence before and after the word *seasoned*. Ken soon discovered that you can season a food by putting salt and pepper on it. He found the answer in the passage. Ken finally submitted his assignment to the teacher and he received a perfect score.

While observing the six participants on several occasions, the researcher noticed that they began to use academic language frequently in the classroom. As the teacher taught reading comprehension skills in a small-group setting, the students began making predictions, inferences, and using context clues to understand and summarize the text. The learners were also able to use the vocabulary in the text to discuss the story. The English learners became more confident and motivated to read and answer questions about text because their comprehension improved.

### **Research Question 3**

To answer Research Question 3, “What instructional strategies are effective in enabling English learners to develop academic language to comprehend text during literacy instruction in a classroom setting?” the researcher interviewed the two teachers who teach the six participants. Teacher A has been teaching for 20 years, she is a third-grade teacher at the Title I school. She has taught third and fifth grade. Teacher A has eight English learners in her third-grade class. Teacher B has been teaching for 8 years. Previously she taught first grade, now she is a third-grade teacher. Teacher B has eight ELs in her class. The teachers do not have an ESOL certificate.

### ***Interview Question 1***

The researcher asked the teachers five open-ended questions (see Appendix K for transcripts of the interviews). The interviews occurred after school. When the researcher asked Teacher A, “Tell me about the challenges or difficulties your English learners face when communicating in English?” she replied, “They have a hard time getting what they want across, finding the words that they are thinking of. Because they speak one language at home and at school it is hard to keep it straight.” Teacher B’s response to the same question was, “They have a lack of vocabulary knowledge and multiple meaning of words and the present tenses to communicate effective in the English language.”

The teachers’ responses suggested that English learners experience difficulties processing information and verbalizing their thoughts in English because English is not their first language. They especially experienced difficulties using multiple meaning words. It is challenging to determine the proper usage of a word that has more than one meaning. For example, *close* has more than one meaning and this word is pronounced differently. The word *close* can be used to state, “Close the door.” It can also be used to state, “That bread is close to the cheese on the table.” These students may not have the appropriate academic language to communicate in the classroom.

### ***Interview Question 2***

Teacher A was asked to “Share with me how you provide academic language instruction in your classroom?” She responded,

I provide instruction by using vocabulary stories, vocabulary list, antonyms, vocabulary in poetry, by circling the vocabulary in read and allowing the students to share. By reading stories...looking for context clues...and by letting the child

share with me how got the answer. Oh, yes, Brain Pop and matching are good too.

Teacher B's response to the same question was,

Through oral communications with myself and the students plus the peer talking time students, so they can orally communicate their thoughts and use the context vocabulary through their talking. Also having written commentary feedback both by me and having students also comment or provide feedback through written communication. So, they can visually see language written and content vocabulary written and having peers use that commentary amongst themselves. My classroom continues to strengthen their knowledge of language vocabulary of all subjects through oral, written, and visual cues, so it becomes an everyday occurrence in their lives.

Both teachers agreed oral communication, explaining context clues, and providing visuals are strategies used to provide academic language in the classroom. Teacher A recommended that academic language instruction is taught through context clues and modeling by peers and the teacher. Brain Pop is used as a visual to teach academic language. Teacher B suggested that oral communication between the teacher and students is the way academic instruction is provided in the classroom. It is usually provided through written commentary by the teacher and the other students. Graphic organizers are used as visuals. Teaching context clues is a good strategy for teaching vocabulary.

### ***Interview Question 3***

When the researcher asked, “What do you think is the most challenging reading comprehension skills for ELs?” Teacher A stated, “Inferencing—because the answer is not there. They have to use clues and pictures. It is hard to put things together.” Teacher B responded by stating,

The understanding of unfamiliar words and multiple meaning words in context to understand what the author is trying to convey. Also, making inferences about a story because it is hard to say, read in between the lines, as it been put to understand and draw conclusions about stories and situations.

Both teachers agreed that ELs experience challenges making inferences about the story because the answer is not directly listed in the story. To make inferences students must read. Teacher B stated that unfamiliar words and multiple meaning words are challenging concepts because if they do not understand the words they will not understand what the author is trying to convey; and they will not be able to make an inference.

### ***Interview Question 4***

The next question stated, “Share with me how you help English learners acquire reading comprehension skills in the classroom?” Teacher A stated, “By reading everyday, by modeling reading comprehension strategies, reading aloud, doing reading groups, by doing guided reading, and providing them with a bag of books.” Teacher B recommended the following:

They need visual cues and exposing them to knowledge about the subject of what they are reading. Many discussions about what the author is trying to convey to

help with the lack of vocabulary knowledge. Use many graphic organizers to have a visual to look at the different parts of the reading and the details that are the reading.

Both teachers agreed that discussing the information in the text is a strategy used to help ELs acquire reading comprehension skills in the classroom. Teacher A claimed that guided reading is a strategy used the classroom. Reading aloud is another strategy. Teacher B suggested that visual cues and exposing them to the knowledge of the subject that they are reading about through discussions are strategies used in the classroom.

### ***Interview Question 5***

The final interview question asked, “Which of the reading comprehension activities or strategies that you use in your classroom do you find the most effective?” Teacher A stated that, “Reading, modeling, learning by doing, reading everyday, constantly reading throughout the curriculum. The activity would be the act of reading, through reading clubs, exposure to books by taking a bag of books home.” Teacher B stated:

To break down the reading and to use graphic organizers so the students can communicate the details of the reading through visuals that break it down, so they can make the connections about the reading. Also, using context clues to understand the important vocabulary and unfamiliar words in the text.

Both teachers agreed that students need to learn by doing. Teacher A claimed that students need to read every day, and become exposed to books at home. Strategies should be modeled by the teacher. Teacher B claimed that information should be broken

down into small pieces and visuals (graphic organizers and pictures) should be used. Context clues should be taught to help students understand words or information.

### *Summary*

Reflecting on the research question, “What instructional strategies are effective in enabling English learners to develop academic language to comprehend text during literacy instruction in a classroom setting?” it was determined that the teachers use some effective strategies to help English learners acquire academic language to comprehend text. Teachers must model strategies or skills to help students develop academic language to comprehend text.

Teachers must demonstrate the strategy or skill so the students can visually see it and understand it. ELs need visual cues to help them develop academic language. They need to see how language is written so that they can use the visual as an example. ELs need to learn how to use context clues to help them develop their academic language to comprehend text. By interpreting the clues in the text, the learners will be able to develop their academic language because they will learn new words and information. The interviews revealed that teachers need to allow English learners to read consistently through guided reading instruction and at home to help them develop academic language because students learn by doing. It was revealed that English learners need multiple opportunities to explain their thinking or to participate in classroom discussions to help develop their academic language. By orally communicating, these students will be able to express themselves and use content vocabulary.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

This final chapter contains a summary of the results and answers to the research questions that guided this study. A discussion about the findings and the implications of the literature and the theoretical framework will follow. The limitations of the research will follow the discussion. The final section will suggest recommendations for further research.

### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative collective case study was to explore how English learners acquire academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills. The researcher collected data by observing the participants, writing field notes on their language experiences, analyzing the participants' permanent folders, and conducting two teacher interviews. The researcher sought to determine common factors that helped ELs acquire academic language in the classroom to obtain reading comprehension skills. She also explored strategies that enable English learners to comprehend text in a classroom setting. The following questions guided the research:

1. How do English learners develop academic language proficiency to comprehend text?
2. How can English learners' utilization and comprehension of the academic language used during literacy instruction help them improve their reading comprehension skills?
3. What instructional strategies are effective in enabling English learners to develop academic language to comprehend text in a classroom setting?

To obtain answers to the research questions, the researcher acquired data from six participants through observations. While observing the participants, the researcher used checklists to help identify the participants' academic language and reading habits during reading comprehension instruction. The researcher wrote descriptive and reflective notes in the margins of the checklists to help identify the participants' behavior. In addition, the researcher wrote field notes describing the classroom environment, the students' behavior, and the use of academic language during reading instruction.

The participants' permanent folders were reviewed to determine when the participants became eligible for ESOL services and the length of time the participants have been active ESOL students. Two mainstream teachers were interviewed to describe how they instruct ELs in the classroom. The data were refined and grouped into common categories to explore how ELs acquire academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills.

The literature review in this study provided information on how ELs acquire language to learn. The literature review contained evidence that ELs experience academic challenges acquiring academic language in the classroom because they have not acquired cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2008). ELs gain cognitive academic language proficiency within 5 to 7 years (Cummins, 1999). The review literature also noted two types of academic language—general and specific language. Specific academic language refers to the language or vocabulary that relates to a particular subject area. General academic language refers to words used in the classroom to describe learning behaviors, such as, *recognize*, *analyze*, and *evaluate* (Johnson, 2009).



ELs experience difficulties comprehending text because these students did not acquire English as their first language and comprehending text in a second language is a complex process. To comprehend text these ELs need to process text first in their first language, and then transfer it to their second language (Pang & Kamil, 2004). It is necessary to comprehend how ELs acquire academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills because many of these students are not proficient comprehenders. In the state of Georgia, all elementary students must meet standards on the CRCT administered in Grades 3 through 5 to be promoted to the next grade. Some of these students may not have achieved academic success because they could not comprehend the reading portion of the standardized test. The purpose of this collective case study was to explore how ELs acquire academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills to become successful readers in the classroom.

The researcher conducted a collective case study because she wanted to provide an in-depth description of the ELs' language acquisition. She wanted to observe each case or participant in a natural classroom setting and record detailed notes or descriptions about each participant. Merriam (1988) stated, "Case studies by definition get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can, partly by means of direct observation in natural settings partly by their access to subjective factors" (p. 26). The researcher believed that the best method to determine how ELs acquire language to obtain reading comprehension skills was to observe and note the participants' behavior in their environment. Field notes and observations were used as data collection methods because the researcher was able to write descriptive and reflective notes on the participants each time she observed.

Interviews were conducted because the researcher wanted to record and understand the teachers' perspective on how ELs acquire academic language. The researcher believed that "the interview is the best way and perhaps the only way to find out what is in and on someone else's mind" (Merriam, 1988, p. 86). The researcher interviewed two mainstream teachers because these particular teachers had EL students in their general education classroom and they experienced challenges educating these students. Five of the researchers' participants were students in Teacher A's general education classroom. One of the researchers' participants was in Teacher B's general education classroom.

The researcher purposefully selected six third-grade participants for the study because she wanted to select three students who were functioning on English language proficiency Level 3 (developing) and three students who were functioning on English language proficiency Level 4 (expanding). It was critical to select students functioning on English language proficiency Levels 3 and 4 because they have not mastered academic language. However, many of these students can read text and use problem-solving strategies to blend words and read fluently. These students may experience difficulties understanding academic language because they lack background knowledge about the subject area, have not mastered reading comprehension skills, or they do not have a broad vocabulary. Third-grade students were selected because academic language becomes difficult in intermediate grades because the curriculum consists of more difficult technical terms (Cummins, 2008). The researcher obtained permission from the participants' parents to participate in the study. She held a general meeting to explain the

research to the parents. An interpreter interpreted the information for the parents. The parents signed a parent consent form to allow their children to be part of the study.

Data were collected from four sources—field notes, observations using checklists, data analysis, and teacher interviews. The researcher conducted observations and wrote field notes on three of the participants during early morning tutoring from 6:30–7:15 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. She also conducted observations and wrote field notes on four of the participants while engaged in book club on Wednesday at 3:00–3:45. Data were collected before and after school hours because data could not be collected during school hours.

The participants' permanent folders were also reviewed after school hours. All personal information, including names, dates, and addresses were removed from the folders, then the files were copied. Pseudonyms were placed on each file or folder. Field notes and checklists were added to the appropriate participant's files. All participants' folders were reviewed and read repeatedly, and notes were written about each participant. Common themes and categories were then formed. Teacher interviews were transcribed and common themes were established.

Open coding and member checking were used to ensure credibility. Dependability was established using an audit trail. Documentation on all the procedures conducted in the study were noted and provided. The audit trail provided original information on the observations, interviews, and field notes. By providing documentation, another researcher can conduct the same research using similar procedures. The triangulation of data (field notes, data analysis, observations, and teacher interviewed) increased the study's validity.

## Discussion

This study explored how English learners (ELs) acquire academic language to become successful reading readers in a classroom setting. The researcher's goal was to discover answers to the study's research questions. The following section presents answers to the research questions.

### *Research Question 1*

Research Question 1 stated, "How do English learners develop academic language proficiency to comprehend text?" The data revealed that English learners develop academic language by using reading comprehension skills like context clues to learn unfamiliar words, previewing text, activating background knowledge, predicting, inferring, summarizing, retelling, and monitoring. The teacher must first model how to use these strategies or skills and scaffold the information in a small group. The ELs must then repeatedly use the strategies with guidance from the teacher.

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development supports the findings of the study's data. Vygotsky believed that learning occurs in a space where the students "problem solve under adult guidance or collaboration with more capable peers" (Walqui, 2006). While observing the participants during morning tutoring, the researcher noticed the teacher modeled the context clue reading comprehension strategy. The teacher modeled how to use the context clue strategy by reading the sentences around an unknown word to determine the meaning of the word. The teacher said, "What does a sour look on the face mean?" The teacher said, "Read the sentences around the words *sour look on the face*." After reading the sentences around *sour look on the face*, John replied, "It means she is mad." The teacher said, "That is correct." As the researcher looked around all the

students in the room answered the questions correctly. They used the strategy and answered the question correctly.

While observing the participants during early morning tutoring, the researcher noticed the participant around a kidney-shaped table. The teacher first modeled how to summarize a passage, then, allowed the students to perform this task. The teacher posted the essential question, “How do I read for details to summarize what I have read?” She began reading the passage and explained that, “We can ask these four questions to help us summarize. Who are the characters in the story? Where is the setting? What is the problem? What is the solution?” She wrote the four questions on the board. After modeling, the teacher asked Amy to read the story and provide a summary using the four questions. Amy used the four questions to help her summarize the story.

On another occasion while observing the participants during Book club at 3:00-3:30, the researcher noticed the teacher explained how to use self-monitoring to make sense of text. She explained that readers could monitor their reading comprehension proficiency by rereading unfamiliar text and finding clues in the story to clear up confusion. The researcher observed Daniel rereading the text, *A Lucky Brake* and highlighting the word “stroke,” an unknown word. When the teacher asked Daniel, “What is a stroke?” He replied, “A stroke is a something very bad. The brain is not working correctly.” The teacher replied, “Great try... When a person is experiencing a stroke, he or she is having difficulties with their brain. Blood is not going to the brain.”

During the observations, the researcher found that students develop academic language to comprehend text by repeatedly practicing and demonstrating reading comprehension strategies. Mainstream teachers must model strategies and conduct

reading lessons in a small group setting. Students must be willing and motivated to participant in discussions. Vogt and Echevarria (2008) found that, “What is important to remember is that learning a language is a process and that the more ELs use English, the more proficient they will become” (p. 51).

### ***Research Question 2***

Research Question 2 addressed, “How can English learners’ utilization and comprehension of the academic language used during literacy instruction help them improve their reading comprehension skills?” The data showed that ELs who repeatedly used the reading comprehension strategies that their teacher modeled became successful readers and comprehenders. Because the students practiced all reading comprehension skills and orally participated in class discussions, all of the participants met standards on the reading portion of the CRCT at the end of the school year. The reading portion of the CRCT consists of reading skills and vocabulary acquisition, literary comprehension, and reading for information.

***Adam.*** At the beginning of the school year, Adam was reading on DRA Level 20, which was below third-grade reading level. At the end of the study, Adam was reading on DRA Level 34, which is on third-grade reading level. Adam regularly used all the reading comprehension strategies that were modeled by his teacher. He was motivated to learn because he always completed his homework and his parents were present during all parent-teacher conferences during the school year. Adam was motivated, hardworking, and his parents were supportive. Adam diligently worked to develop his academic language orally communicating in class and group discussions. He also used all of the reading comprehension strategies throughout the school year. His DRA score excelled;

going from Level 20 to Level 34. Adam also met standards on the reading portion of the CRCT, administered in April 2012.

**Amy.** Amy lacked self-confidence when she first entered third grade. Throughout her academic years at the Title I school, she was a hard worker. She completed her assignments and read fluently. However, Amy had trouble comprehending text in third grade because the text was more challenging. As a result, Amy's mom enrolled her in early morning tutoring at the school. As the researcher observed Amy, she noticed that Amy used her reading comprehension strategies and began using academic language regularly in the classroom discussions. She began making predictions about the story before she read it. She also read the questions before she read the story. One day while observing Amy at early morning tutor from 6:30–7:15, the researcher noticed that Amy was working with a suffix matching game in a small group. She read suffixes, *un*, *sub*, *mis*, *re*, *im* and matched the suffix with its meaning. Amy quickly began to use her background knowledge to find the correct answers. She accurately matched all the suffixes with their meanings. At the beginning of the 2011–2012 school year, Amy was reading on DRA Level 24, which was below third-grade level. Presently, Amy is reading on Level 30, which is slightly below grade level. Amy met standards on the reading portion of the CRCT, administered in April 2012.

**Daniel.** While observing Daniel, the researcher noticed he was a very intelligent student who was unmotivated to do his class assignment. He completed each task effortlessly. Daniel's teacher commented, "He has the ability to do great work but he does not put forth much effort." While observing Daniel in reading club from 3:00–3:30 on Wednesday afternoons, the researcher noticed that Daniel was engaged in his learning.

His reading group was reading a realistic fiction text entitled, *Revolutionary War on Wednesday*, and he immediately began answering the teacher's questions. The students all read different parts of the text and the teacher asked reading comprehension questions about the text. The teacher asked, "Do you know what sleet is?" Daniel looked at the word and made an inference about the word *sleet* by using his background knowledge. He said, "Sleet is frozen rain. Rocks coming from the sky." The teacher said, "Great, that is correct."

Daniel is now motivated to learn. At the beginning of the school year, he was reading on DRA reading Level 20 but now he is reading on Level 34, which is on third-grade level. Daniel exceeded standards on the reading portion of the CRCT, administered in April 2012, because he actively developed academic language by using the language in class discussions and using reading comprehension strategies.

**John.** At the beginning of the 2011–2012 school year, John's DRA Level was 20. He was reading below reading level. John's teacher commented that John had grown a lot during the school year. He was motivated to read and understand text. While observing John during early morning tutoring from 6:30–7:15, the researcher noticed that John was always an energetic boy, who eagerly responded to the teacher's questions. He frequently answered questions using the academic language used in the classroom. On one occasion, the teacher asked what *geared to* meant in the story *Goosebumps TV*. The question asked, "What age group is the *Goosebump* stories geared to?" John went back into the story and used the context clues to determine the meaning of the words *geared to*. John accurately answered the question. At the end of the school year, John was reading at third grade DRA Level 34. He met standards on the reading portion of the



CRCT, administered in April 2012, because he used his academic language in the classroom by using the language during class discussions and small-group instruction.

**Karla.** Karla's DRA level at the beginning of the 2011–2012 school year was 18. She was functioning significantly below a third-grade reading level. While the researcher observed Karla in early morning tutoring from 6:30–7:15, she noticed that Karla was engaged in her learning. She used the academic language in the classroom each time the teacher asked her a question. For example, while Karla was playing a homophones matching game she was able match the homophones. She matched the words, *week* and *weak*, *knew* and *new*, and *see* and *sea*. She independently completed a Homophone Ticket Out the Station assignment. She read the sentence aloud; then, wrote the appropriate homophone on the line. At the end of the school year, Karla was reading on DRA Level 30, slightly below third-grade level. Karla made tremendous gains this school year because at the beginning of the school year she was reading on a second grade DRA Level. Karla met standards on the reading portion of the CRCT because she developed academic language by engaging in classroom discussions and repeatedly practicing reading comprehension skills.

**Ken.** Ken's DRA Level 12 was the lowest reading level score among the six students. He was functioning significantly below third-grade reading level. Ken had extensive vocabulary knowledge. While observing his class during reading club at 3:00–3:50, the teacher was reading a text entitled *Revolutionary War on Wednesday*. The researcher noticed that Ken had a high level of vocabulary knowledge when the teacher asked the students, "What is a bearded soldier?" Kevin replied, "A soldier with a beard." Kevin developed his academic language skills by consistently engaging in class

discussions and using context clues and inferring to determine unfamiliar words or text. At the end of the school year, Ken was functioning on DRA Level 28. Even though Ken’s DRA level is below a third-grade reading level, he made significant gains. Ken met standards on the reading portion of the CRCT because he consistently participated in classroom discussion, used vocabulary in the classroom, and used reading comprehension skills while taking the standardized test.

Table 3

*Students’ Reading Comprehension Scores*

Participant	DRA fall score	DRA spring score	Reading portion of Georgia’s Criterion-Referenced Competency Test
Adam	Level 20	Level 34	Met standards
Amy	Level 24	Level 30	Met standards
Daniel	Level 28	Level 34	Exceeded standards
John	Level 20	Level 34	Met standards
Karla	Level 18	Level 30	Met standards
Ken	Level 12	Level 28	Met standards

***Research Question 3***

Research Question 3 inquired, “What instructional strategies are effective in enabling English learners to develop academic language to comprehend text in a classroom setting?” The researcher discovered that the teachers at the Title I school were passionate about teaching and they wanted their students to achieve academic success. The six participants all met standards on the CRCT. While the researcher collected data,

she noted that the teachers used a variety of instructional strategies to help English learners develop academic language to comprehend text in a classroom setting.

*Academic language.* The researcher observed that the teachers allowed the students to participate in classroom discussions using academic language. If a question was asked, students answered the question using the academic vocabulary embedded in the content area. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher observed that teachers used small-group instruction a great deal. Students sat around a small table and the teachers modeled strategies for the students. First, the instruction was scaffolded to help students understand concepts and skills. Then, students began working on the reading skills or concepts individually. These instructional strategies support Vygotsky's theory that learning occurs in a space where teachers provide scaffolding to help students easily attain a concept or a skill (Walqui, 2006). A teacher sits closely with the students and presents them with a task. The teacher uses scaffolding to offer instructional support. While guiding the students, the teacher can determine if the students are able to move on independently or if they need more support. Herrell (2000) reported that, "In order for students to participate successfully in academic lessons in the classroom, teachers use a series of scaffolding strategies that include modeling academic language; contextualizing academic language using visuals, gestures, and demonstrations; and supporting students in the use of academic language through active learning activities" (p. 1).

*Vocabulary strategies.* The researcher noted that teachers offered a variety of vocabulary instruction strategies to help students develop academic language. The researcher witnessed that the two teachers provided vocabulary instruction by teaching the participants how to determine context clues and identify homophones. Both concepts

and skills are important because ELs must use strategies to determine the meaning of unknown words or vocabulary in a sentence. They also need to recognize that words, such as homophones, sound the same but have different meanings and spellings. Beck et al. (2002) stressed the importance of vocabulary instruction by stating that teachers must choose the appropriate vocabulary to teach students. Vocabulary words should be tiered and divided into different categories according to their importance. A teacher should teach vocabulary instruction in context by teaching important words or unknown words in a text. Then, the teacher should lead the students to determine the definition of the word or words by locating clues from the sentence or sentences (Beck et al., 2002). Furthermore, the researcher observed that the teachers instructed vocabulary through vocabulary matching games. Playing vocabulary games, such as the homophone matching game played during early morning tutoring, allowed the students to repeatedly study and recognize different types of homophones.

***Reading comprehension strategies.*** Because reading is complex process for ELs, mainstream teachers must use effective strategies to teach these students how to read (Sousa, 2011a). The mainstream teachers modeled a list of reading comprehension strategies to help students comprehend text. The mainstream teachers instructed students to (a) make predictions and infer, (b) retell, (c) visualize, (d) make connections, (e) ask questions, (f) use context clues to comprehend unfamiliar words, (g) evaluate the text, and (f) monitor their comprehension.

The researcher observed that the two mainstream teachers demonstrated all the reading comprehension strategies through modeling and small-group instruction. Students sat in a small group and read texts. Then, the teachers modeled the strategy and

asked the students to perform the same strategies. For example, while teaching main idea or retelling, the teacher may retell a familiar story and give an example about the main idea. Following that, she may ask the student to tell the main idea of the story being read. If the ELs did not understand the concept or the skill, the teacher rephrased or reworded the information. While collecting data, the researcher noted that one mainstream teacher conducted a lesson on the author's purpose and two of the participants did not understand how to evaluate the text to determine the author's purpose. The teacher demonstrated how to determine why the author wrote a text or story. She asked the students, "Was the author trying to entertain you when he wrote this text? Is the story funny? Does it make you laugh? Is it fun to read? Was the author trying to persuade you in this text? Is he trying to convince you to do something? Was the author trying to inform you about information? Did he provide facts, dates, and names?" By asking question and probing, the teacher was able to help the students evaluated the correct answer choice, which was *persuade*.

***Guided reading strategies.*** Reading instruction was also provided through guided reading. During guided reading instruction, the participants and other students sat around a small table and read the same book or text. The guided reading lesson began with an introduction to the text; then, the teacher reviewed the book. She introduced unknown vocabulary, and built background knowledge by explaining unknown information. Guided reading is an effective instructional strategy for ELs because "of the focus on vocabulary development, individual instruction, and opportunities for verbal interactions" (Herrell, 2000, p. 66). The six participants seemed to enjoy guided reading instruction because the teacher provided individual instruction catering to each of their needs. She

also focused on reading comprehension strategies to help them comprehend text. During a teacher interview, one teacher stated that guided reading is one of the most effective strategies to use to build reading comprehension skills because you can focus on specific strategies and skills. Guided reading is an effective way to teach academic language because the text's vocabulary and content are discussed amongst the students in the guided reading group. During guided reading instruction, the teacher can also model problem-solving strategies, observe, and note students' learning behaviors. The teacher may also help ELs' build background language by using visuals, realia, and pictures. One of the teachers stated in her interview that she frequently used graphic organizers as visuals to help students comprehend the story after a guided reading lesson (Herrell, 2000).

### **Common Factors Contributing to Academic Success**

Several common factors promoted the participants' reading success. These common factors included motivation, parental support, and ESOL services. All of the participants experienced academic success at the end of the school year.

#### ***Motivation***

All of the students were motivated to learn during the school year. At the beginning of the school year, the participants realized they were not reading on a third-grade reading level. All students received additional reading instruction before or after school hours. Amy, Karla, and John attended early morning tutoring on Tuesday and Tuesday from 6:30–7:15 for 6 weeks. Throughout this time, the students consistently attended tutoring on time. They were engaged in the early morning reading activities because they were motivated to become better readers. Daniel, Ken, Amy, and Adam

attended book club on Wednesday from 3:00–3:50 for 6 weeks to develop their academic language and reading comprehension skills. During this time, the teacher allowed them to read stories and discuss the content of the story. During the readings, she questioned them about important vocabulary words, the main idea, and the literary elements in the story. The students were motivated to attend every session because they enjoyed discussing the stories.

### ***Parental Support***

The parents of the six participants were involved and concerned about their children's education. They attended all parent-teacher conferences and asked questions about their child's performance in school. During the conference, a Spanish interpreter interpreted the teacher and parent meeting. The parents willingly accepted all the educational suggestions provided by the teacher and volunteered to work at home with their child.

The researcher met with the participants' parents to acquire permission to include their children in the research. A Spanish interpreter was present to interpret all information and help answer any questions. All parents immediately agreed to give their child permission to participate in the research. One parent felt that the research would help his child become a better student because the researcher will be able to identify strategies to help the child.

### ***ESOL Instruction***

The six participants received ESOL instruction every day for 90 minutes. Using the pull-out model, the ESOL teacher provided instruction in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The ESOL teacher used the READ 180 (2011) program

to provide instruction for the ESOL students. During a 90-minute block, the students rotate through four different stations or centers—whole group, small-group instruction, independent reading station, and computer station. The ESOL teacher can have up to 14 students in her classroom.

While in small group, the students enhanced their reading comprehensions skills by reading text together and discussing the text. During this time, the teacher instructed the students on a reading comprehension skill, such as main idea and details, summarizing, fact and opinion, and cause and effect. The students were encouraged to discuss the text with their partners at the table and work together as a group. The students improved their speaking skills by participating in discussions with the other students. They were encouraged to use academic language each time they communicated about a topic or subject. For instance, the teacher was teaching a lesson on acquiring the main idea in a magazine article. After reading the article together, the teacher asked the students to determine the main idea of the article. The students discussed the answer choices with their group members at the table. Then, the students answered the question. The students were always encouraged to answer each question in a complete sentence. By using this instructional strategy, the ELs were able to practice listening, reading, and speaking skills.

The students rotated every 20 minutes to different stations and they read books independently in the reading station. They read books on their reading level and completed a graphic organizer on the text. While in the computer station, the students were instructed by instructional software that teaches the students reading comprehension, vocabulary, and spelling skills. ESOL instruction is a critical part of the



ELs' educational career because the ESOL teacher can explain and develop language skills in a small-group setting. The students usually feel safe in a small-group environment to ask questions and take risks.

### **Limitations**

This qualitative collective case study has several limitations. First, the study was conducted in the state of Georgia. The participants were third-grade students who attended one public Title I school. Another limitation was that all of the participants are a small sample of one minority group. Selecting a small sample of a minority group influenced the study because the researcher was able to gather an in-depth description about the six participants' academic experiences. A further limitation was that the results of this study may only be valid for this setting, a Title I school, and they may not be valid for a non-Title I school. ELs attending a non-Title I school may have higher English language proficiency levels. The researcher limited the study by selecting students functioning on English proficiency Levels 3 and 4 because other ELs functioning on lower levels may have acquired different academic experiences. By selecting participants functioning on Level 3 and 4, the researcher was able to observe, explore, and determine how struggling ELs acquire academic language.

Another limitation was that the English learners' mainstream teachers did not obtain an ESOL endorsement or certificate. The teachers were unaware of strategies and techniques to teach ELs effectively. The researcher decided to interview the two mainstream teachers because the participants were students in the teachers' classroom.

## **Implications**

This study explored how English learners (ELs) acquire academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills to become proficient readers in a classroom setting. These students face difficulties acquiring academic language to become proficient readers. Based on the observations, field notes, data analysis, and interviews, the researcher has developed several recommendations for instructing ELs in a general education classroom.

### ***Instructing ELs***

When teaching ELs how to read, mainstream teacher should provide a variety of instructional strategies like modeling, scaffolding, visualizing, and building background knowledge. Many ELs lack the academic language needed to communicate in classroom discussions so teachers need to model the language to these students and encourage them to speak with their partners in a small group about the content area or subject. Teachers must scaffold information to help ELs understand it.

When reading or comprehending text, teachers need to provide information in small chunks to help ELs process it. The reading process is a complex operation and ELs need time to process information to comprehend it. Asking students to visualize information or put a picture in their head will help students make connections with what they are learning. Egbert and Ernest-Slavit (2010) found that ELs comprehend text when they have prior knowledge or background knowledge about the subject area or concept. Activating or developing prior knowledge by watching short video clips, viewing pictures, or using real life artifacts in the classroom help ELs make connections with what they are reading. For example, a science teacher who is reading a nonfiction text

about fossils can allow the students to make fossils in the classroom. By exposing the ELs to this experience, they will understand the academic language related to fossils. As a result, the ELs will be more equipped to understand the nonfiction on fossils because they have some background knowledge about the subject.

### ***Academic Language***

Developing academic language is a continuous process because the language used in the classroom is usually not spoken in social settings, such as on the playground or at home. The mainstream teacher can help ELs develop academic language by encouraging students to use the language in classroom discussions. While providing instruction, the teacher must model the language. Specific academic language should be identified and displayed in the classroom because these students see the words as a constant reminder. Pictures or graphics should be displayed next to the words to help the students remember them. Word, phrases, and content information should be reworded or rephrased to help ELs understand the information. Teachers should provide different examples of the same concept to help students' comprehension. For example, the term a *bear's den* may be a difficult for ELs to understand. Teacher can use a picture to explain the word *den* and they can then tell the students that a *bear's den* is its shelter or home.

Teachers should consider how they communicate with ELs because communication should be appropriate for the students' English language proficiency level. Students who are functioning on English language proficiency Level 1 will need repetition and rephrasing. Instruction should be provided at a slower pace, using multiple words to describe or explain a concept or a skill. Many mainstream teachers may become frustrated because the students do not understand the concepts; however, if the teachers

will simplify or modify their speech or speak at a slower pace the ELs will comprehend more. Echevarria et al. (2008) suggested that mainstream teachers should explain skills or concepts using pictures, graphics, multimedia, and body language.

### ***Reading Comprehension Skills***

Elementary EL students, attending a public school in the state of Georgia, must meet standards on the reading portion of the CRCT to be promoted to the fourth or fifth grade. Thus, ELs' ability to comprehend text is a critical component of the school's success. Mainstream teachers need to use different strategies to help ELs acquire reading comprehension skills. Sousa (2011a) suggested some reading comprehension strategies to help ELs become proficient comprehend. The teachers need to (a) preview information about the subject; (b) modify the language level of the instruction; (c) use gestures, visuals, and technology; (d) read stories at a slow pace and point to the words; and (e) place pictures next to academic vocabulary to help students understand the word (Sousa, 2011a)

### ***School Leaders***

School leaders need to support teachers instructing ELs because these students are a student-group in Georgia schools. School leaders should provide mainstream teachers with additional training on instructing English learners in the classroom. These teachers need to learn strategies to teach ELs in the regular classroom. Professional development training on strategies to instruct ELs should become a priority in Georgia schools because ELs are enrolling in Georgia schools. Some of these students are falling behind academically. Teacher training can be provided through professional development at the local school or through the district.

### **Recommendation for Further Study**

This collective case study involved one Title I school in a Georgia. The results obtained from this school are limited to third-grade English learners at one Title I school. Because research indicated that the immigrant population is increasing in the United States, researchers may want to consider the following recommendations for future study.

1. Use quantitative studies to compare two groups of ELs who are functioning on different English language proficiency levels to determine instructional teaching strategies that significantly improve ELs' reading comprehension skills
2. Explore the impact of parental involvement on ELs' academic success. This study could provide suggestions to help encourage parents of ELs to become more active in elementary schools.
3. Another interesting query is to explore mainstream teachers' perception on instructing ELs in a general education classroom. This study could reveal how mainstream teachers perceive ELs in their classroom. It could explore effective teaching strategies to help ELs gain linguistic skills.
4. Conduct a qualitative study to determine strategies to instruct ELs faced with learning disabilities. This study could determine instructional techniques to help ELs with learning disabilities become successful students.
5. Conduct a longitudinal study to investigate ELs who are exposed to the response to intervention (RTI) process and its advantages and disadvantages. This study could help identify the difference between learning disabilities and linguistic difficulties.

## **Conclusion**

This study provided the opportunity for the researcher to reflect and gather data on how English learners acquire academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills. It provided the researcher with the opportunity to reflect on how ELs learn, read, and process information to become successful learners. It revealed successful reading comprehension strategies that enhance ELs' performance in the mainstream classroom. The researcher hopes this research will provide recommendations on how to help ELs become proficient readers.

As an ESOL teacher, the researcher is passionate about educating and promoting ELs' academic success in the classroom. If mainstream teachers use the appropriate strategies and techniques to help develop ELs' academic language and reading comprehension skills, the researcher believes these students will become successful learners. The researcher has learned that each EL can become a proficient reader if the mainstream teacher sets high standards and diligently teaches academic language in the classroom. Teachers should provide instruction that is comprehensible for ELs by repeating and rephrasing unknown concepts and skills. It is especially important to build background knowledge by displaying realia, using multimedia, and previewing text because ELs comprehend text when they have acquired background knowledge about what they are reading.

## **Summary**

The researcher will continue to pray and teach English learners because she believes that teaching is her calling and God has a significant plan for her life. The Bible states, "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They should mount

up with wings as an eagle. They should run and not be weary and they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31, KJV). She believes that the Lord has called her to teach English learners so that they can go out go into the world and make a difference.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Performance Definitions of the WIDA English

#### Language Proficiency Standards

**Figure 5B: Performance Definitions**

At the given level of English language proficiency, English language learners will process, understand, produce or use:

<b>6- Reaching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>specialized or technical language reflective of the content areas at grade level</li> <li>a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in extended oral or written discourse as required by the specified grade level</li> <li>oral or written communication in English comparable to English-proficient peers</li> </ul>
<b>5- Bridging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>specialized or technical language of the content areas</li> <li>a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in extended oral or written discourse, including stories, essays or reports</li> <li>oral or written language approaching comparability to that of English-proficient peers when presented with grade level material</li> </ul>
<b>4- Expanding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>specific and some technical language of the content areas</li> <li>a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in oral discourse or multiple, related sentences or paragraphs</li> <li>oral or written language with minimal phonological, syntactic or semantic errors that do not impede the overall meaning of the communication when presented with oral or written connected discourse with sensory, graphic or interactive support</li> </ul>
<b>3- Developing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>general and some specific language of the content areas</li> <li>expanded sentences in oral interaction or written paragraphs</li> <li>oral or written language with phonological, syntactic or semantic errors that may impede the communication, but retain much of its meaning, when presented with oral or written, narrative or expository descriptions with sensory, graphic or interactive support</li> </ul>
<b>2- Beginning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>general language related to the content areas</li> <li>phrases or short sentences</li> <li>oral or written language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that often impede the meaning of the communication when presented with one- to multiple-step commands, directions, questions, or a series of statements with sensory, graphic or interactive support</li> </ul>
<b>1- Entering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>pictorial or graphic representation of the language of the content areas</li> <li>words, phrases or chunks of language when presented with one-step commands, directions, WH-, choice or yes/no questions, or statements with sensory, graphic or interactive support</li> <li>oral language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that often impede meaning when presented with basic oral commands, direct questions, or simple statements with sensory, graphic or interactive support</li> </ul>



# Appendix B

## Checklists

### Oral Language Behaviors Checklist

Use this form to record your observations of a student's speaking and listening abilities.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Behavior	Y	SE	N	Example
<b>Listening Behaviors</b>				
Follows simple oral directions				
Follows oral directions of several steps				
Listens in small-group situations				
Listens in whole-group situations				
Listens to others courteously, without interrupting				
Listens to stories read aloud				
Listens for various purposes				
Listens critically to oral readings, discussions, and messages				
Connects cultural experiences and prior knowledge through listening				
Other:				
<b>Speaking Behaviors</b>				
Knows and uses many words				
Uses conventional grammar and usage				
Expresses ideas clearly				
Responds appropriately to questions				
Gives clear directions				
Understands and retells spoken messages				
Participates in conversations and discussions				
Stays on topic in discussions				
Speaks for various purposes				
Adapts speaking to audience				
Other:				
	Y = Yes	SE = Some Evidence	N = No	

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**Checklist of Good Habits**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Doe**  
**Mak**  
Mak  
Com  
Use c  
Cont  
Use l  
**Aski**  
Ask l  
Ask l  
Ask c  
Ask a  
Stop  
**Pro**  
Read  
Look  
Synt  
Stop  
Iden  
**Sun**  
Paus  
Disti  
Expl  
Iden  
Iden

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<b>Unit 3: Great Readers Use What They Know</b>				
<b>Does the Student:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>A</b>
<b>Making Connections</b>				
Explain why making text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections helps him or her be a better reader				
Make connections between the characters and his or her own experiences, and use these connections to understand characters				
Understand why his or her connection may be different from other readers'				
Identify how a connection helps make sense of the text				
Make appropriate and relevant connections				
<b>Activating Background Knowledge</b>				
Evaluate the usefulness of specific background knowledge				
Explain the purpose of continuously thinking about background knowledge throughout the text				
Name different ways to activate background knowledge				
Ask questions that would lead to building background knowledge				
<b>Building Vocabulary and Concept Knowledge</b>				
Use a glossary to figure out the meanings of important words				
Identify an important repeated word in the text				
Use context clues to identify the meaning of either a multiple-meaning word or an unfamiliar word				
Substitute words appropriately to check meaning				
Compare context or descriptions to help identify similarities and differences between terms				
<b>Making Inferences</b>				
Use text clues and prior knowledge to make an inference				
Look for more than one clue in the text to make an inference				
Identify a previous inference that was made and revise it, if necessary				
Use multiple clues to make an inference about characters				
State another possible main idea and use text clues to make an inference				
N = Never                      R = Rarely                      O = Often                      A = Always				

Ongoing Assessment: Checklist of Good Habits **53**

## Checklist of Good Habits

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Unit 4: Great Readers Understand How Stories Work				
Does the Student:	N	R	O	A
<b>Understanding Story Grammar</b>				
Explain why identifying the initiating event can help a reader understand the story				
Identify the plot				
Recognize how characters influence the plot				
Discuss the relationships between characters				
Identify ways to infer the relationship between and among characters				
Use a character's words and actions to make inferences about character				
Use dialogue to infer characters' feelings toward one another				
Identify a character's plan for solving a problem				
Relate character to plot				
Explain how the problem and solution affect the character's actions				
<b>Identifying and Using Text Features</b>				
Use the title and cover to make predictions				
Use the contents page to preview and predict				
Use the contents page to keep track of story events				
Use a chapter title to make predictions and keep track of story events				
Identify who is speaking in a dialogue				
N = Never                      R = Rarely                      O = Often                      A = Always				

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## Checklist of Good Habits

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Unit 5: Great Readers Read to Learn</b>				
<b>Does the Student:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>A</b>
<b>Setting and Monitoring Your Purpose for Reading</b>				
Identify a purpose for reading				
Preview a nonfiction book to see if it matches his or her purpose for reading				
Form questions based on the purpose for reading that are appropriate for the text				
Scan the text to answer questions and locate specific information				
Identify the author's purpose				
<b>Identifying and Using Nonfiction Features</b>				
Tell what an index is, and use it to find specific information				
Explain how words in a glossary are organized, and use the glossary to determine the meaning of words				
Recognize a sidebar				
Read visual information from maps, diagrams, charts, tables, graphs, and timelines				
Use visual information to help understand concepts discussed in the text				
Distinguish between a photograph and an illustration				
Understand why authors use direct quotes				
Differentiate between text features and text structure				
<b>Identifying and Using Nonfiction Text Structures</b>				
Recognize time-order text structure				
Recognize description text structure				
Recognize problem-solution text structure				
Recognize comparison-contrast text structure				
Recognize cause-effect text structure				
<b>N = Never</b> <b>R = Rarely</b> <b>O = Often</b> <b>A = Always</b>				

Ongoing Assessment: Checklist of Good Habits **55**

# Appendix C

## Permission to Use Checklists

PEARSON

ALWAYS LEARNING

### Permission Agreement for Dissertation

Contract No. 160435

Permission is granted for use of School ("Pearson") material from CELEBRATION PRESS READING: GOOD HABITS GREAT READERS ASSESSMENT BOOK GRADE 2/3 2007C, according to the following specifications:

Dissertation title: *An Investigation of the English Language Learners Acquisition of Academic Language to Obtain Reading Comprehension Skills.*

Bound date of dissertation: December 2012

Location where print dissertation will be stored: Liberty University Library

#### PEARSON REQUESTED MATERIALS:

Title/program: GOOD HABITS GREAT READERS ASSESSMENT BOOK GRADE 2/3 ("Pearson Material")

ISBN: 0765285215

Pages numbers: 47, 52, 53, 54, 55 (copies will be made for classroom use for research purposes)

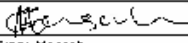
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8. This Agreement contains the entire agreement between the parties and supersedes and cancels any previous written or oral understandings or communications.
9. THIS AGREEMENT AND THE RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE PARTIES HERETO SHALL BE GOVERNED BY AND CONSTRUED UNDER THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK AS IF EXECUTED AND FULLY PERFORMED THERE, WITHOUT REGARD TO ITS PROVISIONS ON CHOICE OF LAW, EXCLUSIVE JURISDICTION AND VENUE OVER ALL DISPUTES HEREUNDER SHALL BE IN THE FEDERAL AND STATE COURTS OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK LOCATED IN THE COUNTY OF NEW YORK.

NISHKA BARNES  
Bryant Elementary  
1626 Springs Place Lane  
Mableton, GA 30128

  
Grace Mensch  
Assistant IP Administration, Rights  
Rights Management & Contracts  
Pearson

June 9, 2011

Pearson Education  
One Lake Street  
Upper Merion Station, PA 19154  
Telephone: 202-236-5710  
Fax: 202-236-5625  
Email: grace.mensch@pearson.com

## Appendix D

### Field Notes Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_

Observation (Description)	Reflection

## Appendix E

### Guided Reading-DRA Levels and Equivalents

**Guided Reading-DRA Book Levels and Equivalents**  
Revised 8-22-03

**PRIMARY ASSESSMENT KIT**

Grade Level	Fountas/Pinnell Guided Reading Level	DRA Developmental Reading Assessment	Grade Level Equivalents	Stages of Reading Development
K	A	1,2	K	Emergent
	B	3	K	
	C	4	1.0	
	D	6	1.2	
1	E	8	1.4	Early
	F	10	1.5	
	G	12	1.6	
	H	14	1.8	
	I	16	1.9	
2	J	18	2.0	Transitional
	K	20	2.3	
	L	24	2.6	
	M	28	2.9	
3	N	30	3.0 - 3.3	Transitional
	O	34	3.4 - 3.6	
	P	38	3.7 - 3.9	
	40P* - 44P*		Extending	

\*Primary Kit

**INTERMEDIATE ASSESSMENT KIT (4-5)**

4	**PQRS	40	Competent
5	**STUVW	50	Competent

\*\*These levels are related to approximate grades, but it is more important to see the gradient as a continuum of progress for your readers. The central goal is to determine the level that is appropriate for students to read independently and for instruction. (Fountas and Pinnell 2001)

Please see the DRA Scoring Guide for more details.

## **Appendix F**

### **Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about the challenges or difficulties your English learners (ELs) face when communicating in English?
2. According to Egbert and Ernst-Slavit (2010), “Academic language requires the use of a wide range of specific vocabulary items, grammar and syntax constructions and discourse” (p. 9). Vocabulary consists of general academic vocabulary. Grammar includes syntax, mechanics, and sentence and paragraph structure. Discourse is oral or written language that is organized in larger forms. Share with me how you provide academic language instruction in your classroom?
3. What do you think is the most challenging reading comprehension skills for English learners (ELs)?
4. Share with me how you help English learners (ELs) acquire reading comprehension skills in the classroom?
5. Which of the reading comprehension activities or strategies that you use in your classroom do you find the most effective?



## Appendix G

### Approval Forms to Conduct the Study

Liberty University Institutional Review Board | 4  
Application for the Use of Human Research Participants

**IV. INVESTIGATOR AGREEMENT & SIGNATURE PAGE**

BY SIGNING THIS DOCUMENT, THE INVESTIGATOR AGREES:

1. That no participants will be recruited or entered under the protocol until the Investigator has received the final approval or exemption email from the Chair of the Institutional Review Board.
2. That no participants will be recruited or entered under the protocol until all key personnel for the project have been properly educated on the protocol for the study.
3. That any modifications of the protocol or consent form will not be initiated without prior written approval, by email, from the IRB and the faculty advisor, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the participants.
4. The PI agrees to carry out the protocol as stated in the approved application: all participants will be recruited and consented as stated in the protocol approved or exempted by the IRB. If written consent is required, all participants will be consented by signing a copy of the approved consent form.
5. That any unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others participating in the approved protocol, which must be in accordance with the Liberty Way (and/or the Honor Code) and the Confidentiality Statement, will be promptly reported in writing to the IRB.
6. That the IRB office will be notified within 30 days of a change in the PI for the study.
7. That the IRB office will be notified within 30 days of the completion of this study.
8. That the PI will inform the IRB and complete all necessary reports should he/she terminate University Association.
9. To maintain records and keep informed consent documents for **three years** after completion of the project, even if the PI terminates association with the University.
10. That he/she has access to copies of 45 CFR 46 and the Belmont Report

Mishka Veira Barnes      Mishka Veira Barnes      11-9-11  
Principal Investigator (Printed)      Principal Investigator (Signature)      Date

**FOR STUDENT PROPOSALS ONLY**

BY SIGNING THIS DOCUMENT, THE FACULTY ADVISOR AGREES:

1. To assume responsibility for the oversight of the student's current investigation, as outlined in the approved IRB application.
2. To work with the investigator, and the Institutional Review Board, as needed, in maintaining compliance with this agreement.
3. That the Principal Investigator is qualified to perform this study.
4. That by signing this document you verify you have carefully read this application and approve of the procedures described herein, and also verify that the application complies with all instructions listed above. If you have any questions, please contact our office ([irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)).

Rebecca S. Harrison, Ed.D      Rebecca S. Harrison      11/9/2011  
Faculty Advisor (Printed)      Faculty Advisor (Original Signature)      Date

\*The Institutional Review Board reserves the right to terminate this study at any time if, in its opinion, (1) the risks of further experimentation are prohibitive, or (2) the above agreement is breached.

FROM :  
FAX NO. : 2766194354  
Nov. 09 2011 02:44PM PJ



August 18, 2011

Ms. Mishka Veira Barnes

Dear Ms. Barnes:

Your research project has been approved with condition. The researcher should ensure that all communication sent to parents is in a language the parent can understand. District reviewers recommend that the researcher meet with parents, using an interpreter if needed, to explain the study.

Listed below are the schools where approval to conduct the research is complete. Please work with the school administrator to schedule administration of instruments or conduct interviews.

Should modifications or changes in research procedures become necessary during the research project, changes must be submitted in writing to the Office of Accountability and Research prior to implementation. At the conclusion of your research project, you are expected to submit a copy of your results to this office. Results cannot reference the Cobb County School District or any District schools or departments.

Research files are not considered complete until results are received. If you have any questions regarding the process, contact our office at 770-426-3407

Sincerely,

Dr. Judith A. Jones  
Chief Accountability and Research Officer

BOARD OF EDUCATION

SUPERINTENDENT

March 13, 2012

Mishka Veira  
IRB Approval 1250: An Investigation of English Learners' Acquisition of Academic  
Language to Obtain Reading Comprehension Skills

Dear Mishka,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**  
*IRB Chair, Associate Professor*  
**Center for Counseling & Family Studies**

**(434) 592-5054**

## **Appendix H**

### **Parent Consent Form**

An Investigation of English Learners' Acquisition of Academic Language to Obtain Reading Comprehension Skills  
Mishka Veira Barnes  
Liberty University  
Liberty School of Education

Your child is invited to be in a research study that explores how English learners acquire academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills. You were selected as a possible participant because you are classroom teacher instructing English learners in your classroom. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Mishka Veira Barnes, ESOL Teacher, under the direction of Dr. Rebecca Harrison.

#### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to determine how English 1 learners (ELs) acquire academic language to become successful readers in a classroom setting. Information from this study will inform the readers about the way ELs acquire language to learn reading comprehension skills. The researcher's intention is to use this research to add to the body of literature about how ELs acquire academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, your child will be asked to do the following things: (a) participate in all academic literacy activities in the classroom and (b) learn academic language during reading comprehension instruction. Your child will be observed for the purpose of the study during reading comprehension instruction. Your child's progress will be measured by reading comprehension checklists and field notes written by the researcher.

#### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

The study's risks are no more than you will encounter in everyday life.

#### **Injury or Illness**

Liberty University will not provide medical treatment or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill as a result of participating in this research project. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence. There are no immediate benefits. However, the results of this study can provide information to benefit all educators.

**Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely in a locked closet and only researchers will have access to the records. The results of the study will be published. However, your name or identity will not be revealed. A pseudonym will be assigned. Only the researcher will have access to the data. At the end of the study, the data will be kept for three years.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or with Bryant Elementary School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time with out affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions**

The researchers conducting this study are: Mishka Veira Barnes. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at Bryant Elementary School, 404-731-3418, mishkaveira@bellsouth.net. You can also email Dr. Rebecca Harrison at rsharrison@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent or guardian\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_  
*(If minors are involved)*

Signature of Investigator\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_

## **Debriefing Statement for Parents**

Dear Parents,

I am conducting a study on how English learners acquire academic language to learn reading comprehension skills in the classroom. The study will explore how your child acquires academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills. It will gather information to determine techniques to teach your child reading comprehension skills. The information will help improve your child's CRCT reading test scores because the teacher will receive information to determine the best strategies to help your child learn academic language.

Your child will participate in the following manner; he or she will (a) participate in all academic literacy activities in the classroom and (b) learn academic language during reading comprehension instruction. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me Mishka Veira Barnes at 404-731-3418.

Kindest regards,

Mishka Veira Barnes

## **Formulario de Consentimiento de los Padres**

Investigación sobre la adquisición de lenguaje académico en estudiantes de inglés para obtener habilidades de comprensión de lectura

Mishka Veira Barnes  
Liberty University  
Escuela de Educación de Liberty

Estamos invitando a su hijo/a a participar en un estudio de investigación que explora cómo los estudiantes de inglés aprenden el lenguaje académico para obtener habilidades de comprensión de lectura. Usted está siendo contactado, porque quisiéramos obtener su consentimiento para llevar a cabo un estudio sobre cómo su hijo/a adquiere el lenguaje académico para aprender y entender la información que se le da en el aula. Le pedimos que lea este formulario y nos haga cualquier pregunta que usted tenga antes de aceptar su participación en este estudio.

Este estudio está siendo realizado por: Mishka Veira Barnes, maestra de ESOL (Inglés como segundo idioma), y bajo la dirección de la Dra. Rebecca Harrison.

### **Marco Informativo**

El propósito de este estudio es determinar cómo los estudiantes de inglés adquieren el lenguaje académico para convertirse en buenos lectores dentro del ambiente del salón de clases. La información de este estudio le informará a los lectores sobre la forma en que los estudiantes de inglés adquieren el lenguaje para aprender habilidades de comprensión de lectura. La intención del investigador es utilizar esta investigación para contribuir a la literatura existente acerca de cómo los estudiantes de inglés adquieren lenguaje académico para obtener habilidades de comprensión de lectura.

### **Procedimientos**

Si usted está de acuerdo en que su hijo/a participe en este estudio, el/ella deberá que hacer lo siguiente: (a) participar en todas las actividades de formación académica en el aula durante el horario escolar regular, y (b) aprender lenguaje académico durante la enseñanza de comprensión de lectura.

### **Riesgos y Beneficios de Participar en este Estudio**

Los riesgos del estudio no son mayores a lo que usted encontrará en su vida diaria. *No hay beneficios inmediatos. Aun así, los resultados de este estudio pueden proporcionar información que beneficie a todos los educadores.*

### **Lesión o Enfermedad**

Liberty University no proporcionará tratamiento médico o compensación financiera si se lesiona o se enferma como resultado de participar en este proyecto de investigación. Sin embargo, esto no le priva a usted de ninguno de sus derechos legales, ni nos libera a

nosotros de cualquier responsabilidad legal que podamos tener con usted en caso de negligencia.

### **Confidencialidad**

Los registros de este estudio se mantendrán en privado. Cualquier tipo de reporte que publiquemos, no incluirá ninguna información que permita identificar a ningún participante. Los registros de la investigación se almacenarán de forma segura en un armario con llave y sólo los investigadores tendrán acceso a los registros. Los resultados del estudio serán publicados. Sin embargo, su nombre o identidad no será revelada. Se le asignará un seudónimo. Sólo el investigador tendrá acceso a los datos. Al finalizar el estudio, los datos se conservarán durante tres años. Después de tres años, todos los registros serán destruidos.

### **Naturaleza Voluntaria del Estudio**

La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Su decisión de participar o no, no afectará sus relaciones actuales ni futuras con Liberty University ni con Bryant Elementary School. Si usted decide participar, usted es libre de no contestar cualquier pregunta o retirarse en cualquier momento sin afectar estas las relaciones.

### **Contactos y Preguntas**

Los investigadores que realizarán este estudio son: Mishka Veira Barnes. Usted puede hacer cualquier pregunta que tenga ahora. Si usted tiene preguntas más adelante, **le invito** a que me contacte directamente a través de Bryant Elementary School, 404-731-3418, mishkaveira@bellsouth.net. Usted también le puede enviar un correo electrónico a la Doctora Rebecca Harrison rsharrison@liberty.edu.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta o duda sobre este estudio y quisiera hablar con alguien que no sea la investigadora(s), **se le recomienda** ponerse en contacto con el presidente de la Junta de Revisión Institucional (Institutional Review Board), el Dr. Fernando Garzón, 1971 University Blvd., Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 o al correo electrónico fgarzon@liberty.edu.

*Se le entregará una copia de esta información para que la mantenga en sus archivos.*

### **Declaración de Consentimiento**

He leído y entendido la información anterior. He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y he recibido respuestas. Doy mi consentimiento para participar en el estudio.

Firma \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

Firma del Padre o Representante \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_  
(Si hay menores involucrados)

Firma del Investigador \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_



## **Declaración Informativa para los Padres**

Estimados Padres:

Estoy realizando un estudio sobre cómo los estudiantes del idioma Inglés adquieren el lenguaje académico para aprender habilidades de comprensión de lectura en el aula. El estudio explorará cómo su hijo/a adquiere el lenguaje académico para obtener habilidades de comprensión de lectura. Se recopilará información con el fin de determinar técnicas para enseñar a su hijo/a habilidades de comprensión de lectura. La información ayudará a mejorar las calificaciones de su hijo/a en los resultados de las pruebas de lectura del CRCT, ya que el profesor/a recibirá información para determinar las mejores estrategias que ayuden a su hijo/a a aprender el lenguaje académico.

Su hijo/a participará de la siguiente manera. El o ella: (a) participará en todas las actividades de formación académica en el aula y (b) aprenderá lenguaje académico mientras se le enseña comprensión de lectura.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta, por favor no dude en contactarme, Mishka Veira Barnes 404-731-3418.

Reciba un cordial saludo,

Mishka Veira Barnes

## Appendix I

### Teacher Notification Letter and Informed Consent Form

1202 Vinings Place Cove  
Mableton, GA 30126  
404-731-3418  
mishkaveira@bellsouth.net

May 10, 2011

Dear Educators,

Your consideration to participate in a teacher interview that explores English language learners (ELs) acquisition of academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills is greatly appreciated. You are being asked to assist with a study that is being conducted as part of my doctoral degree in Teaching and Learning at Liberty University.

It will gather information to determine techniques to teach ELs reading comprehension skills. The information will help improve the English language learners' (ELs') CRCT reading test scores because it will explore the best strategies to instruction academic language to improve reading comprehension skills.

During the interview process, I will ask five questions about English language learners' acquisition of academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills. All of your responses will be utilized for research purposes only. Pseudonyms will be given to insure anonymity. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your time regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Mishka Veira Barnes  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University

## Teacher Consent Form

An Investigation of English Learners' Acquisition of Academic Language to Obtain Reading Comprehension Skills  
Mishka Veira Barnes  
Liberty University  
Liberty School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study that explores how English learners acquire academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills. You were selected as a possible participant because you are classroom teacher instructing English learners in your classroom. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Mishka Veira Barnes, ESOL Teacher, under the direction of Dr. Rebecca Harrison.

### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to determine how English language learners (ELs) acquire academic language to become successful readers in a classroom setting. Information from this study will inform the readers about the way ELs acquire language to learn reading comprehension skills. The researcher's intention is to use this research to add to the body of literature about how ELs acquire academic language to obtain reading comprehension skills.

### **Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: You will be interviewed by the researcher. The interview will consist of 5 questions. The interview will be audio taped. The interview will take about an hour. If follow-up questions to the five questions are asked, the interview will take longer than an hour. Immediate after the study is completed the audio tapes will be taped in a locked closet for three years. After three years, the tapes will be destroyed.

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

The study's risks are no more than you will encounter in everyday life.

### **Injury or Illness**

Liberty University will not provide medical treatment or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill as a result of participating in this research project. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence. There are no immediate benefits. However, the results of this study can provide information to benefit all educators.

### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely in a locked closet and only researchers will have access to the records. The results of the study will be published. However, your name or identity will not be revealed. A pseudonym will be assigned. Only the researcher will have access to the data. At the end of the study, the data will be kept for three years.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or with Bryant Elementary School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study**

If you choose to withdraw from the study please notify the researcher about your decision in writing.

**Contacts and Questions**

The researchers conducting this study are: Mishka Veira Barnes. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at Bryant Elementary School, 404-731-3418, mishkaveira@bellsouth.net. You can also email Dr. Rebecca Harrison at rsharrison@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix J

### Grade Level Cluster 3-5 Reading Can Do Descriptors

#### CAN DO Descriptors

#### Grade Level Cluster 3-5 Reading

For the given level of English language proficiency and with visual, graphic, or interactive support through Level 4, English language learners can process or produce the language needed to:

	Level 1 Entering	Level 2 Beginning	Level 3 Developing	Level 4 Expanding	Level 5 Bridging	Level 6- Reaching
<b>Reading</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Match icons or diagrams with words/concepts</li> <li>• Identify cognates from first language, as applicable</li> <li>• Make sound/symbol/word relations</li> <li>• Match illustrated words/phrases in differing contexts (e.g., on the board, in a book)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify facts and explicit messages from illustrated text</li> <li>• Find changes to root words in context</li> <li>• Identify elements of story grammar (e.g., characters, setting)</li> <li>• Follow visually supported written directions (e.g., "Draw a star in the sky.")</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpret information or data from charts and graphs</li> <li>• Identify main ideas and some details</li> <li>• Sequence events in stories or content-based processes</li> <li>• Use context clues and illustrations to determine meaning of words/phrases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classify features of various genres of text (e.g., "and they lived happily ever after" - fairytales)</li> <li>• Match graphic organizers to different texts (e.g., compare/contrast with Venn diagram)</li> <li>• Find details that support main ideas</li> <li>• Differentiate between fact and opinion in narrative and expository text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarize information from multiple related sources</li> <li>• Answer analytical questions about grade-level text</li> <li>• Identify, explain and give examples of figures of speech</li> <li>• Draw conclusions from explicit and implicit text at or near grade level</li> </ul>	

The CAN DO Descriptors work in conjunction with the WIDA Performance Definitions of the English language proficiency standards. The Performance Definitions use three criteria (1. linguistic complexity; 2. vocabulary usage; and 3. language control) to describe the increasing quality and quantity of students' language processing and use across the levels of language proficiency.

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## Appendix K

### Transcripts of the Teacher Interviews

#### Interview 1

B: Barnes

T: Teacher 1

B: Tell me about the challenges or difficulties your English learners face while communicating in English.

T: Ok. Getting what they want across, finding the words. I think that's, you know there's so many of them, it's not just my English learners. Talking about the challenges...just getting what they want across, finding the words that they are thinking of. A lot of times they will just describe it to me and then I try to guess what they are talking about. And the only other thing I would think of is because they speak one language at home possibly and then they speak another language at school, about maybe difficulty keeping them straight.

B: Alright.

T: That's a big question, #2.

B: Ok. Alright, next question. I just have to put a definition in there, so you'll know what I mean.

T: Ok.

B: According to Edgar Egbert and Ernest Salvit, academic language requires the use of a wide range of specific vocabulary items, grammar and syntax construction and discourse. So vocabulary is basically the language in the classroom and grammar is you know, syntax, and discourse is the one that confuses me sometimes, because it's oral or written language, so it can be like a storybook, a debate, a play, those type of things. Share with me how you provide academic language instruction in your classroom. Basically, how do you teach vocabulary and grammar in your classroom?

T: Ok. Vocabulary I could do through stories, I could do through, like we would do every other week we did a vocabulary list and we worked with them. I tried to make them synonyms or antonyms or prefixes so it went with some of the standards we were teaching. I do a lot of grammar and vocabulary with poetry. Where we like read the poem, we practice reading it for fluency and stuff and then circle you know, the verbs in red, you know in the stanza and then we go back and share. Through reading stories, I try to read a picture book everyday and then discussions on the vocabulary. Vocabulary can be done using context clues like

you saw yesterday, where I would say, you know, share with me how you blank academic language and then they use the words around it to try to figure out what the word means. Trying to think how else I do it. We can do brain pops, we can do, so that it's a visual matching, you know games and stuff.

B: Ok. Next question. Thanks. What do you think is the most challenging reading strategy, what do you think is the most challenging reading skills for English learners, meaning skills.

T: Inference, because the answer's not there, and they have to use their background knowledge, which they might not have. They have to use the clues that are in the story to figure out the answer, using the pictures and it's hard to put all of those things together when having difficulty just figuring out, comprehending the story.

B: Ok. Last, next question. Share with me how you help English learners acquire reading comprehension skills in the classroom.

T: Like I said, I read every day. I model, what is going on through me head when I'm reading aloud. I do reading groups and again, it's the same modeling through what I do. We read every day. We have reading log every day, hoping that when they read books on their own level, which I provide them with a bag for here, as well as when they go home, books on their level, you know practice on their own.

B: Ok. Last question. Which of the reading comprehension strategies or skills that you use in your classroom do you find the most effective?

T: One, huh?

B: Yeah, one.

T: Or it can be an activity?

B: Yeah, it can be an activity.

T: I guess reading. Whether I'm modeling a book or whether they are reading it, you learn by doing. I give them so much opportunities to be constantly reading. Whether it's an article or a book, but just the constant reading. And reading throughout the curriculum. Cause I think all the strategies are important, so I went with an activity.

B: What was the activity?

T: Just reading.

B: Oh, reading is the activity.

T: Yeah, I think all the strategies...

- B: The actual act of reading.
- T: Yeah, doing it. Every form of activity I do, every form of lesson involves some form of reading.
- B: Ok. Alright.

## Interview 2

B: Barnes

T: Teacher 2

B: Tell me about the challenges or difficulties your English learners face when communicating in English.

T: They have a lack of vocabulary knowledge and multiple meaning of words. And they're present and past tense communication effects their communication in the English language.

B: Ok, hold on. Can you repeat the last one?

T: The present and past tense.

B: Present and past tense of what?

T: Of verbs.

B: Ok, they have difficulties, they have difficulties with that?

T: Yes.

B: According to Egbert and Ernest Salvit, academic language requires the use of a wide range of specific vocabulary items, grammar, syntax, construction, and discourse. Vocabulary consists of general academic language, grammar includes syntax, mechanic sentence and paragraph structure, discourse is oral or written language, so basically discourse is like language that is oral or written, so an example of discourse would be like a story, or a debate, so basically just the forms of the language. Share with me how you provide academic language instruction in your classroom.

T: Through oral communication, with myself and the students plus their peers, talking. By giving them talking time which we call pair sharing, between the students so they can orally communicate their thoughts and use the content vocabulary through their talking, so they can review and get the enrichment of the vocabulary of the content. Also, having written commentary feedback from both myself and the students. And this commentary feedback, of course, is written communication but it also, they can visualize the scene of the language written



and also to enrich their vocabulary with the content vocabulary within the written. And, this is done through their peers too so they just not hearing it from the teacher themselves and it continues to strengthen their knowledge of the language and also the vocabulary to enrich their vocabulary of all subjects through the oral and the written. And also visual cues so it becomes an everyday occurrence in their life. With those vocabulary and concept vocabulary words, so they hear them both orally and then they can also see them with the written.

- B: Alright, thank you. What do you think is the most challenging reading comprehension strategy for English learners?
- T: Ok. The understanding of unfamiliar words and the multiple meaning of words in contents, to understand what the author is trying to convey. So they get an understanding of what the author is trying to say to them, what the purpose is. Also, making inferences about a story, because it's hard to, like what we say, reading in between the lines of reading, as it's been put together to understand and to draw conclusions about stories.
- B: Share with me how you help English learners acquire reading comprehension skills in the classroom.
- T: Ok. Through visual cues and exposing them to knowledge about the subject beforehand, before they read it. Lots of discussion about what the author is trying to convey to them, to help them with the lack of vocabulary and knowledge they have and to use graphic organizers so they have a visual look at the different parts of the reading, and the different details that are going on in the reading. Also, to break up the reading, maybe by for instance, paragraphs and discuss the important details out of that paragraph so that when they go back to talking about the whole passage, they know that I've broken it down into parts. So they get the details from each part instead of just trying to concentrate on the whole thing. When you break it down it seems that they understand more, of not as much language, so it gives them the chance to think about what's being said. So then they can piece it together at the end.
- B: Which of the following, which of the reading comprehension activities or strategies do you use in your classroom, which of the reading comprehension activities or strategies that you use in your classroom do you find the most effective?
- T: To break down the reading into parts and to use graphic organizers so that the students can communicate the details for the reading through visuals and break it down so they can make connections about the reading. Also, using contents clues activities to understand those important vocabulary especially content vocabulary or unfamiliar words that they do not know in the text.
- B: Thank you.