

ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES (ESOL) TEACHER EXPERIENCES
WITH NEWCOMER STUDENTS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Lindsey Marie Conrad

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers and other staff members who work with newcomer English Language Learners (ELLs) at the secondary level in two Northern Virginia public school systems. Stephen Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition guided this study as it explains the ways in which students learn and acquire new language skills throughout their schooling and social experiences. The following central research question guided this study: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia? Three sub-questions will support the central question: How do participants describe the learning environment? How do participants describe the process of second language acquisition for their students? How do participants describe the process of content area knowledge acquisition for their students? Participants were current newcomer ESOL teachers or other staff members (administrator, counselor, educational coach, or other school-based staff member) who work in one of two school districts in the Northern Virginia region. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, writing prompt responses, a focus group, and a classroom analysis. Data analysis included bracketing, horizontalization, code clustering, textural description, structural description, and the essence of the phenomenon. Results of the study show that the learning environment, support, pedagogy and practices, and understanding student backgrounds are all major themes that shape newcomer ESOL teacher experiences at the secondary level.

Keywords: English Language Learners (ELLs), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), newcomer, language acquisition

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Dad, Dan Conrad, who passed away suddenly and unexpectedly in 2015. He worked in higher education for over 20 years and I know he would appreciate this document. Thank you for being a role model and mentor for hard work, perseverance, and doing the right thing. I know you would have enjoyed reading over 200 pages of my research!

It is also dedicated to my two children, Penn and Brady, who were both born during this process. To them, I owe my fortitude.

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List of Abbreviations

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

English Language Learner (ELL)

English Language Proficiency (ELP)

Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

World-class Instructional Design Assessment (WIDA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Immigrants face many challenging obstacles when they arrive in America as high school students (Sugarman, 2017). Students must learn a new language and culture while striving to meet rigorous academic demands and standards. School-aged immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds are the fastest growing population of K-12 students in the United States (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2018). School districts across the nation are developing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs to help English Language Learners (ELLs) adapt to life and school in a new world. ESOL education programs must focus on the whole-student, not just their academic concerns (Sugarman, 2017). Newcomer students are those who recently (within the past two years) arrived in the United States, have limited or no English language proficiency, and who often have limited formal education in their native countries (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2018). The stakes for secondary school newcomer students are especially high because time is a factor in their completion of high school—they must finish high school before aging out of the system. Failure to earn a high school diploma could mean limited access to a higher education and to jobs that will provide for and sustain their families. Moving from little to no English language knowledge to full immersion in an American high school is overwhelming for secondary ELLs (Morita-Mullaney, 2016).

Chapter One provides the framework for this research which consists of the experiences of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers in a newcomer English Language Learner (ELL) classroom. This chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) Background, (b) Situation to Self, (c) Problem Statement, (d) Purpose Statement, (e) Significance of the Study, (f) Research Questions, and (g) Definitions of Key Terms. Through the lens of Stephen

Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition this chapter begins by addressing the relevant literature and providing historical context of how the ESOL classroom has evolved over time. It also addresses the empirical gap in the literature and explores the challenges and triumphs ESOL teachers face in a newcomer classroom. This chapter explains why this study was chosen and how its data could be used to inform educators and stakeholders in ESOL education of the experiences within a newcomer classroom setting. The chapter concludes with a detailed summary.

Background

The United States has more immigrants than any other nation in the world (Lopez & Bialik, 2017). The historical, social, and theoretical background of immigrants directly impact the education they receive in America; school-aged immigrants are especially impacted by their journey to a new nation. Historically, America is a nation of settlers who came here for opportunity and the chance for a better life. The social context of America is a melting pot of ethnicities, customs, traditions, and values because of its diverse population and international roots. Teachers, administrators, counselors, and other staff members who work with immigrant students must learn to accommodate the needs of a diverse group of learners who bring a plethora of educational and personal experiences into the classroom. Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition frames this research to provide a context for how newcomer immigrant students learn.

Historical

In the 1920s, the United States government implemented a national-origins quota system where each nation was assigned an immigration quota based on its population represented in the US census (History.com, 2010). Many people believed this limited immigration to America was

a discriminatory system that created unequal treatment. Immigration reform began in the 1960s when a call for equality among all races was central to public policy. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, established a new immigration system and eradicated the quota system (History.com, 2010). This act focused on family reunification and allowing refugees fleeing violence, political unrest, and/or persecution to have preference in coming to America. By the end of the 20th century, this act changed the makeup of the American population.

Since the passage of the new immigration laws in 1965, immigration to the US more than quadrupled (Lopez & Bialik, 2017). Today, 13.4% of the US population is made up of immigrants (Lopez & Bialik, 2017). Educational attainment for immigrants varies, but the overall immigrant population has lower levels of education than people born in the US (Lopez & Bialik, 2017). Some of the obstacles to education include the language barrier, lack of formal education in their home country, and meeting strict federal standards required for high school graduation. As America's school-aged immigrant population grows, educational access for English Language Learners (ELLs) increases to allow for on-time graduation and enrollment in college or career related courses (Flores & Drake, 2014). Equal access for ESOL learners consists of programs that allow for timely completion of high school and include language supports, cultural training, and accommodations to meet grade level standards despite the need for support to access grade level content. ESOL programs do not lower expectations and standards, they increase support (Shafer, 2018). These programs must account for and accommodate English learners with a vast array of needs. The growing population and extremely diverse demographics of immigrant students creates a need for an evolving curriculum that aims to meet the needs of all learners. Teachers of newcomer ESOL students must adapt

lessons and support to meet the needs of each learner in their classrooms.

Social

Newcomer ELLs at the secondary level are a dynamic population that include students who are legally able to live and work in the United States and those who are not (Sugarman, 2017). The Northern Virginia region is a hotspot for immigration due to its proximity to Washington, DC and large urban and suburban areas with a multitude of job opportunities. The region also has below average unemployment rates and the highest immigrant workforce participation rate nationally (Goren, Stewart, & Cassidy, 2017). Over two-thirds of the state's immigrant population lives in Northern Virginia, comprising around 27% of the total population in that region (Goren et al., 2017). School districts in Northern Virginia have adapted to rising immigration trends by developing comprehensive programs for ELLs at every level. Secondary schools, specifically, have tailored newcomer programs to meet the needs of high school aged immigrants. These newcomer programs meet the instructional needs of students and offer English language development courses, mental health services, low cost healthcare, and job preparation training (Sugarman, 2017). Newcomer students speak over 400 languages and range from being educated in a Western-style school for multiple years to stepping foot in a classroom for the first time ever upon arrival in America (Balingit, 2017).

Teachers in newcomer ESOL programs must understand the demands placed on these students and work to balance students' complex individual characteristics with academic demands. Newcomer academy programs are being adopted across the Northern Virginia region to allow for more literacy, numeracy, and workplace readiness skills to help prepare newcomer students for graduation faster (Balingit, 2017). The social context of the Northern Virginia region and school system requires resources for newcomer students and their families to help

them adjust to life in a new area with cultural, language, and educational barriers.

Theoretical

Immigrant youth who arrive during their secondary school years face a unique set of challenges (Sugarman, 2017). Newcomer classrooms present a diverse, complex compilation of student needs ranging from English language support to cultural acclimation. Teachers in ESOL newcomer programs have rigorous experiences with this student population because they need to support language skills and content area acquisition. Stephen Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition framed this research because it identified the ways in which learners acquire second language skills consciously and subconsciously through explicit instruction and casual interactions with the language. The combination of second language learning and content area acquisition is a main focus for newcomer students that was addressed in this study.

According to Krashen (1982), a student does not need to master all grammar and syntax rules of a language to learn it. Meaningful interactions and regular practice with the language will allow for learning and comprehension. Krashen (1982) identified five hypotheses that shape competence in a language: the acquisition-learning hypothesis; the monitor hypothesis; the natural order hypothesis; the input hypothesis; and the affective filter hypothesis.

The acquisition-learning hypothesis supports the claim that there are two ways to acquire language—subconsciously when language and messages come naturally and consciously through formal instruction (Krashen, 1982). Acquiring a language is more important than learning because learning does not necessarily equate to retention. The monitor hypothesis concludes that every second language learner has a monitor through which they edit and refine language as they use it (Krashen, 1982). Language monitors commonly include writing where it is easier to stop and reflect on written words. The natural order hypothesis determines that formal language

structures, such as grammar, will be acquired gradually and in different orders (Krashen, 1989). Students will not learn all grammar rules simultaneously or in a structured, ordered manner. The input hypothesis explains that language is acquired through comprehensible input including reading, writing, and listening (Krashen, 2003). Speaking will come when the second language learner is ready, and it should not be forced. Finally, the affective filter hypothesis states that second language learning will be impacted by the emotional state and characteristics of the learner (Krashen, 1982). Motivation, confidence, and personality traits can all impact the speed and ability of individuals.

There is a need for the voices of newcomer ESOL teachers and staff members to be heard so there is an understanding of how second language learners absorb new language skills and work through the comprehension, acquisition, monitoring, input, and sustainability processes of learning English. There is currently no research giving voice to newcomer teachers and other school staff members in the Northern Virginia region who are working to improve and sustain newcomer programs. Helping newcomer ESOL students gain equitable access to a quality education is a lofty goal that is achievable with the right resources and personnel. There is a national need for feedback and knowledge from ESOL educators in a newcomer program to fill the knowledge gap surrounding this diverse classroom population.

Situation to Self

As a researcher, I bring my own values and assumptions to this study that must be explicitly discussed. According to Creswell (2013), “Good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and, at a minimum to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry” (p. 15).

Personal Motivation

When I moved to Northern Virginia eight years ago, I had no idea how diverse the area was demographically, politically, ethnically, and socioeconomically. I came to this area because there was an abundance of teaching positions including one where I could utilize my undergraduate degree in social studies education/history and my graduate degree in literacy education. I knew I could utilize both these skill sets in any teaching career, but the demographics of this region proved to be ideal for my practice. My role eventually evolved from a social studies teacher into a high school literacy specialist. I also moved from a suburban high school to a more urban area with a large ESOL population, specifically a school with over 50 nations represented and 40 languages spoken.

My experiences with diverse learners in the ESOL classroom setting motivated me to investigate how teachers conduct content area lessons combined with teaching language acquisition skills at the secondary level. These classrooms present diverse environments full of different educational backgrounds and motivation levels that teachers must balance while striving to meet school, district, state, and federal expectations. My motivation for conducting this study is to give a voice to the teachers and school staff who work in one of the most complex classroom environments present at the secondary level. One teacher, counselor, and/or administrator will work in a classroom with 15 students who speak many different languages, may or may not have been to school before, and have little to no English language experience. It is an amazing environment that requires patience and kindness to meet the vast needs of a vulnerable student population. Progress monitoring and assessment is untraditional, and measurements of success come in many different forms. Newcomer ESOL teachers are a special population who deserve to share their experiences.

Philosophical Assumption

This study incorporated an epistemological philosophical assumption with evidence collected from participant's individual views and experiences—I assumed knowledge was known through the subjective experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). The concept of epistemology “is about issues having to do with the creation and dissemination of knowledge in particular areas of inquiry” (Bracken, 2006). Inquiry into newcomer ESOL teacher experiences allows for an investigation of how newcomer students acquire knowledge to help them meet their learning goals. An epistemological perspective “addresses the relationship between the researcher and that being studied as interrelated, not independent” (Creswell, 2013, p. 247). I chose this field of study because I work within it, as do the participants. I know information about newcomer ESOL students because I live and work in an environment with a large community of these learners. I see the daily struggles and successes newcomer students face in the classroom. The epistemological perspective asks, “what do people know?” and, “how is knowledge acquired?” (Steup, 2018). It deals with the production of knowledge which is directly intertwined with how newcomer ESOL teachers produce curricula that help their students understand new concepts.

Additionally, this study incorporated an axiological assumption that acknowledged the roles of values in this research. As an educator, striving to be a positive role model for all students is an important part of the job. Axiology focuses on what is considered important because it will undoubtedly shape and impact the way research is conducted (Creswell, 2013). Biases were present within this research and shaped the interpretation of data from the researcher's perspective. I used bracketing throughout the research process to journal my biases, so they did not interfere with the shared experiences of participants.

Research Paradigm

A social constructivist paradigm guided this study and the data interpretation because I was seeking to understand the world in which I live and work (Creswell, 2013). This paradigm is a worldview where researchers attempt to “develop subjective meanings of their experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). It means that the data was analyzed for its complexity rather than for narrow meanings. Creswell (2013) explained that the social constructivist paradigm includes the researcher placing herself at the middle of the process by extensively interacting with participants and basing all analysis and interpretations on the lived experiences of the participants. Newcomer ESOL teachers use the social interaction between the students in their classroom, themselves, and other staff members at the school to help build the social capacity and language skills of their students. In this context, student interactions with their teachers and peers shape the learning process and without it, there would be a lack of communication and connection. A fundamental principle of social interaction is communication (Sterian & Mocanu, 2016). A qualitative method with a transcendental phenomenological approach was used to address the gaps in the literature with the participants’ voices describing their individual experiences in newcomer ESOL classrooms at the secondary level.

Problem Statement

Between 2010 and 2014, about 154,000 English Language Learners (ELLs) immigrated to the United States annually, with about 49,800 youth falling within the traditional high school age range (Sugarman, 2017). In research for the United States Department of Education, McFarland et al. (2017) estimated the population of ELLs as 9.5% or about 4.8 million students in the fall of 2015. Recent research on the instruction of ELLs at the secondary level indicates that newcomer students are expected to speak, read, and write in grade-level English, close gaps in their subject area education, and pass a full range of courses and standardized testing required

for high school graduation (Morita-Mullaney, 2016; Sugarman, 2017). Newcomer students are those who recently (within the past two years) arrived in the United States, have limited or no English language proficiency, and often have limited formal education in their native countries (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2018). An ESOL teacher is someone who works with ELLs, or those students for whom English is not their primary language (ESLTeacherED.org, 2018). School based administrators, counselors, and educational coaches will all interact with newcomer ELLs on a regular basis.

Current research in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) education falls short on how to address the diverse needs of newcomer students with both linguistic and academic supports—especially when each student in the classroom has different needs, educational experiences, and language abilities (Ouellette-Schramm, 2016; Thomason, Brown, & Ward, 2017). Teachers of newcomer students are expected to help close the gap for their learners by supporting their language acquisition, preparing students for grade level materials, and equipping students with strategies and content for subject-area standardized tests (Olsen Beal & Rudolph, 2015). Teaching this range of students is a complex task that requires educators to balance multiple curricula while preparing ELLs for life in a new nation. The problem is that newcomer ESOL students are a unique population that require a classroom and teacher equipped to help them learn subject area matter and new language skills quickly and efficiently, so they can meet all requirements and graduate high school on time. Newcomer ESOL teachers are tasked with this challenge. Further research is needed to address this gap in the research while providing a voice for teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers and staff members who work with newcomer English Language Learners (ELLs) at the secondary level in two Northern Virginia public school systems. Newcomer ESOL teachers are those that work in a classroom comprised of newcomer students who need instruction in a specific subject area and second language supports. Newcomer students are those who recently (within the past two years) arrived in the United States, have limited or no English language proficiency, and who often have limited formal education in their native countries (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2018). Newcomer ESOL classes combine content area instruction with English language development skills. Stephen Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition guided this study as it explains the ways in which students learn and acquire new language skills throughout their schooling and social experiences.

Significance of the Study

Gaining insight into newcomer ESOL teachers' experiences is significant in several ways. ESOL education is an emerging field of research that needs to be explored as ESOL student populations continue to grow. There is an immense challenge in balancing the needs of each learner in a newcomer classroom. This research will contribute to the field by allowing newcomer ESOL teachers, administrators, counselors, and/or educational coaches to express their ideas and experiences with this diverse classroom environment. There are empirical, theoretical, and practical significances to this study that can impact students, teachers, parents, community members, and educational stakeholders.

Empirical

This study adds to the literature on instructional practices for newcomer ELLs by giving teachers a voice to highlight their experiences in a classroom with this diverse group of students. Administrators, counselors, and educational coaches all shared their experiences working with newcomers. These experiences provide insight into the successes and challenges of supporting the linguistic and academic needs of newcomer students. This study leads to positive changes in newcomer ESOL instruction by allowing teachers to share what works in the classroom. ESOL teachers, districts with a large population of ELLs, colleges with ESOL teacher preparation programs, and communities with ELL families will find this study useful because it will show how newcomer ELLs overcome challenges to learn new content and acquire language skills at the secondary level. Parents and families of newcomer ESOL students will find this study useful to help understand the expectations of teachers and students. This study offers teachers the ability to share their experiences to enrich the educational experiences of newcomer ELLs. There is limited research on newcomer programs, so this study adds information to the field about the newcomer classroom with insights into curriculum, language acquisition, and classroom environment.

Jaffee (2016) explained the importance of considering students' social, cultural, political, and economic contexts in their new country while implementing curriculum in the classroom. When instruction for newcomers shows positive relations to their identity, students have a greater opportunity to connect with the subject matter. The results of this qualitative study provide more equitable access for newcomer students who need more supports to access the general secondary curriculum. According to Alexander (2017), secondary schools have larger numbers of recently arrived ELLs, but are less likely to receive language support services than elementary aged ELLs. This leads to a higher risk for secondary ELL dropouts and/or age-outs

who cannot pass the required coursework and state testing in time. This study has empirical significance in helping newcomer ELLs level the playing field with supports and accommodations to help close the gaps as compared to their grade level secondary peers. Previous studies show significant gaps in pass rates between ELLs and non-ELLs (Alexander, 2017).

Theoretical

This study expands upon Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition by allowing teachers and staff members to share their experiences with student learning in the acquisition and learning phases of language and content area attainment. Krashen (1982) argued that students have two distinct and independent ways of developing competence in a second language: acquisition and learning, formally called the acquisition-learning distinction. Acquisition requires more than tedious drill and grammatical rules; it is the process where students focus on understanding the message they are conveying rather than their form or pronunciation (Krashen, 1982). While acquisition is a subconscious process, learning is the conscious notion of knowing the rules and understanding the syntax of language structures. This study expands upon Krashen's (1982) theory by providing a teacher's perspective of how students learn English language skills simultaneously with content area knowledge, thus combining the two components of the acquisition-learning hypothesis. It allows for newcomer teachers to share their experiences about how students balance this complex learning distinction. The study leads to actual results and data that shows how Krashen's (1982) theory works in a present-day newcomer classroom. This study is significant to researchers who are studying second language acquisition because it will provide insight into classrooms where the theory is at work. Critics and supporters of Krashen's (1982) theory will have the opportunity to consider

whether the five hypotheses in the theory of second language acquisition are relevant to a present-day newcomer classroom. Linguists, preservice teachers, and secondary schools with newcomer programs will find this study significant because it could show Krashen's (1982) theory in practice at the high school level.

Practical

This study adds to the knowledge base of stakeholders in the field of ESOL education, such as teachers, administrators, parents, counselors, and community members, by expanding the research on teacher experiences in a newcomer classroom. There is minimal current research that provides a rich description of how teachers and staff members experience a classroom with a variety of languages, levels of learning, and severe gaps in content area knowledge due to formal schooling systems with alternate curricula and subject areas. Many ESOL newcomer students arrive to the United States with limited or interrupted formal schooling, so they are at least two years behind their grade level peers in reading and mathematics (Hos, 2016). There is limited research on how practicing teachers make sense of and integrate instructional adaptations for their multilingual classroom (Daniel & Pray, 2017). This study helps teachers prepare and plan to accommodate diverse learners in the classroom through their shared experiences with language deficits, interrupted learning experiences, and lack of content knowledge. The Northern Virginia region is an ideal location for this study because each district in the study has over 19% of ESOL students making up their total student population. This region grew from 10% to 19% student enrollment in English as a Second Language courses from 2000-2011 (Owensby, 2015).

This study can be used on a wider scale to help improve ESOL education, especially in newcomer classrooms with students who need to meet grade level requirements, district and state

standards, and pass standardized testing to graduate on time. School and district level administrators can learn about effective instructional practices with proven student results as indicated by progress monitoring and data from these newcomer classrooms. This is influential for school districts with small or large ESOL populations who are looking to improve instruction for their ELLs. District and state policymakers will have interest in the results because ELL populations are often under scrutiny for academic performance, testing, graduation rates, and state funding requests (Alexander, 2017). Colleges and universities with English language learner students and teacher education programs will show interest in the results so they can better support their students and prepare their preservice teachers. The practical implications are far reaching for teachers, students, and families who have an interest in helping ELLs gain equal opportunities in secondary schools.

Research Questions

Research questions are designed to explore, investigate, explain, and describe the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). In this qualitative study, the research questions are open-ended allowing for participants to provide flexible answers with unrestricted viewpoints. The following research questions framed the research investigation: Central Research Question: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia?

English language learners (ELLs) are a growing population across the United States; the number of ELL students increased in almost every state from 2002-2013 (McFarland et al., 2017). In the fall of 2015, there were about 4.8 million students, or 9.5%, identified as ELLs (McFarland et al., 2017). Teachers of newcomer students must accommodate these diverse learners in the classroom to help them advance their English language skills and content area

skills. In a study of newcomer teachers in a global history classroom, Jaffee (2016) described the need for teachers to integrate ELL students' cultural and linguistic assets, prior social studies content knowledge, and current citizenship experiences in their community. Newcomer teachers must foster a variety of skills simultaneously to ensure students meet grade level and content area expectations. Exploring the way newcomer ESOL teachers balance complex curricula is essential to the development of newcomer ELL students' skills. The missing exploration in current research is the perspective of teachers who work in a newcomer ESOL classroom.

Sub-Question 1: How do participants describe the learning environment?

A learning environment, including teacher practice, school climate, school composition, and classroom demographics, plays a role in the academic performance of ELLs (Kim & Suárez-Orozco, 2014). Research by Tas (2016), Wang and Holcombe (2010), and Ryan and Deci (2000) indicated that conditions in the classroom environment can encourage or discourage student development and performance. Perceived teacher interest, peer interactions, and academic support are all linked to a positive learning environment that fosters individual and collaborative learning experiences (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). In a newcomer ESOL classroom, the environment is important because feelings of isolation or lack of integration into a school community can deter their English language development and content area acquisition. The environment is complex because each learner brings a unique set of learning characteristics into the classroom that often include various languages, different language abilities, interrupted or lack of formal education, and dissimilar motivation levels. The purpose of this research question is to explain how newcomer ESOL teachers describe their classroom environment.

Sub-Question 2: How do participants describe the process of second language acquisition for their students?

Krashen (1982) stated that people have two ways of developing competence in a second language: acquisition and language learning. Acquisition is a subconscious process that occurs as people learn language skills needed for communication (Krashen, 1982). Language learning is a conscious process that involves knowing the rules and syntax of new languages (Krashen, 1982). In a newcomer classroom, a teacher must balance English language acquisition skills with content area knowledge. There are often multiple first languages represented in a newcomer classroom setting forcing teachers to use differentiated strategies to teach basic words and skills. English language proficiency (ELP), particularly fluency in academic English, is a strong predictor of academic performance for immigrant youth (Kim & Suárez-Orozco, 2014). The purpose of this research question is to describe how newcomer ESOL teachers explain the ways students acquire second language skills in their classroom.

Sub-Question 3: How do participants describe the process of content area knowledge acquisition for their students?

A newcomer ESOL student must work to develop English language skills and reach grade level content area standards to pass standardized tests and high school level courses. Newcomer ESOL teachers must identify the language demands of classroom discourse/tasks while scaffolding instruction to promote ELLs' learning (Jaffee, 2016). Ladson-Billings (1998) explains that culturally relevant pedagogy uses students' own culture to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes that foster academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. If newcomer ESOL teachers can make a connection with their students' cultural interests and background knowledge, more learning of new content area occurs (Jaffee, 2016). For a teacher, connecting with newcomer students' background knowledge is essential for the student's development of content area knowledge in the English language. For an administrator,

counselor, or educational coach, connecting with their students is vital to understand their strengths, weaknesses, and needs. The purpose of this research question is to describe the way newcomer ESOL teachers and staff members explain how their students learn new content to meets state and federal grade level standards.

Definitions

1. *English as a Second Language (ESL) Teacher* – ESL teachers work with English Language Learners (ELLs), or those students for whom English is not a primary language. ESL teachers work with ELLs to help them acquire fluency in English, both spoken and written word. ESL teachers may work with students of all ages (ESLTeacherEDU.org, 2018).
2. *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)* – a program or service that develops English language proficiency and content area understandings with a goal of preparing students to be college and career ready (Fairfax County Public Schools, 2018).
3. *English Language Learner (ELL)* – a student who is not proficient in English and benefits from various types of language support programs (National Council for Teachers of English [NCTE], 2008).
4. *English Language Proficiency (ELP)* – the level at which a student can read, speak, write, and understand the English language (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2018).
5. *Limited English Proficiency (LEP)* – individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English (LEP.gov, 2018).
6. *Literacy Specialist* – a professional with advanced preparation and experience in providing reading instruction to students and teachers; literacy specialists have

responsibility for the literacy performance of readers in general and struggling readers in particular (International Reading Association, 2000).

7. *Newcomers* – students who are recent arrivals to the United States (within the past 2 years) with limited or no English language proficiency and who have often had limited formal education in their native countries (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2018).
8. *Theory of Second Language Acquisition* – Stephen Krashen’s (1982) theory that second language acquisition is driven by using language that learners can understand. Learners will acquire knowledge unconsciously, but learning requires a conscious thought process and an understanding of grammatical rules, syntax, and language structure. The theory has 5 main hypotheses: the acquisition-learning hypothesis; the monitor hypothesis; the natural order hypothesis; the input hypothesis; and the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982).
9. *WIDA (World-class Instructional Design Assessment)* – an organization designed to advance academic language development and academic achievement for children and youth who are culturally and linguistically diverse (WIDA, 2014).

Summary

Chapter One described the current condition of ESOL education across America. The background of the study is based on the growing population of ELLs and the need for public schools to be equipped to meet the needs of these diverse learners. Limited qualitative research exists giving ESOL educators a voice, especially those in a newcomer classroom. This study was situated through the eyes of a high school literacy specialist who works with a large ESOL population. The existing problem is that newcomer teachers must balance second language acquisition skills with content area knowledge. The purpose of this transcendental

phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in two Northern Virginia public school systems. An examination of the current literature indicates that there is a gap in the research, specifically, that there is insufficient understanding of the experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers' classroom experiences. The study expands on Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition by providing classroom evidence of the process of acquisition and learning for students with varying language abilities and educational backgrounds. The chapter concluded with an explanation of proposed research questions that will guide the inquiry into teacher experiences. Finally, important words were defined to create an understanding of the terms utilized throughout this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The United States Department of Education's (ED) mission statement declares, "ED's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (Department of Education, 2018, About ED section, para. 1). The public-school system in America has a goal to help all students prepare for their future by equipping them with content and educational experiences that will allow them to achieve success. This mission statement is an overarching enterprise that stands true for every student who moves through American schools. Equal access to education and equitable learning opportunities are foundational elements of the US Department of Education's work (Department of Education, 2018, About ED, para. 2). Newcomer ELLs are an exceptional group of learners that must interlace their own culture, customs, and traditions into their American learning experiences. They must learn to adapt to the public-school system, so they can integrate into American society and make contributions to their communities.

When immigrant families come to America, they are often searching for refuge, asylum, opportunities, or reunification with other family members. To assimilate into American culture, and specifically into American schools, multiple forms of support are needed. According to the Office of Second Language Acquisition (2017), a division within the United States Department of Education, newcomer students and their families have four basic needs: a welcoming environment (Olsen Beal & Rudolph, 2015; Wang & Holcombe, 2010), high-quality academic programs designed to specifically meet newcomers' needs (Fritzen Case, 2015; Sugarman, 2017), social emotional support and skills development for school and beyond (Sugarman, 2017), and encouragement and support to engage in the education process (Marx & Saavedra,

2013). Newcomer programs in public schools must address each of these necessities to successfully prepare ELLs to thrive within the classroom and well beyond their formal schooling years. Newcomer ESOL teachers, administrators, counselors, and educational coaches are the front lines of support for these students and their families. Their training and preparation to teach newcomers will shape the American school experience for these students and set them up for achievement within and outside the classroom. Without dedicated educators who understand how to balance content, language skills, and cultural acclimations, newcomer students will not flourish in their new environment.

This study sought to understand newcomer ESOL teacher and staff members experiences at the secondary school level. Chapter Two discusses the guiding theoretical framework, Stephen Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition, and how it impacts teacher and student experiences in a newcomer classroom. Through this framework, the ways in which teachers balance second language acquisition skills and content area knowledge acquisition in a newcomer classroom will be examined. To gain a better understanding of newcomer ELLs and their vast needs, the related literature discusses an overview of ESOL education, newcomer programs, newcomer ELLs, the language and literacy needs of newcomer ELLs, ESOL teacher preparation, newcomer ESOL teachers, and research on newcomer programs, teachers and classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

Teachers of newcomer ESOL students face the challenge of managing a classroom with ELLs that may have extensive language and cultural barriers. Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition framed this research because it focuses on the language acquisition and development of non-English and bilingual learners. This theory hypothesizes how secondary

teachers can present information to help their students simultaneously learn content area material and new language skills. This study examined the experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers at the secondary level using Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition.

Learning a new language as an adolescent or adult is especially difficult because it requires the construction of new cognitive frameworks in the brain, and consistent, sustained practice (Ducharme, 2018). Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition was the result of a linguistic inquiry from three different categories of thought: an approach to language learning from a theoretical perspective without regard to practical application, the approach aimed to help solve a real, practical problem confronting society, and a way to apply ideas that work to the classroom setting (Krashen, 1989). The idea of a theory implies that it can never be absolutely proven, but data and observation can verify its effectiveness as a significant model. The theory of second language acquisition was used to frame language acquisition skills for newcomer ESOL students at the secondary level because it explains how learners acquire new language skills (Krashen, 1982; Krashen, 1989; Krashen, 2008; Tricomi, 1986). The important distinction between language acquisition and language learning, especially for newcomer ESOL students who need advanced language skills to perform at grade level in secondary school, is paramount to classroom instruction for newcomer ESOL teachers (Cummins, 2008; Cummins, 2016; Krashen, 2008). Krashen refined his theory and built upon his hypotheses throughout the years with subsequent research to support and prove each of his premises. As the theory evolved, minor changes were made to support its conclusions. One such change was the use of deception—Krashen originally claimed that students should not be explicitly told they are acquiring new vocabulary or learning subject area matter; however, his work with the input hypothesis concluded that it is important to inform students about the process of language

acquisition, so they can continue to practice it on their own (Krashen 1989; Krashen, 2003). The theory of second language acquisition is widely used today to explain how second language skills are acquired.

Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition has five main hypotheses that explain how a student learns, acquires, comprehends, and applies new language skills. It is important to gain the perspective of newcomer ESOL teacher experiences from the lens of this theory because it offers a way to see how the five hypotheses apply to a classroom where second language learning is taking place. Within a secondary newcomer classroom, teachers must help their students develop academic and social English language skills, so they can effectively communicate their thoughts and ideas. The first premise in Krashen's (1982) theory is the acquisition-learning hypothesis, which is noted as the most fundamental of all five hypotheses (Krashen, 1989). This hypothesis states that "adults have two distinct ways of developing competence in a second language" (Krashen, 1982, p. 10). Acquisition is the first way students develop second language skills. It is a subconscious process where learners are not aware they are acquiring skills, but only see themselves using the language to communicate ideas (Krashen, 1982; Krashen, 1989). It is the "picking up" of language as students immerse themselves into speaking and reading words in English that they then use in alternate contexts. In the context of a newcomer ESOL classroom, students may acquire language skills from their teacher, peers, or through signage and posted communication. Subconsciously acquired language could be social phrases such as, "may I use the bathroom?" or academic vocabulary within the context of a specific subject area. Students are unaware they are learning and comprehending new language because of casual exposure to the words in context.

Learning is the second way to develop competence in a second language through the acquisition-learning hypothesis. Learning is the conscious process of knowing the rules of a language, how to apply them, and being able to talk about why the rules function the way they do (Krashen, 1982; Krashen, 1989; Krashen, 2003). Learning often takes place through explicit, formal instruction which results in conscious knowledge about the language. According to Krashen (1989), learning is less important than the acquisition phase because it does not often result in comprehension of the language. In a newcomer ESOL classroom, students will be taught informal and formal language skills through implicit and explicit instruction. It is essential that newcomer students are immersed with language through reading, writing, speaking, listening, and the exposure to words all around them with signs, posters, and school announcements. Formal instruction of explicit language skills, or the learning process, is necessary to show ELLs the proper way to format language. However, explicit instruction on grammar and language rules does not necessarily imply acquisition of new language. The two processes that make up the acquisition-learning distinction are both important for second language learners; it is important to consider the implications for newcomer ESOL students based on the context in which both distinctions are used in the classroom.

The learning acquisition distinction directly relates to newcomer ESOL students' ability to acquire second language skills and content area knowledge in the classroom because it categorizes what information students can comprehend and absorb versus the information they will only browse through and discard. There is a clear distinction between content-related acquisition and surface learning that is explained through Cummins' (1979) distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Cummins (1979) introduced BICS and CALP to create awareness of the challenges

second language learners experience as they attempt to close academic gaps throughout their schooling years (Cummins, 2008). According to Cummins (2008),

CALP or academic language proficiency develops through social interaction from birth but becomes differentiated from BICS after the early stages of schooling to reflect primarily the language that children acquire in school and which they need to use effectively if they are to progress successfully through the grades. (p. 72)

CALP is more academic in nature, whereas BICS is more conversational language that does not necessarily transfer into schooling. Two research studies (Cummins, 1980, 1981) showed the significance of the BICS/CALP distinction for ESOL students' second language development. The research showed that ESOL students' English conversational language proficiency was often mistaken as academic English language proficiency, which led to the misconception that students were acquiring more academic skills than they actually were (Cummins, 2008). The implications of Cummins' studies show that the process of acquiring second language skills can be easily misconstrued when newcomer ESOL students dispense strong conversational English that does not translate into academic conversation and content. BICS can be viewed as part of the learning phase through the lens of the theory of second language acquisition because it is a less formal way to communicate in a casual manner. CALP requires actual acquisition and comprehension to formulate thoughts and ideas about academic context within the classroom. Krashen (1982) made this distinction as subconscious learning verses conscious learning in his acquisition learning hypothesis.

Monitor Hypothesis

The second hypothesis in Krashen's (1982) theory is the monitor hypothesis, which explains the relationship between acquisition and learning. The monitor hypothesis suggests that

acquisition is responsible for the fluency, smoothness, and flow of language—the words that come to us naturally come through acquired language (Krashen, 1982). The only function of learning is to monitor and edit our words through self-correction when speaking or writing (Krashen, 1989). Conscious learning and formal rules will only play a role in language performance if students have enough time to process the rules and know and understand the correctness of a word, both the pronunciation and meaning. The monitor hypothesis is the filter through which second language learners sift words, syntax, and semantic information before speaking or writing with newly acquired skills (Krashen, 2003). In a newcomer classroom, students must learn to monitor newly acquired language by translating the information from their native language and emitting their response in English. The monitoring process is a continuous progression that will be refined as students advance in their academics and subject matter at the secondary level.

In a study of eight high school English language learners, Latham Keh (2016) analyzed how these students monitored their miscues while reading aloud from a text at their current reading level. Findings indicate students recorded miscues related to limited vocabulary knowledge, nonnative phonology, developing grammar, and non-attention to text (Latham Keh, 2016). The results of this study allowed researchers to find patterns among miscues for ELLs and demonstrate how ELLs construct meaning when they have miscues related to partial understanding of text. The monitoring process shows that ELLs are aware they are making mistakes as they read aloud, which is the first step in applying new language skills in a second language. When newcomer ESOL students actively monitor their language during reading, it demonstrates progressive knowledge towards second language acquisition and comprehension.

Natural Order Hypothesis

The third facet of Krashen's (1982) theory is the natural order hypothesis, which suggests that, "acquirers of a given language tend to acquire certain grammatical structures early, and others later" (p. 12). There are some grammatical structures that transcend languages and are therefore easier to acquire when learning a second language. Research by Brown (1973), Dulay and Burt (1974) and Bailey, Madden, and Krashen (1974), reported a natural order for both children and adults that parallels along a similar continuum. These empirical studies give evidence that there will always be certain language aspects, such as certain grammar rules, that come before others and this order is predictable. Although Krashen (1982) points out that there is a natural order, he rejects the idea of a prescribed syllabus with grammatical structuring since the overall goal is language acquisition and comprehension. Teachers in a newcomer ESOL classroom should weave grammar into their lesson in the context of their content area instruction instead of explicitly teaching skills in isolation (Mei Lin, 2015). Retention of grammar skills is more likely when there is substantive context for ELLs to locate the structure in text and analyze how or why it is present. Overall, the natural order hypothesis is less significant in the second language acquisition process because it does not directly relate to the acquirement of new language skills.

Input Hypothesis

The fourth component of Krashen's (1982) theory is the input hypothesis, which attempts to answer the principle question in the field of ESOL education, how do we acquire language? This hypothesis is only concerned with the acquisition phase of language development, not the learning phase. According to the input hypothesis, a learner can receive second language input at one stage beyond his or her current stage of linguistic competence (Krashen, 1982). Input for second language learners is at the core of how they acquire new language skills. Comprehensible

input is when learners see and hear context that they can process for meaning (VanPatten, 2014). For newcomer ESOL students, comprehensible input must be presented in multiple modes for acquisition to occur. A newcomer teacher may present the word, an image, a video, a physical example, and a song with the new concept. Every student will process and acquire input in a different manner, which leads to many challenges within a newcomer classroom.

Comprehensible input does not guarantee acquisition; however, comprehension cannot happen in the absence of input (VanPatten, 2014). Therefore, instruction in the second language must be leveled to meet the needs of the student. There will be multiple levels of comprehension and acquisition in a newcomer classroom, so teachers must work to present new information in ways that all students can acquire skills at their own comprehensible input level. The input hypothesis presents challenges for a newcomer classroom because not all students will reach proficiency levels at the same time. This requires careful curriculum development and consideration of multiple learning styles and modalities.

The input hypothesis has been studied extensively, especially in the context of classroom application. Yamashita and Iizuka (2017) studied the effectiveness of structured input with Japanese learners to determine if it is an operational method to improve learners' receptive and productive knowledge. The research found that when comprehensible input is used during instruction, students can understand information and produce responses to content area matter. This suggests that input is crucial to second language acquisition and development (Yamashita & Iizuka, 2017). Newcomer ESOL teachers need to provide high quality instruction and adapt curriculum to the various levels of comprehension within their classroom. For students to fully acquire new language skills, input activities should extend beyond the classroom into activities

completed outside of class. Helping newcomer ESOL students understand their input level will allow them to work independently to develop second language skills.

Affective Filter Hypothesis

Finally, Krashen (1982) rounds out his theory with the affective filter hypothesis. The concept of an affective filter was introduced by Dulay, Burt, and Finnochiaro (1977) as the emotional factors, or affective variables, that impact second language acquisition. Research confirms that affective barriers can be grouped into three categories: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety (Krashen, 1982). A student's affective factors will directly influence their ability to acquire second language skills—the affective filter hypothesis captures the relationship between emotional barriers and second language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). According to this hypothesis, learners who possess high levels of motivation and self-confidence and low levels of anxiety are better prepared to acquire new language skills. For newcomer ESOL students, affective filters can support or hinder their ability to acquire language skills and content area knowledge in the classroom. The learning environment will play a major role in helping to eliminate negative affective factors that can delay academic performance and conversational language skills. Newcomer teachers and staff members should strive to create a welcoming environment that allows learners to feel comfortable stepping outside their comfort zone to engage with new ideas and knowledge at the secondary level (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009).

The variability of newcomer ELLs affective strengths and weaknesses led Rao and Torres (2017) to examine the Universal Design for Learning framework to address a multitude of learning styles within one lesson or classroom. This framework consists of a set of guidelines that can help educators design flexible lessons and activities that address variability while also supporting language and literacy for ELLs (Rao & Torres, 2017). This design is useful in

newcomer classrooms because students understand content material and language use at varying levels; therefore, teachers can differentiate their lessons for every student. The Universal Design for Learning provides multiple modes of representation, expression, and engagement which appeals to students who have varying levels of motivation and self-confidence. Research on Universal Design for Learning shows remarkable successes in classrooms with special populations because it is a flexible process that allows students to adjust their learning to the style that best fits their needs. Rao and Torres (2017) reported gains in confidence, comfort, and subject area mastery while using the Universal Design for Learning with ELLs in the classroom.

Studies involving the theory of second language acquisition are usually focused on one hypothesis in practice. Several studies aim to disprove Krashen's (1982) hypotheses and claim there is no empirical evidence proving them correct. The most commonly studied aspect of the theory of second language acquisition is the input hypothesis and the idea that second language learners need information presented to them at a level at or just above their comprehensible input. Multiple theories of second language acquisition exist; however, Krashen's (1982) theory was one of the first to cover processes related to learning, acquiring, monitoring, comprehending, and sustaining new language skills.

Related Literature

There is much literature pertaining to ESOL students in secondary schools across America, and this section will address key topics that are important to this study. The existing literature on ESOL education, ESOL teacher preparation, and the literacy/language needs of ELLs provide a context for the condition of education for minority students across the United States and specifically in the Northern Virginia region. The additional topics of newcomer programs, newcomer students, and newcomer ESOL teachers will help shape the setting of

newcomer programs, the students they enroll, and the teachers who work within them. All this literature contains material that can help newcomer ESOL teachers and staff members at the secondary level balance efficient classrooms where newcomer students can make strides towards meeting grade level requirements and reach high school graduation. This literature provides a context for the field of newcomer ESOL education where teachers are at the forefront of instruction.

ESOL Education

Over the past 20 years, the population of ELLs has consistently grown throughout the United States. In the 2014-2015 school year, the percentage of public-school students in the United States who were ELLs was an estimated 9.4% or approximately 4.6 million students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). ELLs are also the fastest growing population of students in the United States with a 60% increase in the past decade, compared to a seven percent growth of the general student population (Figueroa Murphy & Haller, 2015; Olsen Beal & Rudolph, 2015; Peercy et al., 2017; Torres & Tackett, 2016). There are ELLs living and attending schools in all 50 states (Ruiz Soto, Hooker, & Batalova, 2015). ELLs are more likely to live in urban areas, but suburban and rural areas that have not typically served ELLs are reporting growing populations of second language students. ELLs speak over 150 languages and include native born Americans, immigrants, refugees, and unaccompanied youths (Ruiz Soto et al., 2015). These students are not a generalizable group—they include newcomer students, or those who have just arrived in America, and students who are third generation Americans, but do not speak English at home (Shafer, 2018). Challenges for ELLs in American schools include limited or interrupted formal schooling, inadequate literacy skills in their native language, personal responsibilities outside of school, and a lack of effective resources to help adjust and adapt to

American culture and schooling (Breiseth, 2015). Research surrounding ELLs and their vast educational experiences has increased with the influx of the changing demographics in American schools.

ESOL education programs are present in elementary, middle, and high schools across America. Each program is designed to meet the needs of the ELLs present in the school community. Therefore, programs range from a single classroom for ELLs to full on immersion programs spanning multiple grade levels and specialized teachers. There is no set blueprint for schools to follow as programs vary between schools, districts, and states. Students identified as ELLs can participate in ESOL education programs for language assistance to help them gain English proficiency and meet academic content requirements (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Helping ELLs with their English proficiency is directly correlated with improved educational outcomes (Ross et al., 2012). In a study from The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Takanishi and Le Menestrel (2017) noted that while the number of ELLs in American schools is on the rise, the quality of education those students receive is not keeping up. The study explored barriers to academic success for ELLs. The results show that schools do not provide adequate instruction and support for students who speak English as a second language. The language barrier, cultural differences, academic challenges, and social obstacles are all cited as difficulties that obstruct academic proficiency and success (Takanishi & Le Menestrel, 2017).

At the secondary level, extensive research has been done on the impact of standardized testing with the ELL population. English language proficiency assessments, measuring listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills, are used to measure the language progress and proficiency of ELLs (Carroll & Bailey, 2016; Menken & Solorza, 2014; Morita-Mullaney, 2016; Wolf,

Wang, Blood, & Huang, 2014). ESOL students are required to earn the same number of credits, pass the same standardized tests, and meet the same grade level standards as their mainstream classmates (Fritzen Case, 2015; Hos, 2016). Assessment programs provide testing accommodations to ELLs with the intent to minimize or eliminate limited proficiency in English as a threat to the measurements of their academic achievements (Solano-Flores, Wang, Kachchaf, Soltero-Gonzalez, & Nguyen, 2014). Solano-Flores et al. (2014) found a need to develop consistent, systematic testing accommodations using illustrations that support text because it enables ELLs to understand what they are reading even if they cannot directly comprehend the words. A study was conducted to design and implement illustration-based testing accommodations to help ELLs close the standardized testing gap. The results of the study show that illustrations are effective, but the researchers noted student characteristics and backgrounds as challenges to developing testing accommodations because ELLs are such a diverse group of students with exceptional needs (Solano-Flores et al., 2014). It is important to recognize that ELLs need accommodations and support to pass standardized tests because of profound language barriers. Public school districts across the United States must work to implement supports for all ELLs so they can pass state tests and work towards on-time graduation.

School districts across America are creating courses and programs to help ELLs adapt to advanced curricula and standardized testing procedures. Large, urban districts, who often have the largest populations of ELLs, are beginning to develop comprehensive ESOL programs to help newcomer students meet secondary school requirements and reach graduation in a timely manner. The establishment of newcomer programs, or those catered to meet the needs of students who recently arrived in the United States, is a growing trend that is proving to be

beneficial for ELLs (What are newcomer programs, 2017). Schools are moving away from the program model that isolates ELLs into self-contained classrooms where they are only interacting with other ELLs.

Newcomer ESOL Programs

Compared with their non-ELL counterparts, ELLs struggle to succeed in school, especially at the secondary level. As a nation, the United States has started to make progress in reforming secondary school programs designed to serve ELLs. According to Short and Boyson (2012), “Adolescent students who are newly arrived immigrants and who need to learn English are among the most vulnerable subgroups of English language learners...” (p. 9). One solution to this issue is the creation and implementation of secondary newcomer programs. Newcomer programs are defined as “specialized academic environments that serve newly arrived, immigrant English language learners for a limited period of time” (Short & Boyson, 2012, p. 9). Newcomer programs began in the 1970s, but they were used as a temporary service for ELLs until they were ready to enroll in a traditional school (Koller, 2015). Early newcomer programs did not allow newcomer students to earn credits towards graduation until they enrolled in regular high school classes. This prohibited newcomer students from graduating high school on time and led to a history of academic underachievement and a high percentage of students who aged out of school before earning a diploma. According to Przymus (2016):

Structural components of ESL programs at many school’s position ELLs as “mere” immigrants and “limited” English proficient by limiting their interaction with non-ELLs. Such “ESL bubbles” may act to initially insulate ELLs but also isolate them from important interaction with non-ELLs. The placement of students within an ESL bubble through particular tracked classes based on English language proficiency tests isolates

ELLs from the mainstream peer population and denies ELLs opportunities to become members of interest-based communities of practice. (p. 265)

Today, newcomer programs have evolved into immersion settings where ELLs are able to earn credits towards graduation while building skills that will help them learn English and adjust to life in a new country. These programs provide supports to ease students, their families, and the school community into their new academic setting. Educational researcher Monica Friedlander refers to newcomer programs as “cultural shock absorbers” because they help newcomer ELLs adjust mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally to a new school environment (Koller, 2015). Creating a stable, supportive environment for newcomers to learn and meet their academic and language goals is an essential component for all newcomer programs. Przymus (2016) studied the impact of programs that isolate ELL students from their mainstream peers. He found that integration into the larger school community through ambassador programs helps to develop and advance ELLs’ social, academic, and language skills by creating a space where ELLs regularly interact with non-ELLs (Przymus, 2016).

Goals of newcomer programs at the secondary level are particularly demanding because students need to be prepared for entrance into the mainstream classroom and/or work to earn credits towards graduation immediately upon their entrance into the American school (Salerno & Kibler, 2015). Current immigration trends indicate there is an increasing need to study newcomer programs, especially those at the secondary level. There are several models that newcomer ESOL programs can follow; programs will vary dependent on student populations and school needs. Newcomers’ native languages, countries of origin, differences in literacy skills, and educational backgrounds are the most important factors in determining the design of newcomer programs (Short & Boyson, 2012). Programs should build on newcomers’ assets and

provide support for students, their families, and the school community. The United States Department of Education (2016) categorized newcomer programs into two main categories: integrated programs and designated programs. Integrated programs are defined as the following:

Integrated programs are designed to meet the needs of varied populations, including newcomers, children of immigrant families, and English-only students at the same time—and are usually dual or bilingual language programs that enroll newcomers, children of immigrants, and English-only students in varying combinations. (p. 11)

Integrated programs incorporate newcomer ELLs' native languages to help create a strong, supportive environment where students can learn English and academic content. These programs are usually found within regular secondary school buildings and students have the opportunity to take courses within the program and outside of it.

Designated programs are defined by the United States Department of Education (2016) as the following:

Designated programs are designed specifically to meet the unique needs of newcomers enrolled in a district and include newcomer centers and international schools that provide academic and social emotional support and development to students who attend until they transition to elementary or secondary schools within a district. (p. 11)

These programs could be on site at a secondary school or located at a specialized center where students can spend their full or half day. Designated programs are the entry point for many newcomers with a goal of transitioning into the traditional classroom at some point during their formal schooling. They focus on educating the whole student with academic, social, emotional, and cultural supports. Although there are two types of newcomer programs as classified by the United States Department of Education, there are many blended models that combine

characteristics of both program types. The Northern Virginia region, where this study takes place, combines aspects of both program types. Each school district enrolls newcomer students on site within their designated high schools so there is no separation from mainstream students at any point throughout the day. This allows for a smoother transition for students and opportunities for interaction and engagement with their English-speaking peers on a regular basis.

The geographic area in focus in this study, Northern Virginia, has a continuously growing ESOL population. At the close of the 2012-2013 school year, Virginia had more than 99,000 ELLs, which was a 101% increase from the 2002-2003 school year (Ruiz Soto, Hooker, & Batalova, 2015). The Virginia Department of Education is committed to creating equitable educational opportunities for ELLs and targeted newcomer programs are a major component that play a role in helping Virginia's schools meet standards for all their students. Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe announced a plan to award \$50,000 innovation grants to pay teachers to develop curriculums that will help newcomer students adjust to life in the United States (Balingit, 2017). The Northern Virginia region has established itself as a front runner in the implementation of newcomer programs. The two districts in this study have newcomer programs designed to offer safe environments where newcomer ELLs can gather, learn, and socialize in a setting intended to help them advance their academic and language skills. Each district has at least a 19% population of ELLs with varying numbers of newcomers enrolled in each high school or secondary center. One Northern Virginia high school reported an enrollment of 100 students between January and March of 2017 who had been in America for less than one month. All these students are required to meet the Virginia state graduation requirements before the age of 22. Newcomer programs are adapted to student needs based on their language levels and

academic needs. According to a middle and high school survey of specialized newcomer programs, the main goals of newcomer programs include helping students acquire English skills, providing instruction in core content areas, guiding students' acculturation to the United States school system, and developing or strengthening students' native language literacy skills (Short & Boyson, 2012). These goals must be reached while meeting the national and Virginia state standards for all students.

According to the Virginia Department of Education (2018), a student must earn 22 course credits from required courses and electives and pass six end-of-course standardized tests. There is a lot of work to be done to help newcomer ESOL students develop their language skills while simultaneously learning new content and working to pass grade level standardized tests to graduate on time. Newcomer ESOL classrooms in Northern Virginia are comprised of students who speak all different languages. Currently, the most common languages spoken by ELLs in Virginia are Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, Urdu, and Korean (Balingit, 2017). Regardless of native language, all newcomer ELLs must take assessments to place them in appropriate courses within their newcomer program. Virginia is a member of World-class Instructional Design Assessment (WIDA), which is a program dedicated to annually assessing the English language development of ELLs (Ruiz Soto, Hooker, & Batalova, 2015). ELLs are categorized by their scores on WIDA assessments—any score between a one and six classifies them as needing English language support. Students in levels 1-2 are in self-contained classes for each content area and they are enrolled in an English language development course within their newcomer program. Data from the 2016-2017 school year, shows steady progress for ELLs in the Northern Virginia region on the Virginia state Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments. Statewide, 64% of ESOL students passed the state reading assessment, an improvement of three points from

2015-2016 (Balingit, 2017). School officials attributed the improvements to better approaches to teaching ELLs, including their immersion into general education classes before they are completely proficient in English or once they reach a WIDA level of three. There is a consensus among district officials in the Northern Virginia region that newcomer programs are helping to prepare and equip newcomer ELLs for academic success in secondary schools across the region.

Newcomer ESOL Students

Newcomer ESOL students, or those who have recently arrived in the United States, are a heterogeneous group that are among the most vulnerable students enrolled in American public schools. The term newcomer encompasses a variety of native languages, cultures, socioeconomic levels, life experiences, and educational backgrounds (Fritzen Case, 2015; Hos, 2016). Developing academic language skills at the secondary level is a challenging, high-stakes endeavor that poses many challenges (Menken & Solorza, 2014; Ouellette-Schramm, 2016; Wolf et al., 2014). In a three-year research study for the Center for Applied Linguistics, Short and Boyson (2012) describe challenges for newcomer ELLs as the following:

They are held to the same accountability standards as native English speakers while they are just beginning to develop their proficiency in academic English and are simultaneously studying core content areas. With their low levels of literacy in English, these adolescent newcomers are not prepared for secondary level texts and assignments. New to the country and the language, they face acculturation issues too, making engagement with their schools, peers, and teachers challenging. When one considers the likelihood of these students succeeding in traditional school settings, it is difficult to be optimistic. (p. 3)

It is extremely difficult for schools and districts who serve this student population to develop educational programs that meet the needs of newcomers because there is not one correct or

effective way to meet the needs of all students within this category. Researchers have focused on exemplary newcomer programs across the nation as models for others to follow. However, determining factors that lead to success for newcomers will vary depending on location, student demographic, and student needs (Short & Boyson, 2012). There is a focused accountability on standardized test scores, on-time graduation rates, and student performance for schools with large ESOL populations (Olsen Beal & Rudolph, 2015; Solano-Flores et al., 2014). Therefore, schools with newcomer programs must strive to create curricula that reaches the greatest population of newcomer students.

Numerous research studies have shown that English language learners need four to seven years to reach the average performance level of their English-speaking peers (Cummins, 1981; Collier, 1987; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000; Kim, 2017; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Newcomer students fall into this category, but often need even more time because of their minimal English exposure in text and conversation. In a study on out of school English language use of newcomer English learners from Korea, Kim (2017) investigated whether Korean ELLs' English language use outside the classroom had a significant impact on their language proficiency development. The results of this study showed that many of the Korean students did not regularly speak English outside of school—most students only spoke Korean at home and occasionally spoke English with their friends. The lack of English conversation and exposure outside of school is an inhibitor to their English language development. Newcomer ESOL students often speak, read, and write at least two years behind their grade level peers (August, Artzi, & Barr, 2016). The participants in the study expressed a desire to learn ways to engage in ways to improve their English speaking, writing, listening, and vocabulary outside of school, but did not receive guidance from their parents or teachers (Kim, 2017). The parents of the students

were not aware of ways to help their children improve language skills because they had little to no English-speaking skills themselves. This study showed the importance of English language and text exposure, especially for newcomer students. Research has indicated that ELLs' out of school language use directly impacts their English language development (Kim, 2017). This study also emphasized the significance of the involvement of educational stakeholders in newcomers' academic and language development. There was a disconnection between students, teachers, and parents that led to a lack of support outside of school. It is essential that schools, including administrators, teachers, and students, find effective ways to communicate with their newcomer community to help bridge their educational and language gaps and create an environment to accommodate these learners and their needs.

Literacy/Language Needs of ELLs

English language learners come to the classroom with limited language and literacy skills compared to their grade level peers. There is a sufficient gap that exists because of the language barrier for ELLs (August et al., 2016). Accessing grade level text is difficult for ELLs because of this gap and the complex content associated with the secondary classroom (Thomason et al., 2017; Wolf et al., 2014). Extensive research exists on ways to help ELLs improve their language and literacy skills at the secondary level. Using reading strategies, enhanced vocabulary development, and regular exposure to written and spoken English all prove to help close gaps and lead to quicker gains for ELLs (August et al., 2016; Pang, 2016). Research also shows that ELLs improve their literacy development through regular classroom participation and engagement (Pang, 2016; Teale, 2009).

The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth conducted a comprehensive study on instructional effectiveness for literacy learning in ELLs to determine the

usefulness of teaching reading skills (August, McCardles, & Shanahan, 2014). It was found that second language learners benefit from explicit instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, oral fluency, reading comprehension, and writing skills (August, McCardle, & Shanahan, 2014). ELLs at the secondary level are not explicitly taught each of these specific skills due to time constraints and lack of training for content area teachers with reading skills. Therefore, high school aged ELLs do not develop fully functional reading skills at grade level which can hinder their academic performance. There is simply not enough time to teach secondary ELLs everything they need to know about reading in English before they are expected to take standardized tests and pass grade level assessments. Many secondary content area teachers rely on the use of reading strategies to aid in the comprehension of text for ELLs. Reading strategies force ELLs to monitor their understanding as they read to check for comprehension.

In a study on using reading strategies by Thomason, Brown, and Ward (2017), high school ELLs were taught close reading skills to see if repeated readings enhanced their understanding of readings for a history class. The researchers found no evidence of improved comprehension or enriched history content knowledge after the implementation of the prescribed close reading skills. Even though the study was not favorable for close reading strategies, it did lead researchers to three significant findings: background knowledge is essential, students can answer comprehension questions better when the text is on their instructional level, and motivation and engagement is key for comprehension (Thomason et al., 2017). Background knowledge is crucial for ELLs to develop their understanding while reading (August et al., 2016; Pang, 2016). When teachers introduce text and ask students to engage with the reading before they begin to construct their own meaning, ELLs are more likely to comprehend the material. It

is also important that content area text is accessible for ELLs. Research shows that most ELLs will not be reading on grade level by the time they reach high school, so leveled texts and adapted materials are indispensable for reading comprehension. Finally, when ELLs are committed and engaged in the classroom, they are more likely to understand subject matter. ESOL teachers must create an environment that encourages engagement and motivation, so all students feel comfortable and committed to learning.

Reading skills and reading strategies are essential components for improving newcomer ELLs' literacy skills, but perhaps the most important component that can help advance both English language and content area skills is vocabulary development. ELLs come to the classroom with a limited English vocabulary compared to their English-proficient peers (August, Artzi, & Barr, 2016). Embedded instruction that combines English vocabulary with content area knowledge is a cornerstone of the newcomer classroom because it works on two important components of student development at once. There is a lack of research focused on content-specific vocabulary learning for low-literacy ELLs; however, learning content specific vocabulary is an essential skill for all students so they can master the academic language and vocabulary of content area texts (Ardasheva & Tretter, 2017). Mastering complex content area vocabulary is a daunting task for all students, but especially for newly arrived immigrant students at the secondary level (Ardasheva & Tretter, 2017; Fang, 2008). Despite the recognized need for explicit vocabulary instruction, rarely do secondary classrooms focus on specific content area terminology. Research cites a lack of instructional time (Sweeny & Mason, 2011) and/or a lack of preparation or understanding of how to teach newcomers complex words (Ardasheva & Tretter, 2017) as the main reasons for leaving explicit content area vocabulary

instruction out of the general curriculum. These challenges make it extremely difficult for newcomer ELLs at the secondary level to achieve content area mastery.

In a study on developing science-specific, technical vocabulary for newcomer English learners in high school, Ardasheva and Tretter (2017) reported on a science-literacy intervention program designed for secondary school newcomer ELLs. Their study aimed to collect data for science curriculum development focused on vocabulary support that could be used across language and grade levels in science class. This research was based on the idea that science-specific vocabulary, no matter how complex, should be integrated into everyday lessons, studied with repetition, and used in meaningful ways in the classroom (Ardasheva & Tretter, 2017). The study showed that many low-level newcomer students did not have knowledge of the complex vocabulary in their native language, so it was their first exposure to many words—this further minimized student experience to this type of vocabulary. The results of the study showed significant improvements from the pre to posts tests indicating that the explicit vocabulary instruction helped students make progress in their content specific terminology retention. Explicit and embedded vocabulary instruction is proven to help ESOL students improve their language development skills (August, Artzi, & Barr, 2016). This study proves that there are benefits to teaching newcomer students explicit vocabulary to help advance their content area academic language. It is especially important and relevant for newcomer students because they have fewer years to master language skills before high school graduation. Secondary ESOL teachers must be prepared to teach vocabulary and language skills to their students regardless of the content area they teach.

ESOL Teacher Preparation

Research shows that many teachers are not prepared to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations (de Jong, Naranjo, Li, & Ouzia, 2018; Marx & Saavedra, 2013; Peercy et al., 2017). There is a growing body of literature on how to improve general education teachers' skills in teaching ELLs, but less attention has been given to the way ESOL teachers are prepared to teach English language skills and content areas (Tigert & Madigan Peercy, 2017). Because of the recent and rapid growth in the ELL population, many school districts across America have not trained or provided professional development for regular classrooms teachers or ESOL teachers on how to adapt their curriculum to include ELLs. According to Silva and Kucer (2016), "While the majority of classroom teachers have at least one ELL enrolled in their classroom, only 29.5% received the professional development necessary to address the linguistic and cultural needs of these students (p. 1). Preservice teachers need to be adequately prepared to teach newcomer ELLs and current teachers need training to help meet their students' needs (Daniel & Pray, 2017; Figueroa Murphy & Haller, 2015; Hos, 2016; Torres & Tackett, 2016; Wolf et al., 2014). Less than 17% of teacher preparation programs offer specific courses to support and prepare educators to work with ELLs (Silva & Kucer, 2016). Teachers with a degree in ESOL have the difficult task of helping students develop grade level content area knowledge while acquiring English language skills (Fritzen Case, 2015; Weinburgh, Silva, Horak Smith, Grouiz, & Nettles, 2014). They are also required to prepare their students to pass state standardized tests (Torres & Tackett, 2016). There is a heightened emphasis on integration of content area instruction and English language development in ESOL education today; therefore, ESOL teachers are expected to be able to teach both within their classroom. ESOL teacher preparation programs focus on language pedagogy and do not typically prepare teachers for specific content areas, which leaves teachers

underprepared for the newcomer classroom (Tigert & Madigan Percy, 2017). ESOL teachers at all levels need to learn to juggle many different roles and responsibilities within the classroom to help prepare their students to meet grade level standards and pass state testing.

In a study on the preparation of ESOL teacher candidates enrolled in a teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) Master of Education program, Tigert and Madigan Percy (2017) examined how prepared teacher candidates felt to teach in the content areas. The results showed that the teacher candidates did not feel their university coursework sufficiently prepared them to teach a specific content area with English language development. The participants in the study noted that there was nothing in their degree program that addressed content specific ESOL instruction. Upon graduation, one candidate was tasked with teaching ESOL mathematics, something she had no experience or training to do. With the recent reforms in secondary standards and testing expectations for ELLs, there is an added pressure for schools to show increasing improvement in ELLs' achievement through standardized measures and graduation rates (Tigert & Madigan Percy, 2017). Research shows the challenges teachers face when they were trained in either ESOL or a specific content area. Teachers trained to support language acquisition sometimes struggle to address complex content area curricula while working to develop new language skills (Pokrivcakova, 2013). There was also noted difficulty in conveying complex concepts to students who have a language barrier. There is a clear discrepancy between ESOL teacher preparation and the expectations for the classroom that should be addressed so ESOL students can receive the necessary supports to succeed at the secondary level.

Martin-Beltran and Madigan Percy (2014) studied the collaboration of ESOL teachers and language specialists to determine how they can best meet the needs of ELLs in the classroom. The researchers found that the collaborative model allowed them to create a vast array of

instructional tools that met the needs of more students in the classroom. Although this model is not typical for all ESOL classrooms across the country, it shows the importance of having a team of individuals devoted to helping ELL's access secondary curricula and complex subject matter. The collaborative model is becoming increasingly popular in schools with newcomer programs because there is such a high need for students to be able to access grade level content and language skills quickly. The support of an ESOL teacher and a content area teacher allows for cooperation where the mainstream teacher is "responsible for teaching the core academic objectives," whereas the ESOL teacher "helps classroom teachers know how to scaffold academic instruction by adapting their language use" (Tigert & Madigan Percy, 2017, p. 544). Newcomer ESOL teachers will need support from colleagues and administrators to create differentiated materials for their diverse classrooms. Schools that have a literacy specialist, reading coach, and/or ESOL resource teacher will have the added benefit of extra support for their students and classroom. Mainstream classroom teachers with transitioning ESOL students will need added support to help adapt content and materials to student levels. Without support and/or professional development to teach these skills, teachers and students will not succeed in a classroom with ELLs.

Newcomer ESOL Teachers

The evolution of newcomer programs across America have created a need for educators with experience teaching ESOL students and specific content areas. Dually-certified teachers are ideal candidates for newcomer programs, but schools cannot always find teachers who have the skills and certifications to teach within these programs. Bilingual teachers are also prime candidates because of their enhanced communication abilities. There is no specific degree or training program to work with newcomer students; ESOL certified teachers can lead newcomer

classrooms. Newcomer programs strive to provide services to the whole child because students are exposed to a range of personal and family issues that impact their well-being and ability to succeed in school (Short & Boyson, 2012). According to the US Department of Education (2016), “Perspectives about high-quality education for ELLs are grounded in sociocultural theories of learning and often challenge common assumptions and practices” (p. 3). Finding and retaining qualified teachers is a challenge for newcomer programs. There is a lack of research in staffing the newcomer classroom and a deficiency in transferrable instructional strategies that can be used across content areas in newcomer classrooms. In their survey on successful newcomer programs across the United States, Short and Boyson (2012) recommend recruiting teachers who are specifically trained to teach newcomers and have ESOL or bilingual credentials and endorsements. Educators working with newcomer students can engage them in high-quality instruction by using instructional strategies designed for ELLs (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

According to the United States Department of Education’s Newcomer Toolkit (2016), high-quality instructions for newcomer students are grounded in sociocultural theories of learning. There is a heightened emphasis on social factors with an emphasis on communication to help develop English language skills. The newcomer toolkit states that instruction in the newcomer classroom should do the following: set high expectations for success, provide authentic learning opportunities that simultaneously develop language and content area skills, provide rich opportunities to learn, reflect students’ cultural orientations, and develop student autonomy (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The instruction should focus on the strengths of the students within the classroom, so they can develop confidence and independence in their learning. Newcomer teachers must recognize that their students will arrive in the United States with

knowledge, skills, and language abilities that will frame their social and academic experiences in their classroom (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). There should also be ongoing professional development for all teachers who work with ESOL students, so they can develop competencies that will continually help their students (Silva & Kucer, 2016).

In the Northern Virginia region, newcomer programs are regularly developing new curriculum to share between secondary schools. These programs are in their infancy, so there is continuous professional development to reflect and advance the courses and programs. Schools are also expected to cater their newcomer programs to their student population. For example, some schools may require specific vocational training coursework, while others may not. Short and Boyson (2012) report that 14% of newcomer programs offer career or vocational training. These courses are especially “important for students are overage for their grade (by two years or more) and may not have enough time to finish high school or for those who may not select to pursue postsecondary educational options” (Short & Boyson, 2012, p. 21). Newcomer teachers will need to survey their students to help refine their academic and career goals. Continuous tracking and progress monitoring of language development and content area achievements are useful for creating an educational course of action for each newcomer student. Newcomer teachers are tasked with tracking students who are learning and speaking English at many different levels and who have various career and academic goals. Regardless of certification, experiences, and language abilities, newcomer ESOL teachers must be committed to adapting their instruction to meet the needs of the students within their classroom.

Research on Newcomer Programs, Classrooms, and Teachers

Much of the research cited throughout this literature review focuses on one aspect of ESOL education or newcomer ELLs. There is a lack of current research on entire newcomer

programs because many school districts across the United States are constantly revising their newcomer ESOL curriculums to keep up with immigration trends and changing student demographics (Sparks, 2016). Short and Boyson (2012) published a report aiming to focus attention on newcomer ELLs at the middle and high school level. The report was based on a 3-year national research study that resulted in a survey of secondary newcomer programs, a searchable database of program profiles, and a case study of 10 programs that exhibited exemplary practices (Short & Boyson, 2012). This study could be revisited to include more current research on newcomer programs, including how the 10 exemplary programs are continuing today. The US Department of Education (2016) published a Newcomer Toolkit designed to provide teachers and state, district, and school administrators with the tools needed to help newcomer ELLs reach English language proficiency and college and career readiness standards required by federal laws. This toolkit provides information for identifying the following tools and resources: identifying English learners, providing ELLs with a language assistance program, staffing and supporting ELL programs, providing access to core curricula and extracurricular programs, creating an integrated environment, addressing ELLs with learning disabilities, serving learners who opt out of ELL programs, monitoring programs and services, evaluating the effectiveness of a program, and ensuring meaningful communication with parents (US Department of Education, 2016). The tools for creating an impactful program are present in this report; however, the report acknowledges that school districts must create a program that will meet the needs of its student population, which means each newcomer program will look different. Some aspects of newcomer programs that are relative to this study on teacher experiences in a newcomer classroom have been researched including effective instructional

practices, how to create meaningful access to core curriculum, and supporting/staffing for newcomer students.

Newcomer ESOL programs have the dual obligation of supporting students with their English language proficiency and helping students attain core curricular concepts (US Department of Education, 2016). Effective instructional strategies for ELLs will help students learn language skills while working to acquire content area knowledge. Although there is no blueprint for newcomer program curriculums, there are strategies that consistently show up in research on effective instruction for ELLs. These strategies include regular opportunities for English language conversation and practice (Pryzmus, 2016), explicit instruction on language structures and vocabulary (August, Artzi, & Barr, 2016), activation of background knowledge to increase comprehension (Silva & Kucer, 2016), regular writing opportunities (Mei Lin, 2015), and parent/family involvement (Koller, 2015). Each strategy is proven to help newcomer ELLs succeed in the classroom and as members of a community. These strategies are foundational for newcomer programs because they allow students to simultaneously work towards meeting language proficiency and content area goals. The implementation of each strategy will vary depending on student population and English language proficiency levels with the school and specific classroom.

The other area of research that directly applies to this study on teacher experiences in a secondary newcomer classroom are supporting/staffing for newcomer students. According to the US Department of Education (2016), “Recruiting, developing, and retaining excellent educators is essential in order to ensure that EL program models successfully achieve their educational objectives” (pg. 1). Teachers should be ESOL certified and trained to support ELLs or core content certified and trained to support ELLs. Administrators should also receive training on

supporting ELLs, so they can effectively evaluate teachers' performance and school-wide support systems (August, Estrada, & Boyle, 2012). Regular professional development is necessary for all members of the school staff who will interact, support, and/or work with ELLs (Silva & Kucer, 2016). Newcomer programs should offer continuous support and development so staff members can meet the needs of the learners in their classroom.

Summary

Chapter Two discussed various aspects that relate to the study of newcomer ESOL teacher classroom experiences. The theoretical framework using Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition, including the five main hypotheses, was explained as a lens to view teachers work in a newcomer classroom. A review of the literature revealed that ESOL education is an emerging field with a growing student population. There is a need to explore newcomer ESOL classrooms at the secondary level to gain an understanding of the curriculum used to provide instruction in specific content areas and English language acquisition. This study addressed the gap in the literature by giving a voice to the teachers who are on the front lines in newcomer classrooms. The challenges, successes, classroom environment, and experiences balancing content area instruction with second language acquisition skills is important to add to the current research in ESOL education. There is no homogenous profile for newcomer students; they are a diverse group with varying experiences and needs. Newcomer ESOL students also possess a unique variety of literacy and language needs that can be addressed in many ways in the classroom. ESOL teachers must work to adapt instruction for their students in a way that best meets their learning style and needs. Teacher preparation is a driving force that may directly relate to student experiences and successes. It is essential that all teachers who work with ELLs have some training to support all students in their classroom.

There is a body of research on individual aspects of newcomer programs, but there is a lack of research on whole programs. Overall, the literature revealed that ESOL is an ever-expanding field that will need research and attention as the population of ELLs continues to grow.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers and staff members who work with newcomer English Language Learners (ELLs) at the secondary level in two Northern Virginia public school systems. By investigating this phenomenon, this study helps broaden the research in newcomer ESOL education and provide insight into what it is like to work with students new to the country, culture, and educational system all in one classroom. A transcendental phenomenological design was chosen for this study because it allows for the explanation of a phenomenon by the individuals who have experienced it—newcomer ESOL teachers. Secondary schools in the Northern Virginia region were chosen for their rich diversity in demographics, including a large population of ESOL students who represent many different nations, cultures, socioeconomic statuses, and languages. The participants in this study were newcomer ESOL teachers who work within two school districts in the region. Data collection for this study focused on the shared experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers through semi-structured interviews, writing prompt analysis, classroom observations, and a focus group session. Data analysis followed Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological research methods to develop a synthesis of the essence of the lived experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers. Finally, trustworthiness and ethical considerations were addressed through member checking, participant review of interview transcriptions, triangulation of data, an audit trail, and continuous reflexivity.

The purpose of Chapter Three is to describe the methods used in this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study which investigates the experiences of ESOL teachers in

newcomer classrooms at the secondary level in Northern Virginia. Chapter Three will discuss the (a) design, (b) research questions, (c) setting, (d) participants, (e) procedures, (f) researcher's role, (g) data collection, (h) data analysis, (i) trustworthiness, and (j) ethical considerations. The chapter will conclude with a detailed summary of the investigation of newcomer ESOL teacher experiences.

Design

Qualitative research encompasses a variety of styles of inquiry; explorations are shaped by researchers' beliefs about the nature of the world (ontology), the ideas of how people acquire knowledge (epistemology), and the beliefs, experiences, and characteristics of the researcher (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). There is not one definition that classifies or explains qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explained the nature of qualitative research as follows, "Qualitative research is difficult to define clearly. It has no theory or paradigm that is distinctively its own...Nor does qualitative research have a distinct set of methods or practices that are entirely its own" (p. 6). This branch of research cannot be confined to one method or approach and includes multiple disciplines and styles. The qualitative method of research was used to convey expressive information about experiences, beliefs, and feelings from individuals who have experienced a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). For this study, ESOL teachers, administrators, counselors, and educational coaches were asked to share details about their experiences in newcomer classrooms. The qualitative method is appropriate because it allowed participants to provide in-depth information that cannot be articulated with a quantitative structure. The provided information made the phenomenon visible to the outside world through interpretive responses and shared experiences that relate to the stated research questions.

A phenomenological approach was used to describe the lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The roots of phenomenology extend back to post-World War II Europe, a continent ravaged by war, fighting, and sordid ideologies. German philosopher Edmund Husserl sought to develop a philosophical method that could help heal and provide hope to a disintegrating civilization (Groenewald, 2004). Husserl believed that nothing in the world exists dependently on another object; therefore, to arrive at certainty anything outside the immediate experience should be ignored (Groenewald, 2004). Individual realities exist as phenomena and can be studied through a person's conscious experiences. Phenomenology as a philosophical research method was born through the aim of studying pure phenomena (Groenewald, 2004). The purpose of using this design was to reduce individual experiences into the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach is appropriate to study the experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers at the secondary level because it allowed participants to express their thoughts, opinions, and practices within a newcomer classroom in isolation of their personal and professional lives. This study solely focused on newcomer teacher experiences as a sole phenomenon.

Transcendental phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand human experiences—it is grounded in the concept of intentionality, the act of perceiving or judging something in an intentional way (Moustakas, 1994). Investigators aim to explore phenomena as explained by an individual, so they can understand how it is perceived and experienced. A qualitative research method with a transcendental phenomenological approach was used to guide the investigation of newcomer ESOL teacher and staff member experiences at the secondary level in the Northern Virginia region because it allowed for data to be collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of teaching newcomer ESOL

students (Creswell, 2013). Transcendental phenomenology allowed the researcher to focus on the descriptions from participants rather than the interpretations of the researcher—it is called transcendental because it “adheres to what can be discovered through reflection on subjective acts and their objective correlates” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 45). The participants’ shared experiences of the phenomenon, working with newcomer ESOL students at the secondary level, provided a deeper understanding of what it is like to work with a diverse group of students who bring varying needs, interests, and educational experiences to the classroom environment. The researcher’s role was to explain the meaning of the phenomenon “in terms of its constituents and possible meanings, thus discerning the features of consciousness and arriving at an understanding of the essence of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49). The researcher solely focused on the descriptions and information provided by the participants to understand the core of their explanations. The participants’ shared experiences of the phenomenon provided a deeper understanding of the features of a newcomer classroom. Open-ended research questions allowed for a phenomenological response, one which focuses on the conscious thought and experiences, from all participants.

Research Questions

Research questions are the roadmap to the pursuit of knowledge used to outline the path of exploration. The research questions attempted to investigate the phenomenon of teacher experiences in a newcomer ESOL classroom. The following questions guided the study:

Central Research Question: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia?

Sub-Question 1: How do participants describe the learning environment?

Sub-Question 2: How do participants describe the process of second language acquisition

for their students?

Sub-Question 3: How do participants describe the process of content area knowledge acquisition for their students?

Setting

The site for this study is Northern Virginia, specifically secondary schools in two school districts: Grayson Public Schools and Brick Public Schools. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for the names of all school districts. The Northern Virginia region is the most populated area of Virginia and often seen as the economic engine due to its proximity to Washington, DC. The region has accounted for 60% of the state's population growth since 2010; it is a thriving community with tremendous growth in business, schools, residential communities, and commerce (Olivo, 2018). Northern Virginia consistently ranks among the United States' wealthiest, healthiest, and most-educated regions, but there are stark disparities among the region's population with areas of affluence situated directly adjacent to poverty-stricken neighborhoods (Woolf, Chapman, Hill, & Snellings, 2017). According to Woolf et al. (2017), there are several areas of the region that are categorized by low educational attainment, high poverty, unemployment, housing problems, and a lack of access to respectable healthcare. These areas have lower life expectancies than the more affluent districts and residents typically do not have a higher education degree. The high poverty areas in Northern Virginia have a higher representation of Hispanic, African American, and immigrant populations (Woolf et al., 2017). Opportunities for social and economic mobility in the Northern Virginia region are largely dependent upon education and learning experiences for all populations.

The school districts in the Northern Virginia region, Grayson Public Schools and Brick Public Schools, are all representative of the various demographics that makeup the region.

Grayson Public Schools is the 10th largest school system in the United States with 198 schools and centers. It serves more than 188,000 students in prekindergarten through 12th grade. Of those students, 29% are eligible for free or reduced lunch, 14% receive special education services, and 29% receive ESOL services. Brick Public Schools serves more than 15,000 students in 16 schools. Its student population has students from 118 countries who speak 120 languages—31% of its population receives ESOL services. About 63% of its student population are eligible for free or reduced lunch and 11% receive special education services. The Northern Virginia region was selected based on the diverse population of ESOL students in this region. The demographics in this area are representative of the growing population of ESOL students across America, especially in urban areas. According to McFarland et al. (2017), the ESOL population is generally higher in urban areas compared to suburban and rural. Despite the large ESOL population in this geographic area, there are limited qualitative research studies focused on the region.

Participants

According to Creswell (2013), “The concept of purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research. This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (p. 125). Polkinghorne (1989) recommended interviewing five to 25 participants who have experienced the phenomenon; the main criteria are that participants must have experienced the phenomena being studied. Participants should be selected and interviewed until data saturation is reached. Purposeful criterion sampling was used to select 12-15 people who teach or work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level and meet the selection criteria. Participants eligible for selection were certified educators in the state of Virginia and/or have experience in

ESOL as an administrator, counselor, educational coach, or other school-based staff member. Participants had at least three years of teaching experience at the secondary level with at least two years specifically in ESOL and currently work with newcomers. According to King (2013), experienced teachers are more effective in raising student achievement, teachers perform better with experience, and experienced teachers can impact students beyond the classroom walls. The pool of participants ranges between the school districts being studied—each newcomer ESOL program is unique in its structure, style, and staffing. According to school district data, there is an estimation of just over 64,200 students who receive ESOL services in some capacity within the school districts being studied with about 3,000 teachers working with those ESOL students (Virginia Department of Education, 2018). Only teachers who work specifically with newcomer students, those who have experienced the phenomenon, and meet the selection criteria qualified to participate in this study (Creswell, 2013). This selection criteria allowed for participants who understand how to work with the target population.

To find participants, the researcher contacted ESOL department chairs at secondary schools throughout the Northern Virginia region with an explanation of the study and participant requirements. The email asked department chairs to forward the recruitment information along to their teachers. Potential participants were contacted through email or via contact information provided by the department chair and invited to participate in the study. The recruitment email contained an informed consent document which was collected from each participant before the study begins. Further information was collected for each participant via a demographic questionnaire and formal, recorded interviews. The demographic questionnaire is included in Appendix C.

Procedures

The first step was to receive approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. It is the responsibility of the IRB to ensure that the proposed study is safe for all participants and that it meets moral and ethical standards. The IRB approval letter can be found in Appendix F. After IRB approval, I gained site approval for the two districts in my study. Upon site approval, I contacted the ESOL department chairs at secondary schools within the region with information about the study and ask them to forward it onto the teachers in their department. Participants received a \$10 Amazon gift card for taking part in the study. Teachers and staff members who meet the selection criteria and were interested in participating reached out to me directly via email. From there, I sent emails to potential participants with details of the study and an invitation to participate. Upon participant selection, I obtained written consent from each participant; the consent form is included in Appendix B. Participants were selected in the order of received emails and I verified that they each met the established criteria. The next step was to schedule interviews and prepare for further data collection with a journal prompt, classroom observation, and a focus group session.

Before formally meeting with participants, I focused on epoche (or bracketing) to set aside my experiences and ideas about the phenomenon to view the participants through a fresh lens (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The bracketing included journaling my own experiences and viewpoints with ESOL education. Meetings were then be set up with participants at a neutral location or a place where they were comfortable as to establish a relaxed environment for sharing experiences. Participants were given a demographic questionnaire which was used to gather data on age, gender, years of experience, and teaching certification. Formal, in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant and follow-up interviews as

needed. All interviews were recorded with two devices to ensure accuracy. Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service and manual analysis was used to code and analyze all data in an ongoing manner as it was received. Participants were sent an email with the formal transcription, so they could review the record. Any discrepancies were reviewed and revised.

After all interview data was transcribed and reviewed, participants were sent a follow-up email with a writing prompt asking them to add or elaborate on any additional information. The writing prompt is included in Appendix D. The email format allowed for free response of reflection on former answers or new material participant's wish to add. I then followed up and requested a classroom visit to view the general setup of participant classrooms; this was done outside the school day as to not interfere with student learning. ESOL teachers often teach in a nontraditional setting—for example, many classrooms have reading stations, writing centers, and contain labels in English for every item in the classroom. Participants were able to highlight or submit artifacts they found pertinent to the study. Finally, participants were given information about an online focus group session and asked to participate. Focus group questions differed from interview questions and were used to fill gaps in existing data or clarify information.

As data accumulated, data analysis immediately began and continued throughout the research process. Moustakas' (1994) steps for analysis were used to investigate this transcendental phenomenological study, specifically epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. Epoche was used before beginning formal interviews to set aside biases and beliefs to see the phenomenon through a fresh perspective. Phenomenological reduction included the horizontalization of data, a textural description to establish themes in each participant's data, and composite textural descriptions to locate similarities between participant

data (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation was used to look for meanings of the experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers. This process involved viewing the data from different perspectives and using “polarity and reversals” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). Finally, synthesis involved combining all the data to determine and develop the essence of the phenomenon which defined the core of the newcomer ESOL teacher experiences.

The Researcher's Role

I currently work as a high school literacy specialist in the Northern Virginia region. My high school has an extremely diverse student population; our building has over 50 different countries represented, and 40 different languages spoken by the student body. The ESOL population in my school and region is continuously growing. There is a large immigrant and refugee population within the schools and community. Trends across America show that this population is rapidly growing and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future; this region is a representation of many urban areas across our nation. I became interested in studying newcomer ESOL teachers because many ESOL students need reading and writing support beyond what the traditional classroom teacher can offer, traditionally provided by a literacy specialist. Targeted literacy intervention for ESOL students, especially newcomers, is proven to improve student vocabulary, reading comprehension, subject-area performance, and standardized testing (August et al., 2016).

As the human instrument in this proposed study, I needed to bracket my involvements with newcomer ESOL teachers and students as much as possible to take a fresh perspective towards the opinions and thoughts of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Remaining ethical, responsible, and committed to sharing participant experiences in an honest, representative manner is my main role in the research. This reduced any influence I had and

allowed participants to deeply express their ideas. I met with participants at a neutral site as to not intimidate them with a location. I purposely selected participants with whom I have no personal relationship and do not work within my department. Participants from my current place of employment were included in this research. Acknowledging my assumptions, personal beliefs, and experiences with newcomer ESOL teachers and students throughout my data collection and analysis allowed them to remain separate from participant experiences.

Data Collection

Data collection is a series of activities aimed at gathering information to answer research questions (Creswell, 2013). In phenomenology, the main qualification for participants is that they must have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, data was collected through in-depth individual interviews, a writing prompt sample from each participant, a classroom observation, and a focus group session. A demographic questionnaire was used in the initial stage to gather basic information about participants. Pseudonyms were used for all participants and school districts. Before beginning formal data collection, I focused on epoche (or bracketing) to set aside my experiences and ideas about the phenomenon so I could perceive the participants' ideas through a fresh lens (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing included journaling my own experiences and perspectives and reflection on my time working with newcomer ESOL students and teachers. All interviews were held at a location convenient to participants and recorded with two devices for accuracy. A professional transcription service was used to transcribe all interviews. Triangulation of data was used to establish credibility with the interview, writing prompt, classroom observation, and focus group data checked against one another to ensure that themes overlap across all data (Creswell, 2013). Four forms of data and

sequencing were used to increase the reliability of information and help create a wholesome depiction of newcomer teacher experiences.

Interviews

The main form of data collection was in-depth interviews with ESOL teachers or staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level. The interviews served as the reporting of the lived experiences of participants in regard to the phenomenon. Pilot testing was used before formal interviews to ensure question validity and refine questions (Yin, 2003). The pilot study was conducted with a professional colleague at my place of employment who do not teach newcomer ESOL classes. The pilot interviews were recorded and transcribed to help evaluate the clarity of questions and gauge the flow and timing of the interview. Interview questions were primarily open-ended, so participants had the opportunity to provide rich, deep responses (Moustakas, 1994). The interviews took place at a neutral site or a place where the participant feels most comfortable. The researcher asked follow-up questions as needed to clarify understanding or ask for more details about an answer.

Eighteen open-ended interview questions were used to help facilitate participants' responses to their experiences as a newcomer ESOL teacher. Interviews took no longer than one to one and a half hours. Each question was designed to gain information about what newcomer ESOL teachers experience while working with students who represent many different languages, cultures, traditions, and educational backgrounds. Interview questions vary slightly for teachers and non-teacher staff members.

Standard Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. What would you like to tell me about yourself?
2. Why did you become an ESOL teacher?

3. Explain a typical newcomer ESOL classroom.
4. What classes do you teach? (How many? What subjects?)
5. Explain the demographics present within your classroom. (Where are students from? What languages do they speak? How long have they been in America? What prior educational experiences do students have?)
6. Explain the typical structure of a class period.
7. How would you describe the dynamic of your classroom environment?
8. How do you help newcomer students adjust to life in America?
9. How do you know if a student is learning?
10. Tell me about how you make connections with students.
11. How do you balance content with language acquisition skills?
12. What has been your greatest success in working with ELLs?
13. What supports do you need to be a successful ESOL teacher?
14. What are some of the challenges you face in such a diverse classroom?
15. If I were to walk into your classroom tomorrow, how would it look different from a non-ESOL teacher's classroom?
16. How would you describe your experience as a newcomer ESOL teacher at the secondary level with one word or phrase?
17. What else do you think would be important for me to know about being a newcomer ESOL teacher?
18. Do you have any other significant thoughts related to newcomer students?

Standard (Non-Teacher) Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. What would you like to tell me about yourself?

2. Why did you choose to work in the field of education?
3. What is your job title? Explain your responsibilities.
4. Explain the demographics present within your school. (Where are students from? What languages do they speak? How long have they been in America? What prior educational experiences do students have?)
5. Explain the typical structure of a class/meeting with a student(s).
6. Tell me about how you make connections with students.
7. Explain a typical interaction you have with a newcomer ESOL student.
8. How do you help newcomer students adjust to life in America?
9. How do you know if a student is learning/adjusting well?
10. What has been your greatest success in working with ELLs?
11. What supports do you need to be a successful ESOL educator?
12. How do you balance your role as a _____ with language acquisition skills?
13. What are some of the challenges you face in such a diverse work environment?
14. If I were to walk in and observe you tomorrow, how would your work look different from a non-ESOL _____'s work?
15. How would you describe your experience as a _____ who works with newcomer ESOL students at the secondary level in one word or phrase?
16. What else do you think would be important for me to know about working with newcomer students?
17. What other significant thoughts related to newcomer students do you have?

Question 1 was designed to help participants' feel comfortable opening up with information about themselves—they shared anything they wished about their personal and/or professional

life. The purpose of question 2 was to gain information about why participants chose their career path. Questions 3-7 asked participants to delve into the structure and dynamic of their classroom beginning with basic demographic information and moving into the overall classroom experience. This information was important because it provided background information about the diversity of newcomer classrooms. Every classroom will function differently depending on the student population, classroom environment, and goals of the course. The classroom environment is one of the most important factors that impacts student learning (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009). Questions 8-9 asked about how teachers help students adjust to life in a brand-new nation. These questions provided insight into the many roles newcomer ESOL teachers play while teaching newcomers. It is just as important for students to feel welcome and comfortable in their new life as it is for them to learn content material. When teachers create a positive learning environment, students feel a sense of belonging, trust, and feel encouraged to tackle challenges, and take risks (Bucholza & Sheffler, 2009). Questions 10-11 explored teacher definitions of success and how they measure ESOL student success in their diverse classroom. According to Salerno and Kibler (2015), "Students arrive with diverse prior educational experiences and English proficiency levels, but those with little school experience and/or low English proficiency face challenges, as they enter schools increasingly centered around high-stakes testing and standards-based curricula (p. 202). These questions also acknowledged how difficult it is to differentiate and create learning opportunities with students who have a broad range of learning experiences, comprehension skills, and language abilities. Questions 12-14 were about balancing the demands of ESOL education to help students reach their full learning potential. These questions were developed based on Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition. They directly aligned with his five hypotheses to delve into how newcomer teachers

balance English language skills with content area acquisition. These questions allowed participants to explain how they overcame the issue of teaching complex content, which becomes especially difficult at the secondary level (Tigert & Madigan Peercy, 2017). Question 15 asked participants to compare their classrooms with non-ESOL classrooms. This question set the stage for the classroom observation portion of data collection. If participants explained a nontraditional classroom setting, this information was used as an artifact to support themes that emerged in data analysis. Finally, questions 16-17 allowed for any additional sharing of information participants may deem necessary to help create a whole picture of their newcomer classroom and teaching experience. The questions allowed the researcher to ask for clarification on expressed topics or more details as needed. Participants were encouraged to provide honest, open answers to all questions. All interview questions directly relate to the central research question and sub-questions.

<p>Central Research Question: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What would you like to tell me about yourself? - Why did you become an ESOL teacher? - How would you describe your experience as a newcomer ESOL teacher at the secondary level? - What has been your greatest success in working with ELLs? - What else do you think would be important for me to know about being a newcomer ESOL teacher? - What other significant thoughts related to newcomer students do you have?
<p>Sub-question 1:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain the demographic information present within your classroom. (Where

<p>How do participants describe the learning environment?</p>	<p>are students from? What languages do they speak? How long have they been in America? What prior educational experiences do students have?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain the typical structure of a class period. - How would you describe the dynamic of your classroom environment? - Explain a typical newcomer ESOL classroom. - If I were to walk into your classroom tomorrow, how would it look different from a non-ESOL teacher's classroom?
<p>Sub-question 2: How do participants describe the process of second language acquisition for their students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you help newcomer students adjust to life in America? - How do you know if a student is learning? - What supports do you need to be a successful ESOL teacher?
<p>Sub-Question 3: How do participants describe the process of content area knowledge acquisition for their students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you balance content with language acquisition skills? - What are some of the challenges you face in a blended classroom? - Tell me about how you make connections with students?

Figure 1. Alignment of research and interview questions

Writing Prompt

After the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to respond to a writing prompt via a follow-up email. Data collected through reflective journals or writing allowed the writer to share subjective information from their own point of view (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008). This method of data collection is appropriate because some people feel more comfortable expressing their ideas in writing rather than overtly speaking with a researcher. The

prompt aligned with the research questions but took on a different viewpoint of their experiences by asking them about the most important part of their job. The following prompt was sent via email: “Newcomer ESOL students are a unique population and every individual student will have different needs—some students will adjust to school in America easily, while others are truly shocked by the differences in their new nation. In your opinion, what is the most important part about working with newcomer ESOL students?” This prompt allowed participants to explain what aspect of working with newcomers is most important and acknowledge the various roles newcomer teachers fulfill for their students—teacher, mentor, advisor, counselor, and/or parental figure. This prompt provided another piece of data with personal anecdotes about teacher experiences working with a diverse, complex student population. It added to the interview data by giving participants free range in their responses instead of asking them to answer specific questions. This also allowed them to expand on their responses and/or clarify information that they explained in the earlier interview. I sent the writing prompt after the interview and asked participants to respond digitally with at least one paragraph, or six to eight sentences, of information. Participants sent their responses back to the researcher via email. The writing prompt can be found in Appendix D.

Classroom Observation

According to James, Milenkiewicz, and Bucknam (2008), observations are defined as, “Stylized note taking about predetermined portions of an event or groups of events under study...” (p. 70). Observational data can provide reliable information to support claims or details presented by participants. Being able to visit participants’ classrooms provided information and context into their shared experiences, especially if their room looked different from a traditional setting. Classroom visits occurred when there were no students present, so

information could be gathered about structure, setup, and materials. ESOL classrooms are often set up very differently than mainstream classrooms. Station work, reading centers, and labeling of all items in the classroom are common to help students develop skills in several different areas within one class period. The classroom provided vital information to help complete data collection because it gave life to the classroom experiences participants explained during their formal interview and/or via their writing prompt response. The classroom observation contributed to research data by showing the differences between a newcomer classroom and a content area classroom. Because of the various ranges in ability and language, the classroom needs to be set up to meet the needs of the learners within it (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009). It was not necessary to schedule an observational visit to each participant's classroom if the interview takes place there—additional requests for visitation were made based on the information presented by newcomer teachers in their individual interviews and writing prompt responses. The classroom observation form can be found in Appendix E.

Focus Group

According to Creswell (2013), “Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with one another...” (p. 133). Focus groups provide an opportunity for the researcher to interact with multiple participants at the same time. Focus groups are especially useful for exploring complex, multi-layered concepts from the perspectives of the participants. The researcher needs to be careful to manage the conversation so there is not one person or a select few dominating the conversation. In this study, a focus group was used to confirm preliminary themes that emerged from interviews and the writing prompt. The participants for this focus group were the newcomer teachers who participated in the formal interviews.

Participants were invited to participate via a recruitment letter through email. The recruitment letter can be found in Appendix A. The focus group took place in a virtual setting using Google, so contributors could participate from the comfort of their own space. It gave the participants a chance to work through ideas and overlapping themes to add more information based on conversation with their colleagues. The focus group session was conducted after all individual interviews are transcribed, analyzed, and coded for themes. This gave participants a chance to reflect on the analysis and work together to add any other pertinent information. All discussions were facilitated, moderated, and guided by the researcher (Kitzinger, 1994). The conversation was transcribed and took place virtually to allow for maximum participation.

The focus group session began with an explanation of the goals and topic for discussion—newcomer ESOL teacher experiences at the secondary level. Guidelines were established and encouraged the sharing of all ideas and points of view. Ten open-ended questions were used to guide the conversation within the focus group. Participants were able to respond to the original prompt and/or other participant responses in Google hangout. This allowed for a fluid conversation where participants shared their ideas with one another and commented on their colleagues' thoughts.

Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

1. Tell me about the experiences of working with newcomer ESOL students.
2. Think back over your time working with newcomer students, what has been the most influential aspect of your work?
3. What is the best part about being a newcomer ESOL teacher?
4. What is the worst part about being a newcomer ESOL teacher?

5. The theme (the learning environment, support, pedagogy and practices, and recognizing student circumstances) has emerged through work with newcomer ESOL teachers. How do you see this present in your work with newcomer ESOL students? (themes/categories were presented one at a time and separated into multiple questions)
6. What is the most important thing for people to know about being a newcomer ESOL teacher?
7. Tell me about the structure/format of the newcomer ESOL classroom you work with.
8. What do you think is the most difficult part of being a newcomer ESOL student in an American school?
9. Suppose that you were in charge of a newcomer program at the secondary level in Northern Virginia, what is one thing you would change or add to the existing newcomer curriculum?
10. What other significant statements would like to add about teaching/working with newcomer ESOL students at the secondary level?

Questions 1-2 were asked to establish familiarity with the topic and get some general information about the characteristics of the newcomer students the participants worked with on a regular basis. This set the scene for future responses and allowed participants to reflect upon rewarding experiences in their work. Questions 3-4 were used to gain additional information about the pros and cons of newcomer ESOL teacher experiences within and outside the classroom. These questions were designed to provide insight into the positive and negative aspects of working with students who struggle academically because of a language barrier (August, Artzi, & Barr, 2016). Question 5 was used to gauge whether the themes gathered from data analysis are indicative of newcomer ESOL teacher experiences. The themes were presented

one at a time, so participants could comment on how it does or does not relate to their work with newcomers. Question 6 allowed participants to express additional information about why their role as a newcomer ESOL teacher is significant. Question 7 asked about the structure of the newcomer classroom. This question related to the formal interview question about structure and setup and provide insight into what was seen in the classroom observation portion of data collection. Question 8 asked participants to take on the persona of a newcomer student and explain the most difficult part of being a student in an American school. This question provided insight into how teachers who work with newcomers view the challenges associated with learning new content and language skills. Question 9 asked participants to reflect upon what they would change for newcomers at the secondary level regarding curriculum and structure. According to Tigert and Madigan Peercy (2017), many ESOL teacher candidates do not feel sufficiently prepared to teach in a content area classroom. This question provided insight into what resources teachers need to help improve their experiences. Finally, question 10 allowed for the extension of additional thoughts and ideas.

<p>Central Research Question: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tell me about the experiences of working with newcomer ESOL students. - Think back over your time working with newcomer students, what has been the most influential aspect of your work? - What is the best part about being a newcomer ESOL teacher? - What is the worst part about being a newcomer ESOL teacher? - The theme (the learning environment, support, pedagogy and practices, and recognizing student circumstances) has emerged through work with
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	<p>newcomer ESOL teachers. How do you see this present in your work with newcomer ESOL students? (themes/categories will be presented one at a time and separated into multiple questions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the most important thing for people to know about being a newcomer ESOL teacher? - What do you think is the most difficult part of being a newcomer ESOL student in an American school?
<p>Sub-question 1: How do participants describe the classroom environment?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tell me about the structure/format of the newcomer ESOL classroom you work with. - The theme (the learning environment, support, pedagogy and practices, and recognizing student circumstances) has emerged through work with newcomer ESOL teachers. How do you see this present in your work with newcomer ESOL students? (themes/categories will be presented one at a time and separated into multiple questions)
<p>Sub-question 2: How do participants describe the process of second language acquisition for their students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What other significant statements would like to add about teaching/working with newcomer ESOL students at the secondary level? - The theme (the learning environment, support, pedagogy and practices, and recognizing student circumstances) has emerged through work with newcomer ESOL teachers. How do you see this present in your work with newcomer ESOL students? (themes/categories will be presented one at a time and separated into multiple questions)
<p>Sub-Question 3:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suppose that you were in charge of a newcomer program at the secondary level in Northern Virginia, what is one

<p>How do participants describe the process of content area knowledge acquisition for their students?</p>	<p>thing you would change or add to the existing newcomer curriculum?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The theme (the learning environment, support, pedagogy and practices, and recognizing student circumstances) has emerged through work with newcomer ESOL teachers. How do you see this present in your work with newcomer ESOL students? (themes/categories will be presented one at a time and separated into multiple questions)
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Figure 2. Alignment of focus group and interview questions

Data Analysis

In this study, the participant's explanations and descriptions as expressed in the in-depth interviews provided the main source of data. A focus group, writing prompt, classroom observations, and follow-up interviews were coded for analysis. Before beginning analysis, bracketing was used to journal and reflect on my own biases, beliefs, and assumptions as to not interrupt the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). A professional transcriptionist transcribed each interview and transcriptions were reviewed by the researcher and dissertation chair for completeness and appropriateness. The primary source of knowledge came from participants' perceptions and descriptions of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas' (1994) steps for analyzing phenomenological data were used to analyze the data from the in-depth interviews, writing prompt, classroom observation, and focus group. The processes used for analyzing data in this transcendental phenomenological study included epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and a synthesis of the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoche

Epoche is translated to mean freedom from judgement (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche prepared the researcher to view the phenomenon for the first time as if it is new again (Creswell, 2013). This first step in the data analysis process was used to bracket all prejudgments, biases, and assumptions present before beginning the formal data analysis process. It allowed the researcher to focus on the meaning of shared experiences rather than questioning the provided data.

Phenomenological Reduction

Phenomenological reduction included the processes of horizontalization and individual and composite textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Horizontalization is the process of viewing each statement with a fresh lens for equal value. This process allowed the researcher to eliminate statements that stand out and begin to align data. Next, examining information for individual textural description consisted of looking for themes in participant responses and coding themes into established categories to see similarities between participant descriptions, called composite textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). This process eliminated any outlying data or overlapping information (Creswell, 2013). The researcher then went through the data and highlighted or coded significant statements to create units of meaning (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The data was analyzed several times over and each code was grouped by meaning. Manual coding was used to help code significant statements and group data into themes. The emerging codes were then be grouped into clusters. Overlapping themes emerged based on participant responses. Themes and subthemes emerged from interview, focus group, classroom observations, and writing prompt data.

Imaginative Variation

Imaginative variation is the process of integrating the textural and structural descriptions into themes to determine a universal description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). It also

involves viewing the data through different perspectives to look for alternate meanings and various structural qualities. An integration of all the individual structural descriptions were merged into a composite structural description that incorporated all statements that emerged from the data (Moustakas, 1994). The composite description captured the lived experiences in a vivid, thorough manner and fully explained the characteristics of the phenomenon.

Synthesis of the Essence

Finally, a synthesis of the essence was developed through the integration of the structural and composite descriptions to determine the true meaning, or essence, of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This was the final piece of analysis that was supported with conclusions and quotations from participants. This captured the experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers at the secondary level in the Northern Virginia region. It was the most important part of the analysis process because the rich textural descriptions were used for recommendations for future research and learning in the field. The key for the researcher in the data analysis process was to describe the data in rich detail as to communicate it to others.

Trustworthiness

In this study, I needed to develop a strong rapport with my participants, so they felt comfortable sharing their classroom experiences, both positive and negative, with me. All research procedures must increase the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All interview and focus group data were audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure validity. The transcripts were returned to participants for participant review to verify the accuracy of transcribed data. Triangulation of data were used to approach the research question in at least three different ways—interviews, a writing prompt,

focus groups, and classroom analysis (Creswell, 2013). All three forms of data collection related to one another and validated each other.

Credibility

Credibility is the way researchers establish truth and value in their study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In this study, credibility was established by the lived experiences and teaching stories shared by the participants. Koch (1994) states that credibility involves using self-awareness in the analysis of interview transcriptions. All data was provided by the participants themselves and analyzed by the researcher. The interview and focus group questions were peer-reviewed by the dissertation committee for appropriateness. Member checking was used so participants could check the credibility of the analysis and make sure established themes align with shared experiences. The researcher was mindful of her own actions throughout interviews to ensure credibility. Finally, triangulation of data, or making sure the patterns and themes found in each data source matches with the next, was used to establish credibility.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability will be determined by an organized, traceable, and identifiable process of research (Schwandt, 2007). This means that the study can be replicated with the same methods and participants and the results would be almost the same (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail was used to track all decisions made throughout the study. The researcher's data, notes, and analyses were documented and stored to help secure the reliability of the study. Manual coding was used for the grouping and organization of interview, and all other, data. Schwandt (2007) states that audit trails can help assist the reader in the dependability of the study.

Confirmability is concerned with the aspect of neutrality of the researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). It was addressed with a researcher journal where all biases and experiences were

noted before, during, and after the study to ensure validity. Journaling biases helped keep them excluded from the research process and analysis (Creswell, 2013). The audit trail and storage of all data helped provide support and explanations for all established themes extracted from data. It also allowed readers to follow the research process explicitly as it progresses. Direct quotations from participants were used to support conclusions and provide support to confirm accuracy.

Transferability

Transferability was achieved because the researcher was solely responsible for the collection of all data—including monitoring the setting in which it is collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This ensured consistent, reliable tracking and analysis of all data. The study could be replicated, or transferred, through similar data collection processes with alternate research and interview questions. The research could be expanded upon through additional qualitative collections or in a quantitative format with more participants and one research question. Thick, rich descriptions of participant experiences allowed for full comprehension of the processes used to conduct the study and explanation of results. Additional researchers could use these descriptions to identify how the research can be applied to their own studies.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed prior to conducting a research study and throughout the study. The first step was to seek research approval by the IRB at Liberty University. The IRB process included an application that detailed the purpose and description of the study, background information on the researcher, a timeline of the study, detailed information about nature of the participants, and information about the data collection and analysis procedures. Once IRB approval was granted, informed consent by all participants was requested

and obtained. Study site permission was sought for each of the schools where participants currently work. Consent was provided as an attachment to the recruitment email. All participation was voluntary. Each participant received a \$10 Amazon gift card for their participation. The researcher worked to separate herself from the roles of the participants and respect their privacy and experiences. Because I live and work in the same community as the participants, potential ethical issues were addressed with respect for the sites and participants. All names, identities, and locations of participants were protected with pseudonyms and coding throughout data collection and analysis. All information about students, classrooms, schools, or school districts was protected with pseudonyms.

All participant, interview, and other research data was saved on private devices under password protection. Only the researcher, participants, and dissertation committee had access to interview transcriptions and demographic information. Participants has the ability to decline interview questions that made them feel uncomfortable or any they did not wish to answer. The audit trail was maintained and available for independent review as requested. The researcher worked to be completely honest and present all information in a clear, valid manner. As noted in the section on the researcher's role, I conducted the study from an unbiased perspective and all methods and procedures were followed to obtain accurate, practical information. Continuously reflecting on my own personal experiences, influence over the study, and participant involvements helped keep the research just and ensured confidentiality and ethical treatment of all information (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Summary

This chapter discussed the design for the study—a qualitative transcendental phenomenology. A rationale and description of the setting were provided to help offer context

for the region being studied. All procedures were outlined and detailed with clarity, so they could be replicated and followed. Data collection measures were explained in detail with examples of interview and focus group questions and an explanation of why a writing prompt and classroom observation are important and relevant to the study. The role of the researcher was explained to show the relationship with participants and clarify any biases brought to the study that may influence the data or analysis process. Data analysis procedures following Moustakas' (1994) methods were identified and rationalized in detail so the study could be replicated. This analysis directly aligns with the research design and all tools were properly identified. Finally, trustworthiness was established by addressing credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Member checking, triangulation of data, an audit trail, and reflexivity were the main forms used for establishing trustworthiness. Ethical considerations were discussed to ensure all data was stored and organized in a proper manner as not to compromise the study or the reputation of participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers and staff members who work with newcomer English Language Learners (ELLs) at the secondary level in two Northern Virginia public school systems. Chapter Four presents a description of each participant and results of the research study. This research focused on teachers, administrators, counselors, and other school-based staff members who work with newcomer ESOL students at the secondary level. The goal of this research is to gain perspective into what it is like to teach, counsel, and/or mentor students who are new to America and possess limited English skills. The data was collected through in-person interviews, a physical classroom observation, a writing prompt, and a focus group. Four themes emerged from the data to support the answers to the research questions. The themes are as follows: The learning environment, support for ESOL programs, pedagogy and practices, and recognizing student circumstances. Subthemes follow each theme to support the development of ideas.

Participants

There were 12 participants in this study who varied in age, ethnicity, and years of teaching experience. There was one male and 11 females. The male participant is of African descent. Seven females are Caucasian, one female is from South Africa, one female is Puerto Rican, one female is Mexican, and one female is Korean. The following is a more complete profile of the 12 participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' privacy and maintain confidentiality.

Abigail

Abigail is a 23-year veteran educator who came to America as an immigrant from South Africa. Before settling in America, she lived and studied throughout Europe. Abigail moved to Texas in the 1990s and eventually moved to Northern Virginia in 2006. She became a citizen after 10 years of residence in the United States. She is fluent in three languages English, Spanish, and Afrikaans. Abigail began a doctoral program while living in Texas, but abruptly stopped when she was going through a divorce and raising young children. Her journey as an educator began with her teaching English to businessmen in Spain and Taiwanese students in South Africa. She did not have a teaching degree when she moved to America, but pursued a bachelor's degree in drama, English, and applied linguistics once she settled in Texas. She continued her education by earning a master's degree in education/reading. She is now a certified educator in the state of Virginia with certifications in English (9-12), English (6-8), reading specialist (K-12), and ESOL (K-12). Abigail is passionate about teaching reading and language skills to students from other nations because she understands the difficult journeys these students face when moving to a new country and learning a new language. She finds teaching newcomer ESOL students rewarding, but difficult. When replying to an interview question about the challenges of working with newcomer ELLs, Abigail stated,

It's hard. I mean, you have to help your students grow in such a short amount of time.

The kids or the students that have come to us in ninth grade and they've been in middle school for three years or two years; there's a huge difference between them and other students. They started at a high school, even if they're not SIFE kids, it's just such a huge difference with the gaps in their language development. And then to try and make it up, plus pass coursework to graduate. I mean it's so much. (Abigail, Interview, March 15, 2019)

Abigail also expressed her concerns with the maturity and socioemotional status of her students, which she believes directly impacts their ability to succeed at the secondary level. She teaches literacy essentials which is a course for level one ESOL students who are brand new to the country and school system. Her curriculum begins with students learning the alphabet; these same students have the goal of graduating high school in four years' time.

Amy

Amy is a 62-year-old Polish-American educator with 15 years of experience teaching ESOL at the secondary level. She has a master's degree in Slavic linguistics and completed doctoral coursework in Slavic literature. She became a teacher when her own children entered middle school and she was not as involved in their classrooms any longer. She knew she loved working with kids and being in schools, so she decided to begin substitute teaching which led her to the classroom full time. Amy teaches English language development which is a course designed to support content area classes with language concepts such as reading skills and strategies, writing, speaking, and listening. Amy is thrilled with her position at her school and expressed gratitude and wonder for the work her district is doing to support newcomer ESOL students. She raved about her department chair and assistant principal whom she said are strong advocates for her and her students' needs. Amy's favorite part about being a teacher is making connections with her students. Her classes are generally small, so she can really get to know her students' backgrounds, strengths, and weaknesses. She loves working one on one and in small groups where her students feel most comfortable taking risks and making mistakes. Amy finds that her student motivation is generally high because they want to become better English speakers. When asked about the motivation of her students, she stated,

The motivation is high. A lot of them are working at night, so they are tired. They live in crowded conditions, so they don't have a place to do their homework and stuff like that. But, it's cool as a teacher to know that they want to learn. (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019)

Amy is constantly looking for new ways to approach language development in her classroom. She has developed several units for her language development course that are content-based, so students can make connections to their core content courses. When asked if she could describe her experience as a newcomer ESOL student at the secondary level in one word or phrase, she said, "dynamic" (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019). Amy loves the challenge of teaching students who vary in educational experience, language level, background, and ability. She tries to remain positive, upbeat, and clear so her students feel connected and welcomed in her classroom.

Carina

Carina is a Caucasian 34-year old veteran teacher with eight years of experience. She is certified in Virginia and Pennsylvania to teach physical education (PE) in grades K-12. She currently teaches advanced physical education and personal fitness. Advanced PE is an elective course where students focus on self-selected lifetime activities as they continue to learn and master/refine skills with emphasis on health and sports-related fitness. Personal fitness is an elective course that extends knowledge of fitness, strength training, physical conditioning, and knowledge to promote health and wellness; this course is conducted in the school weight room. Any student who has successfully passed 9th and 10th grade physical education can elect to take advanced PE or personal fitness, including newcomer ESOL students. PE classes at Carina's school range in size from 25-40 students. She loves the diversity of her school but acknowledges

the difficulties of teaching courses with about 35 students who have mixed ability and language levels. Carina discussed her advanced PE class that had 40 students, 20 of whom are English language learners. She said,

It's really hard to gauge what speed I should teach on because I feel like the for general ed kids its way too slow for them and the ESOL kids its way too fast for them and it's hard to find that medium of what fits everyone the best. (Carina, Interview, March 20, 2019)

Carina also explained that many of her ESOL students either stick together with other language learners or stay to themselves during class. Her classroom structure is very interactive, and she does see a divide between her students. Carina loves making connections with her students by getting to know them and she especially enjoys learning about different customs and cultures. She also encourages her students to bring in ideas about sports and physical activities from their own home nation so she can incorporate them into her lesson plans. For example, one of her students from Pakistan taught a lesson on cricket to his peers. These are the moments she cherishes most as a teacher; she loves to watch her students gain the confidence to help other people learn a new idea. Carina acknowledges that one of the most important aspects of teaching in a mixed language level classroom is having support from ESOL teachers and/or ESOL coach so she can ensure she is reaching the needs of her ELLs.

Gary

Gary is an experienced educator with over 27 years of practice teaching and leading at the middle and high school levels in America and abroad. He is certified in school leadership/administration, English (K-12), ESOL (L-12), and French (K-12). Gary immigrated from Cameroon, Africa to Virginia in the early 2000s. He has a doctorate in curriculum and

instruction from George Washington University. Gary currently teaches English 9, English 10, and English 11/12 combo for English learners. He has level three ELLs in his classes; he has predominantly Spanish speaking students, but also has students who speak Urdu, Pashtu, Hindu, Vietnamese, Korean, Tagalog, Tigrinya, and Amharic. Gary knows over five different languages and believes he has a special gift for learning and retaining different dialects. Gary knew he wanted to be a teacher since he was a little boy growing up in West Africa. His father was an elementary school teacher and he thought he was the smartest person in the world, so he wanted to be just like him. He chose to work in ESOL because he began learning new languages when he was four years old including English; Gary experienced moving to a new country and speaking English just like many of his students.

Each class period, Gary tries to incorporate reading, writing, speaking, and listening into his lesson plan. He believes that it is especially important for his ELLs to develop all four areas of literacy so they can express and absorb as much English language as possible. Gary also takes weeks in the beginning of the school year to build his classroom community. He finds that making connections with students and fostering their relationships with one another to be the most effective way to create a welcoming classroom community where students feel open to take risks and ask questions. He credits these activities with his lack of discipline issues—he has not written a referral in eight years! Gary believes in giving his students as many attempts as needed to master a concept. He often creates 10 different assessments for one topic so his students can retake tests and quizzes as needed. For Gary, the biggest challenge in a newcomer ESOL classroom is the intangible characteristics he believes his students lack, such as being humble and feeling like they are invincible. His biggest successes come from watching his students grow into law-abiding citizens who go to college and into the workforce.

Helene

Helene is a Korean-American, 20-year veteran educator who loves teaching and contributing to young people's lives in a positive way. She began her education career by teaching English in Korea. She took a break when she first moved to America and worked in healthcare for a while, but she missed teaching and knew she was meant to be in the classroom. Helene is certified in ESOL (K-12) and Algebra 1 (7-12); she teaches individual math and active physics, which are adapted math and science classes for ELLs. She teaches students brand new to America who are at a one or two English language level. Helene speaks Korean, English, and French; she also understands Spanish, but cannot speak it. She has students from over five countries who speak a variety of languages in her classes. On the day of our interview, Helene explained that she got four new students the day before from Central America. Helene keeps her class structure organized and consistent as she finds this to be the easiest way to create routine and keep high expectations for her students. She posts the agenda on the board each day, and her students know they will have a warm-up, class activity, and reflective question at the end of the period. Her school is one to one with technology, so every student has a personal laptop. She uses technology in the classroom regularly and her students access several math review websites to help hone their skills. Helene's top priority as a teacher of newcomer ESOL students is to help them feel safe in the classroom. Many of her students experience tumultuous journeys to America, and their classroom performance and behaviors are impacted by those experiences. She believes a lot of their healing can take place in the classroom.

Helene uses a lot of manipulatives in the classroom to differentiate her instruction to meet her students' needs. She does a lot of informal assessments through individual conversations and online feedback to continually check in on her students. Helene is passionate about being an

ESOL teacher and believes there are two keys to instruction in a diverse classroom. She said, “It’s modification of your lesson. You can’t use last year’s materials. No generalizations. Just keep updating your mindset and your materials” (Helene, Interview, March 19, 2019). Finally, she explained what she believes is the most important aspect of newcomer education—emotional support. Her students need a teacher, cheerleader, mentor, confidant, and leader. Helene believes ESOL teachers must possess many skills to efficiently reach their students.

Katie

Katie is a 42-year-old Caucasian educator with 18 years of teaching experience. Katie has a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction and bachelor’s degrees in Spanish and English. She is certified in English (7-12), Spanish (7-12), and ESOL (K-12). She has been at her current school for her entire career as a teacher and an ESOL instructional leader. She does not currently teach any classes, but she oversees the entire ESOL department in her building. Katie’s current role as ESOL instructional leader has evolved greatly over the past 10 years because the ESOL population in her building has tripled in size since then. She has seen a transformation in education for newcomer ESOL students in her school and across her county. Katie is passionate about fighting for the unique needs of her teachers and students. She plays an important role in educating her teachers, administrators, counselors, and other school staff members about how to work with ESOL students in all content areas and classrooms. At her school, about 70% of students do not speak English as their first language.

Katie’s role in her building varies from day to day. She manages department meetings, pushes into classrooms to co-teach, and/or meets with students to discuss graduation pathways and state testing updates. When asked about her responsibilities, Katie responded, “Some days I come into school with nothing on my schedule. Those are the days I literally don’t sit down at

all. I am running around putting out fires all day” (Katie, Interview, March 20, 2019). Her school started a new program four years ago in an effort to help newcomer ESOL students graduate on time. Before this program, ESOL students were not allowed to take non-elective credits until they reached a WIDA level of three, something that some ESOL students never accomplish. Some students took eight years to graduate and only took elective courses for the first three years of high school. The new programming allows for students to take core classes based on their WIDA level. For example, Biology for level twos or English 10 for level ones. Katie believes this new program is amazing for ESOL students because it allows for more equitable opportunities. Because of the success of this program, Katie often hosts visitors from other schools in her county. The plan is for more schools to adapt this model over the next few years. Katie explained that her greatest success in working with newcomer ESOL students is seeing them graduate. She said, “It is amazing to see a student who came to the United States two years ago as a level one progress to graduate on time as a level three. It’s truly amazing what they accomplish in such a short amount of time” (Katie, Interview, March 20, 2019). Katie’s role fluctuates by day but providing adequate supports for her ESOL teachers is always at the forefront of her work.

Madison

Madison is a 47-year old, Caucasian teacher with seven years’ experience. She is a career switcher who moved from working in the federal government for almost 15 years before becoming a teacher. She worked for the American Academy of Pediatrics as a lobbyist in Washington, DC, but realized the lobbying schedule was too demanding once she had three young children. Because she always loved working on children’s issues, she began substitute teaching and realized she loved the classroom. She earned her degree and teaching certifications

through the Virginia Department of Education career switcher program. She is certified in Virginia to teach ESOL (K-12), History (9-12), and English (9-12). Madison teaches ninth and tenth grade English to level one and two ESOL students. Her students vary in age range from 14-19 and speak several different languages including Spanish, Arabic, Bengali, Amharic, French Creole, Vietnamese, and Urdu. Madison stresses organization and consistency as the key to keeping her students on task and engaged. Her lesson plans follow a routine structure and the students know what to expect each week. She is a firm believer in a loud, collaborative classroom and she encourages conversation regularly. She connects with her students by creating a welcoming, comfortable environment where students can open up and take risks without the fear of making mistakes. Her passion for building relationships with her students was clear in our discussion. When asked about the dynamic of her classroom environment, Madison explained,

I'm okay with a louder classroom. I think this comes from being a career switcher and having teenagers of my own. These kids can smell phony a mile off. So, it's also very genuine. Like, I am who I am. I have kind of a dry sense of humor. I present a very honest front and so when I get to know the kids, I can usually figure out which kid can probably take some teasing and which kid can't. (Madison, Interview, March 13, 2019)

Madison also tries to immerse herself in her students' situation by reversing roles and trying to learn aspects of their language and culture in the context of her lessons. She tries to understand what it is like to learn content and language simultaneously. Madison is a firm believer that all her students have the ability to learn and master English standards; the quest is how to approach the content and present it in a manner that reaches students' vast learning styles.

Maria

Maria is a Mexican-American educator with 11 years teaching experience. She has degrees in curriculum and instruction, bilingual education, and history. She is certified in Virginia in ESOL (K-12), and in New Mexico in bilingual education (K-12), and social studies (7-12). Maria currently teaches English for academic purposes and Biology. She came into teaching by accident—she was living in Las Cruces, New Mexico while her partner finished graduate school, so she began subbing at a local school. She subbed at all levels from kindergarten through 12th grade and fell in love with secondary education. She went back to graduate school for her teaching degree and the rest is history. Maria has taught in New Mexico, China, Thailand, and Virginia. She is bilingual and often uses her Spanish language skills to address her students and make them feel more comfortable in her classroom. She enjoys teaching Spanish terms of endearment to her students, such as *cariño* which means sweetie, which helps them develop a connection with her. Her school organizes the ESOL program into pods of teachers who all teach the same group of students. They meet regularly to discuss the academic and emotional progress of their newcomer ESOL students. She believes it is important that her students have access to resources at school because they might not have them at home. Her school employs a bilingual school psychologist who checks in with all newcomer students on a regular basis. Maria's greatest success in working with newcomer ESOL students has been creating a culture of positivity for her students. She pauses to celebrate the small things like an A on a test or a win in a soccer game. This welcoming environment helps her students adjust to their new life in America and understand that their teachers are engaged in their success as a learner, not just a student in Biology class. When asked about important or significant thoughts related to newcomer ESOL teachers, Maria explained, "I would say for all newcomer teachers,

find a mentor. Seek out your party of elders or table of elders. Look for those people because they will help you” (Maria, Interview, March 4, 2019).

Monica

Monica is a Caucasian, 25-year-old ESOL science teacher with three years of experience. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in biology and a Bachelor of Arts degree in education. She is certified in Virginia to teach ESOL (K-12) and science (7-12). Monica grew up and attended college in a predominantly white, middle/upper class area, so working in a school with a lot of diversity was a big change for her. Despite the differences, she loves her work and is so proud to represent a school that encompasses different customs and cultures through its students. Monica teaches biology and earth science to level two and three ESOL students. Her students vary in language skills and education experience. When asked about how she addresses the various language levels in the classroom, she responded, “It’s a lot of pre-teaching vocabulary, a lot of anchor charts, word walls, sentence frames, and practicing” (Monica, Interview, March 28, 2019). She explained that her units generally take much longer than a typical classroom because she spends time on words, content, and communication skills. Monica described her frequent use of scaffolds and differentiation to adapt her lessons to each individual student. She starts with more intensive scaffolding and gradually scales back as the school year progresses. Monica also uses manipulatives, visuals, and encourages kinesthetic activities so her students are more engaged in the content. She described her classroom as lively and loud; a place where her students can make connections with science content and their own lives.

Monica’s greatest quantitative success comes from her state standardized test pass rate, which increased by 10% from last school year. Her qualitative successes include helping her students join sports teams, clubs, or other school activities. She hopes her students feel

connected to her high school and their new life in America. She cites per interaction and conversation as a huge factor in helping students adapt. When asked to describe her role as a newcomer ESOL teacher in one word or phrase, Monica responded, “Adjustments, adjusting to their needs, adjusting your curriculum, and accommodating” (Monica, Interview, March 28, 2019).

Rosa

Rosa is a 42-year old school counselor with 10 years of teaching and counseling experience. She moved to mainland United States from Puerto Rico when she was 16. Rosa said, “I didn’t know I was an immigrant until I moved to New York City” (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019). Rosa considered herself a good student in high school and thought she had a great education in Puerto Rico. When she got to New York City, she was enrolled in a bilingual education program. Looking back, Rosa was unhappy with this decision because she did not know English, and this prohibited her English language development. Rosa is extremely passionate about being a school counselor because she sees her high school self in so many of her students. Growing up, no one told Rosa she could go to college and continue her education. She stated, “My teachers and counselors just assumed I wanted to graduate and go to work. They did not tell me about college or that I could actually go” (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019). It took Rosa 10 years to finish her bachelor’s degree. She explained it as very difficult, but it helped her recognize what she truly wanted to do—teach. Rosa works with all newcomer ESOL students who come to her school. She is fluent in Spanish and English, which is invaluable to her work. When a student is brand new to America, Rosa is the first person they meet at their new school. She sits down with the student and their parents to explain what type of education the student will receive and explains the graduation requirements. She makes sure

to present all options to her newcomer students, including academy courses, college, community college, and trade schools. “I do not want to discount their dreams. I want to make sure they know all their options because I didn’t” (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019). Rosa’s office walls are full of college posters and motivational quotes. She explained the various ways she keeps track of her students on a daily basis. She said she considers herself a pest to them because she refuses to let her guard down and let them become content. “I push my students out of their comfort zones” (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019). When asked to describe her role as a school counselor for newcomer ESOL students in one word or phrase, Rosa responded, “Every child needs a human being who is irrationally crazy about him or her” (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019). Rosa loves her job and truly looks forward to coming to work every day. She is inspired by her students and does not mind going above and beyond to ensure she meets their needs and pushes them in the right direction.

Sabrina

Sabrina is a 30-year old Caucasian family and consumer sciences (FACS) teacher with eight years of experience. She has been working at her current school for all eight years and is certified in Virginia to teach FACS (K-12). Sabrina moved to Northern Virginia after completing her undergrad in Pennsylvania. She immediately noticed the stark differences between her upbringing and her new home in Virginia. Sabrina attended a high school with very little diversity; now, she works in a school with over 50 countries represented. Sabrina teaches fitness and foods, life planning, and child development, which are all elective courses. Because electives are open to all students at her school, she has a mix of advanced, general education, and newcomer ESOL students. Her typical class has between 25-30 students of varying grade levels, abilities, and language proficiency. Sabrina explained the balance of teaching such a diverse

group of learners as difficult, especially because of the large class sizes and drastic differences in academic proficiencies. She often reaches out for support from the ESOL instructional coach in her building and other elective teachers who have mixed groups of students. With her colleagues, she has developed several scaffolds to help her newcomer ESOL students access her curriculum. Sabrina said her most popular class is child development; this year, she has a child development class with 29 students, 12 of which are ESOL learners. She relies heavily on her more advanced ESOL learners to help and support the newcomer students. She asks them to translate information and check their understanding regularly. Sabrina also finds that her newcomer ESOL students do not ask for help or clarification often because of their language barriers. She tries to address complicated vocabulary by putting the word in Spanish next to the English version in presentations, quizzes, and classwork. Sabrina's favorite part about being a teacher is helping her students prepare for life beyond high school. She finds her courses especially relevant to their future and knows that her students will continue to use the skills they learn in her class.

Sandra

Sandra is an ESOL instructional coach with 14 years of experience teaching ESOL at the secondary level. She is a Caucasian woman who prefers not to share her age. She is a career switcher who began teaching after a career in architecture. She earned her master's degree in curriculum and instruction and then took the Praxis tests for English (9-12) and ESOL (K-12) to earn her teaching certifications. Sandra's role as an ESOL instructional coach includes acting as a resource for general education teachers who have ESOL students in their classroom. She helps teachers adapt lesson plans, utilize strategies for ESOL learners, and use differentiation and scaffolding in the classroom to help ESOL students access complex content material. Typically,

a general education teacher will reach out to Sandra and ask for assistance for a certain task. Sandra will meet with the teacher to discuss the needs and then push into her classroom to observe the ESOL students. Then, they will develop a plan together to adapt the curriculum levels. When asked about helping a teacher balance content with language acquisition skills, Sandra stated, “Just recognize that they’re going to need a little more support and that’s it. Again, check in with them. Don’t just ignore them...A lot of the strategies can benefit all the students. It’s best practices” (Sandra, Interview, March 14, 2019). Sandra explains that there is a delicate balance working with other adults in the classroom. Some teachers have inherent bias or prejudice against students because of their language backgrounds. “There is an assumption that the students can’t learn in the same manner,” Sandra explained (Sandra, Interview, March 14, 2019). When teachers call Sandra, she is expected to solve the problem, but sometimes the problem is how the student is being treated in the classroom. Overall, Sandra really enjoys working with teachers to help accommodate newcomer ELLs. She is passionate about helping educators develop strategies that work for all students.

Results

This study answered the following central research question: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia? Three sub-questions also guided this study. Data from interviews, classroom visits, a writing prompt, and a focus group were analyzed to create codes. Answers to the research questions helped to focus the coding process around newcomer teacher experiences, the learning environment, and how students acquire second language skills and content knowledge. After multiple reviews of data, four research themes emerged. Theme one showed the importance of the learning environment. The two subthemes, relationships and educating the

whole student, developed from the examination of comments about the learning environment. Theme two emphasized how essential support for ESOL programs is to program success. Subthemes of school district/community support, administrative support, and support from colleagues reinforced the theme of support. Theme three discussed pedagogy and practices as the foundation of all learning. Two subthemes of scaffolds and differentiation; and resources emerged from the data. Finally, theme four encompassed the importance of recognizing students' circumstances. The subtheme of understanding student backgrounds supported this theme. The frequency of themes and subthemes are recorded in the table below—frequencies were tallied by counting the word/theme itself and all related codes that fall into that theme. Details and support for the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data are detailed and discussed in the theme development section.

Table 1

Frequency of Themes and Subthemes

Theme/Subtheme	Frequency
The Learning Environment	117
Relationships	69
Educating the Whole Student	48
Support for ESOL Programs	92
School District/Community Support	22
Administrative Support	28
Support from Colleagues	45
Pedagogy and Practices	197
Scaffolds and Differentiation	39

Resources	158
Recognizing Students' Circumstances	144
Understanding Student Backgrounds	46

Theme Development

Theme development emerged from Moustakas' (1994) steps for data analysis. First, I bracketed my experiences and judgements about the phenomenon so I could view the data from a fresh perspective without preconceptions; the process of epoche. Phenomenological reduction included horizontalization and the creation of individual and composite textual descriptions which coded statements and placed the codes into categories. Each idea was separated from the larger transcript and grouped into a category. Next, imaginative variation used the textural and structural descriptions to create themes based on the categories. The categories were analyzed to find a composite theme that combined the ideas. Finally, participant experiences were synthesized into the essence of the phenomenon to find the shared meaning of the phenomenon. Data was derived from interviews, physical classroom observations, writing prompt analysis, and a focus group. Themes were developed based on the repetition of words, ideas, and concepts through the four sources of data.

Theme One: The Learning Environment. This theme provides an answer to the central research question: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia? It also answers the sub-question: How do participants describe the learning environment? The learning environment was mentioned by all 12 participants in this study as something that directly impacts a newcomer ESOL students' ability to learn content and second language skills. Words and phrases associated with the learning environment were coded 117 times. The learning environment is

defined as any place where students learn (Tas, 2016). The learning environment includes the physical location, materials present within the room, and the physical beings and attitudes of the people present within the classroom (U.S Department of Education, 2014). Physical classroom or office space observations were conducted with each participant to gain insight into their working environment; the classroom observation form can be found in Appendix E.

Observations were made about the location of the classroom, arrangement of desks, designated/special areas, decorations, and resources. Of the seven classrooms visited, all newcomer ESOL teachers had a designated reading area with leveled books for choice reading. Abigail explained that her school supplies many textbooks for the ELLs, but she also purchases books at used book sales and accepts donations from friends and family (Abigail, Observation, March 15, 2019). Finding high interest/low level texts is difficult for secondary teachers. When looking through her classroom library, Amy discussed book selection for her ELLs. “My students don’t want to read books about learning their colors and ABCs. They are high schoolers—they want to read about relationships and teenage things” (Amy, Observation, March 13, 2019). Classroom library spaces were an important piece of the learning environment because they allow students to gain access to text at their reading level and help promote choice reading in the classroom.

Three participants were categorized as non-teaching, so their office spaces were observed. A school counselor, ESOL instructional coach, and ESOL department chair all participated in the physical observation of their work space. The ESOL instructional coach had several textbooks with coaching strategies, reading and writing skill books, and collaborative coaching tips (Sandra, Observation, March 14, 2019). When asked about the resources they use regularly, these staff members referenced online material and professional development provided

by their school districts. Their office space served as their own personal learning environment, but most of their work was done in classrooms or elsewhere in the building with other staff members. Rosa, a school counselor, had an especially welcoming environment in her office suite. She had motivational posters, college signs, and mental help resources hanging throughout her room (Rosa, Observation, March 27, 2019). She commented that students often ask her about her decorations, which is why she consistently looks for eye-grabbing signs to hang in her room. She stated, “I want my students to feel welcome and ask me questions. This will usually lead to conversation about their interests, hobbies, and their future, which is what I want” (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019). The physical learning environment or work space allowed participants to set the tone for student interaction and lead to positive learning experiences.

When asked about creating a cooperative classroom environment, each participant took time to explain how they establish a positive, welcoming, and supportive learning environment because they see the direct impact that setting has on the academic, social, and emotional development of newcomer students. Many teachers used the first two weeks of the school year as community building time and saved content instruction for after this time period. “When I build a community, my work is done for me. I call my class my family. They get to understand that our differences are just skin deep” (Gary, Interview, March 20, 2019). Some teachers emphasized the importance of getting to know newcomer students because their teachers might be the only consistent adult figure in their life. Many newly arrived students left their home countries and the people who raised them. That means, they came to America to live with someone whom they may have never met or have not seen in over a decade. In our interview, Rosa, a school counselor, explained how she addresses newcomer students who are meeting new people in their life and starting school in a new country. She said, “I ask them where they are

coming from and how long their journey was. I also ask them if their parents were with them or if they've lived with their parents. That's important to know. I ask how long they've been separated" (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019). The background information about a student's journey and experiences in America helps teachers recognize that creating a safe, welcoming environment is essential to helping newcomer students feel comfortable in the classroom.

Eight participants explained specific ways they create a learning environment that invites participation, risk taking, and opportunities for failure and success. Some teachers teach lessons on respectful listening and speaking to help their students understand the value of hearing other people's viewpoints. Some teachers use flexible seating, snack breaks, or open-door policies to create a place where students feel connected to one another. One participant elaborated on how she encourages her students to connect and learn about one another. She explained, "We do a lot of character building. We make vision boards and family trees and we just kind of explore what they want to get out of school and how we can take what we learn in school and apply it..." (Monica, Interview, March 28, 2019). Another teacher described an identity project where her students present themselves as citizens of their country and explain what their heritage means to them. There were several teachers who mentioned their classroom space as a way to welcome students. Because newcomer ESOL students cannot be generalized, the classroom space should not be traditional. One teacher uses couches, bean bags, and a carpet to gather her students together in her English language development class. She wants to create a place where students are physically comfortable because she believes it helps them focus more on the content. Five teachers mentioned using decorations, motivational quotes and/or posters, and pictures to create a space where students can find motivation when they are struggling. The learning environment, including the physical space, classroom materials, and student attitudes, played a major role in

defining the experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers. Two subthemes emerged from the analysis of data related to classroom environment, relationships and the education of the whole student.

Subtheme: Relationships. All 12 participants mentioned making connections and building relationships with their students; words and phrases related to relationships were coded 69 times. The idea that helping newcomer ESOL students find refuge at school was a resounding theme in the data analysis. Some newcomer ESOL students are forced to escape their home country due to tragic circumstances. Some students travel alone or with random people they meet along their journey. Other students move with their family for a parent's job or to join extended family in the area. Every student has a unique story that helps shape them into an individual learner. Newcomer ESOL teachers are tasked with helping their students find and use their strengths to become better learners and people. Developing strong relationships with newcomer students allowed participants to engage student's interest and motivate them for learning. Participants also highlighted the importance of building relationships throughout the school year, not just in the beginning of the year. During the focus group session, participants were asked about the best part of working with newcomer ESOL students. Five participants responded that the relationships they create with students are the highlights of their career. Katie responded, "When students come back to visit or email you just to tell you about their new job, the grade they got on their college essay, or how they are using what you taught them. That is powerful" (Katie, Focus Group, April 24, 2019). Gary added, "I have students who message me on Facebook to say thank you. That is why you become a teacher and work in this field" (Gary, Focus Group, April 24, 2019). Relationships were also mentioned by each participant in the in-person interviews. Because the newcomer ESOL population is adjusting to a new country,

helping students bridge the cultural gap was a major conversation topic while building relationships in the classroom.

Participants noted that their newcomer ESOL classes undoubtedly change and grow as the school year progresses. One teacher shared that she got four new students in the month of January. Welcoming a new student and helping him or her adjust to their new classroom is an opportunity for all students to reconnect and strengthen their peer and teacher relationships. There are many ways to build relationships and make connections with students. Nine participants explained small gestures they use to develop relations with their students. Maria, a Biology teacher, explained, “We just try to take the time, you know, little jokes with them. Engage them about their home country. I use little nicknames from my own culture like *hija* and *hijo*” (Maria, Interview, March 4, 2019). Helene, a math teacher, mentioned, “A lot of time was just spent getting to know each other. Get to know our families and their families and talk about it and just to build their relationships” (Helene, Interview, March 19, 2019). Other participants noted making jokes, talking about common interests, references sports teams, and attempting to learn words and phrases in their student’s language as ways to develop trust and bonds in the classroom. Six participants noted that making connections with students is their favorite part about being an ESOL teacher. These six participants noted that they learn so much about their students’ culture, background, traditions, and customs by having regular conversations that are not related to the content area. When asked about making connections, Katie, an ESOL instructional coach, answered,

These are the conversations that students will remember. This is the connection they will take with them beyond these high school walls and into the real world. Can they force themselves outside their comfort zones and take risks? Yes, and I helped them develop

those skills. They know that I support them. I am their cheerleader for life. (Katie, Interview, March 20, 2019)

Relationships with peers and teachers was a recurring idea mentioned regularly in interviews and written responses. Strong relationships help encourage newcomer ESOL students, who have low language skills, ask questions to clarify ideas they cannot access because of a lack of language. Relationships help newcomer students make connections to their peers and teachers at school; an important aspect for students who may not have stable, supportive relationships with family members at home because of family separation, parents/guardians work schedules, or their own work schedule. Positive relationships help students connect to their learning environment and build trust among their teacher and peers. “Because my students know me and trust me, they come to class. They are genuinely interested in my class because I have showed them, I care” (Madison, Interview, March 13, 2019). Relationships between newcomer teachers and their students allowed for higher motivation and a learning environment built on genuine interest in how students’ background shape the learning environment.

Subtheme: Educating the Whole Student. The second subtheme under learning environment is educating the whole student. This subtheme was coded 48 times in data analysis. Education is more than just an academic process; it involves the health and safety of students. Education and the learning process should help students feel engaged, supported, and challenged. Newcomer students who felt mentally, physically, and emotionally connected to their school and teacher were more engaged and comfortable in their learning environment. The two newcomer programs in this research both used a whole-student approach to education. Supports were in place to help develop the academic, social, and emotional capabilities of newcomer ESOL students. One participant noted the support of her bilingual school psychologist as an essential

component of their newcomer program. “If I am able, I will personally escort the new student who is arriving now. Just to say these are some supports that are in place. If you need five minutes or if you need a break you can come here” (Maria, Interview, March 4, 2019). Abigail, who teaches a literacy development course for brand new newcomer ESOL students, explained the social and emotional differences between her students. She explained, “There was such a disparity between their emotional and social immaturity and their lives outside of school” (Abigail, Interview, March 15, 2019). She explained that many of her students work full time jobs as adults after school, but in school they good around like elementary school students. She expressed a need for her school to address emotional scars for her students that never truly had a childhood. Gary highlighted the importance of psychological support when he stated, “I believe that our newcomer students need a lot of empathy from us. Many of them come to us with a lot of scars that may be physical, but mostly psychological” (Gary, Writing Prompt, March 21, 2019).

Support programs of all kinds were mentioned throughout data collection. One newcomer program developed a course for newcomer students called strategies for success, which helps students learn cultural norms, develop study skills, discuss conflicts, or tackle issues that students are facing. This course is required for any newcomer student who has just arrived in America. Part of the strategies for success course is the introduction of student ambassadors who help newcomer students by giving them tours of the school, accompanying them to lunch, and introduce them to the clubs and sports available at the school. Katie, an ESOL instructional coach, discussed the ambassadors and their role. She said, “For example, this year she was working on having student ambassadors take students around. She also had them talk to parents

about how to have a successful student and what the school expects from the student” (Katie, Interview, March 20, 2019).

Rosa, a school counselor, discussed the role of counselors as support systems for newcomer students. She explained that students often feel very overwhelmed by a new language, country, school, and people. Her newcomer students will stop by her office regularly to check in and discuss their performance in school and socially. She encourages students to take part in school activities to help them develop social skills and meet people with similar interests and hobbies. Other participants touched on the importance of helping students connect with their peers outside of school. Helene discussed the value of school sponsored activities in her writing prompt. She said,

Many students enjoy playing soccer after school and yet, they are not aware of trying out for the school soccer team. There is an advantage of playing for the school team. It is an education in extension where students practice and train themselves to be a team player and contribute, be responsible for his actions and maintain good grades. My school is an excellent place for newcomer students because two ESOL teachers are coaching the varsity and junior varsity soccer teams. (Helene, Writing Prompt, March 21, 2019)

Participants also mentioned programs such as Liberty’s Promise, a program designed to help newcomer immigrant youth engage and adjust to civic life in America and access information about higher education. Posters were hung in ESOL classrooms to highlight this program and give information about available resources (Madison, Observation, March 13, 2019). Family reunification programs were mentioned six times as powerful tools to help newcomer students connect with their family whom they have not been living with for years. A girl’s club for newcomer immigrants run by an ESOL counselor was an outlet for newcomer girls to meet one

another and discuss their experiences. The school government association, gardening club, anime club, and library book club were all cited as after school resources to help newcomer students develop their language and social skills. All 12 participants acknowledged the importance of extending education beyond the classroom for newcomer students who have so much to learn about a new country. Participants expressed how imperative it is for newcomers to engage with their peers, so they do not feel isolated. An interactive learning environment was cited as essential to help students open up and connect with their teacher and peers on an academic and emotional level. It is very challenging to meet all expectations and standards at school when students may not have had any formal schooling experiences in their home country. There is a major cultural learning curve that newcomer students must address as they work towards high school graduation and a future career. The public-school classroom is a new learning environment where newcomer students must acclimate to make themselves vulnerable to new ideas.

Theme Two: Support for ESOL Programs. This theme provides an answer to the central research question: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia? Support from various entities was mentioned 92 times in interviews, writing prompt responses, and the focus groups. Support was a recurring theme that all participants felt was essential to a successful newcomer classroom. Because there were so many references to support, three subthemes were created to help divide the various types of support derived from the data. Of the subthemes, school district/community support was coded 22 times, administrative support 28 times, and support from colleagues 45 times. Gary, a 27-year veteran teacher and administrator in various school districts and two different countries, discussed a time when he did not have proper support from the

administration at his school at a previous job. He was the only ESOL teacher at a school where there was a growing population of ESOL students. His principal tasked him with helping his colleagues meet the needs of the diverse students in the classroom. He asked to give one presentation to the staff, but the principal denied him this opportunity and instead asked him to meet one on one with teachers who needed support. It took him the entire school year to meet with each teacher who needed support because he also had to balance his own classes. Gary expressed his frustration with this process because newcomer ESOL students were sitting in classrooms being ignored because their teachers had never taught students like them before (Gary, Interview, March 20, 2019). Gary inferred that this situation is probably not uncommon in places where there are smaller ESOL populations. Many school districts are not equipped or knowledgeable on how to handle new and growing populations of students who do not speak English as their first language. Many districts do not have the funds to buy resources, hire more teachers, and train their staff on strategies for meeting the need of ESOL students.

Consequently, these students do not have access to equitable learning opportunities and are often left behind in the American public-school system. Carina emphasized the importance of support for newcomer ESOL students when she wrote, “When a person feels that they aren’t valued, they resist the mainstream culture and can show this in a number of ways including, but not limited to, dropping out of school, and/or engaging in a gamut of unwanted behaviors” (Carina, Writing Prompt, March 21, 2019). The three subthemes discussed below detail the different types of support that help newcomer teachers meet the needs of their disparate student populations.

Subtheme: School District and Community Support. Each participant in this study was part of a school district that had developed county and/or schoolwide newcomer ESOL programs. In January of 2015, the Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education

and the Civil Rights Division at the U.S. Department of Justice released a memo reinforcing the legal obligations of public schools to create equal educational opportunities for ELLs. The memo stated that public schools must act to overcome language barriers, allow for equal participation in instructional opportunities, and equal participation by ELLs in instructional programs (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). This meant that ELLs must have the same opportunities as their grade level peers to meet content area standards, access standardized testing, and meet graduation requirements on a four-year timeline. Many districts across the nation were educating ESOL students in ESOL self-contained classes until they reached an English language proficiency level of three on the WIDA assessment. Students would spend years taking ESOL electives that did not count as course requirements for graduation. In our interview, Katie remembered a student who graduated with 41 credits—you need 22 credits to graduate in the state of Virginia; 19 of his credits were ESOL electives that did not count towards graduation (Katie, Interview, March 20, 2019). This reinforcement of education law forced school districts across America to revamp their ESOL programming to provide access to content area and grade level courses for newcomer ESOL students. Brick County Public Schools and Grayson County Public Schools both created new programs that allowed their newcomer students to take required courses at their English language level, thus creating a timely course to graduation. Both school districts have extensive resources and information on their district websites for ESOL students and their families. Rosa, a school counselor, and Katie, an ESOL department chair, both received training on the structure and timeline of their school district's newcomer programming so they can share information with their students and communities. A path to graduation timeline is available in Rosa and Katie's offices so they can pass this out to their new students (Katie, Observation, March 20, 2019; Rosa, Observation, March 27, 2019). The education and

training from their school district was cited as invaluable to the development of their students.

School district support is the first major milestone for newcomer ESOL programming. Schools and teachers cannot create curricula, access resources and materials, or create new programs without the consent and approval of their school district. In our interview, Madison commented on the new programming in her district which allows students to take courses at grade level and at their English level. For example, newcomer students could take English 9 for level twos and Biology for level twos. She said,

I just wholeheartedly support GCPS' move to this. Um, and how capable students are. It's a tragedy to me that these students were spending seven, eight years to get to 9th grade courses. And they were wasting their time. They're more than capable of mastering these standards. And admittedly, their work product will look different than an average ninth grade native English student. But by the end of the year, my level twos in the newcomer program are writing better essays than many gen ed or native-born English-speaking kids. (Madison, Interview, March 13, 2019).

Amy, a veteran English language development teacher, also commented on the ESOL program at her school. She did not realize how her school district's programming disadvantaged the newcomer youth until the new program was implemented. She said,

I had no idea that none of it counted towards graduation. So that was eye opening for me from the other side. It was like wow, these kids need, they need these classes or else they are never going to graduate. And so, we're not preparing them for anything beyond high school. We were setting them up for failure in life by allowing them to spend eight years taking useless classes then forcing them to dropout once they turned 22 years old. (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019)

Community support is also imperative according to newcomer ESOL teachers and staff members. The school community and local community should understand the student population, their challenges, and their successes in trying to work towards high school graduation and beyond. Highlighting and celebrating student diversity was a recurring theme in the data collection process. “At my school, we host an international night to celebrate the diverse cultures and traditions in my building. This event sells out every year and the school is packed with students, families, and local community members” said Sandra, an ESOL instructional coach (Sandra, Interview, March 14, 2019). Maria explained her school’s team-based approach to their newcomer student groups. “We meet biweekly solely to discuss our students’ accomplishments. Who got an A on a test? Who scored a goal in their soccer game? Then we are in the hallways high-fiving students and handing out certificates of achievement” (Maria, Interview, March 4, 2019). She also talked about how she uses her school’s parent liaisons and translators to call home and talk to parents about their kids’ positive accomplishments at school. Creating a place where students, teachers, and families feel welcome fosters a friendly environment where people want to embrace differences and celebrate their school’s diversity.

Subtheme: Administrative Support. The next level of support and subtheme derived from the data is administrative support. Based on participant responses, support from principals, assistant principals, and department chairs is essential for newcomer ESOL teachers to be successful in the classroom. In the sit-down interview, each participant was asked what supports they need to be successful newcomer ESOL educator. All 12 participants mentioned administrative support, either from a principal, assistant principal, and/or department chair in their responses. When asked, Amy responded, “I feel hugely supported, I really do. Our

assistant principal has been awesome. She is unafraid and will not be bulldozed and she advocates for our kids” (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019). Abigail said, “We have very supportive department heads. If we need something, I am not afraid to ask. And we usually get what we need” (Abigail, Interview, March 15, 2019). Katie, who is the department chair for the ESOL department at her school, discussed her relationship with her principal as a catalyst for the positive changes her school was making in their ESOL education program.

My principal trusts me. She knows I am not going to come to her for something that isn’t absolutely necessary. It might not mean much coming from me, but if my principal goes to instructional services or to central office, it is clear that there is a need for it. She fights for our newcomer students because she knows they deserve the same opportunities. (Katie, Interview, March 20, 2019)

Gary echoed Katie’s thoughts; he stated, “Administrative support is very, very important. And the beauty of this building is that the school administration has a whole school approach. It is all hands-on deck for our students” (Gary, Interview, March 20, 2019). Monica emphasized her department chair as a person who helps her and her colleagues on a daily basis. “She is an amazing department chair. She makes sure we have everything we need. She will come in and help us teach or come talk to a student whenever you need” (Monica, Interview, March 28, 2019). Rosa, a school counselor, mentioned her assistant principal as someone who is always available for the newcomer students in her building. She said,

These students need adults who are consistent role models in their lives. Their AP isn’t scary to them. They don’t go to her when they are in trouble, they go to her when they need a friend. Someone to talk to about their soccer game or advice for their future. She is their support system. (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019)

There were various levels of intervention from principals, assistant principals, and department chairs mentioned in the data collection process. It was clear that all the participants felt supported by their leaders; they could approach their leaders and ask for advice, materials, or questions about their students.

During the focus group session, participants were asked if there was anything they would change or add to the existing newcomer curriculum. Helene expressed a need for workshops that help students with life skills such as time management, money management, and anger management (Helene, Focus Group, April 24, 2019). Monica, who works at a different school, explained that there was a need for this in her district, so outside resources were brought in to help meet the need. Her school purchased an online learning tool that help students learn personal finance strategies for high school students. This program was implemented in ESOL classrooms and throughout the building for seniors (Monica, Focus Group, April 24, 2019). Monica's principal advocated for the funding for this program because she knew it was something all students could benefit from. It is essential that administrators are open to listening and observing the needs of the classroom teachers so they can provide support and resources to help all students reach their learning goals.

Subtheme: Colleague Support. All 12 participants worked in schools where there was a full ESOL department with a clear pathway for newcomer students. There were hundreds of ESOL students at each school, so the student populations filtered into mainstream classes and ESOL self-contained rooms. Carina and Sabrina are both general education teachers who teach elective courses in their school. They are not certified in ESOL. Carina teaches physical education and Sabrina teaches fitness and foods, life planning, and child development. The setup of the ESOL program at their school allows for newcomer students to take mainstream electives,

which means they can have students of all language levels in their classrooms. Gaining their perspective in interviews and a writing prompt provided a valuable viewpoint in the research. Carina had classes with 35 students who have varying academic abilities and language levels. She stated, “I have classes with full IB diploma candidates who play volleyball with a level one newcomer student who has only been in America for two months.” (Carina, Interview, March 20, 2019). Carina spoke about some students who have played several sports and grew up performing physical activities and other female students who come from conservative religious backgrounds where they are not allowed to change into different clothes for gym class. She expressed the difficulties she faces in trying to balance the various content levels in her classroom. “The hardest part for me is the pacing—it is never right. Some students are bored, and some students are lost because it’s too fast or too slow” (Carina, Interview, March 20, 2019). Carina explained that she often reaches out to other teachers in her school and department for ideas and supports for her classroom.

I have really worked hard to reach out the ESOL department for support. I have never worked with student populations like this, so I can’t just sit back and hope for the best. I want actual strategies that help meet these student’s needs. And my colleagues have been great. I had a group of ESOL teachers come to my class and sit individually with the newcomer students to teach them how to open a locker. They sat with me and helped me adapt my PowerPoints and note sheets to use more simple language. I would be doing my newcomer students a disservice without the ESOL teachers support. (Carina, Interview, March 20, 2019)

Some meetings result in simple fixes such as less wordy PowerPoints or graphic organizers while others are more intensive and involve leveling text for different language levels. Sabrina had

many of the same experiences with her students. She spoke about classes with 30 students that had 15 low level ESOL students. She reached out to her school's ESOL instructional coach for ideas and support. Sabrina stated,

My ESOL coach came to my room and observed so she could understand what we do in class. Then we met and she walked me through strategies I could immediately implement in my class. I saw a huge difference in the engagement and participation of my newcomer students. (Sabrina, Interview, March 27, 2019)

There was a clear need for support from ESOL teachers and coaches for the teachers who were not trained in working with newcomer students. Other participants, who are ESOL certified, also echoed the importance of collaboration among teachers. Madison, an ESOL/English teacher, spoke about her interactions with colleagues. She has 15 students in a classroom and eight spoken languages. "I need help and ideas from my colleagues—those who teach ESOL and those who don't. Part of being a teacher is constantly looking for new ways to meet your students' needs. You have to be open to change and new ideas" (Madison, Interview, March 13, 2019). Collaboration was a strong theme in the data collection process.

Theme Three: Pedagogy and Practices. The pedagogy and practices of newcomer ESOL teachers were emphasized 197 times in interviews and written responses. This theme and the subsequent subthemes answer the central research question: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia? They also answer two sub-questions: How do participants describe the process of second language acquisition for their students and how do participants describe the process of content area knowledge acquisition for their students? The essence of newcomer ESOL teachers' experiences is woven into their everyday pedagogy and practices in the

classroom. These experiences shape their teaching practice and the students' learning processes. Two resounding phrases stuck out as paramount to teacher experiences in the newcomer classroom, good teaching is good teaching and best practices. These phrases were mentioned directly or indirectly 11 times in data collection. Many of the participants agree that the strategies used in newcomer ESOL classrooms are transferrable to all classrooms and content areas. "Good teaching is good teaching, so if you have the content knowledge, you are going to be able to adapt it to your student population, which all teachers have to do" (Madison, Interview, March 13, 2019). Sandra, an ESOL instructional coach who works with ESOL and general education teachers as a support for ESOL students, stated,

It's all about best practices. What works as an adaptation for one student, will probably work for others, too. It is never a one size fits all, but chances are there is more than one student in the room who will benefit from altered practices. (Sandra, Interview, March 14, 2019)

Specific strategies and classroom practices were mentioned as cornerstone features used to meet the needs of newcomer ESOL students. Word walls were present in all nine classrooms visited throughout the data collection process. These walls included both content area words and academic vocabulary. Scaffolded sentence starters were displayed in Helene's math classes and Monica's biology classroom to help students explain how they approached and solved problems (Helene, Observation, March 19, 2019). Anchor charts and adapted anchor texts were used in eight of the nine classrooms to highlight important information and display it throughout the unit. In Monica's biology classroom, she had student made posters as anchor charts for their cellular processes' unit. Abigail had anchor charts with research skills for her global citizen research project (Abigail, Observation, March 15, 2019). All nine classrooms had some type of

adapted texts or leveled literacy instruction present in the room. There were many low-level books present on various topics in each classroom. For example, Amy had children's books on different emotions and feelings on display in her English language development classroom because her students were studying emotions in English (Amy, Observation, March 13, 2019). Gary spoke about using tiered vocabulary with his juniors and seniors to prepare them for the workplace language they will encounter once they graduate. He said, "I really try to focus on those tier two words that appear in all content areas. These are often the most overlooked because teachers assume they know what summarize and synthesize mean, but these words are difficult for ELLs" (Gary, Interview, March 20, 2019). He, and five other participants, also focused on the use of reading strategies in their content area so their students could learn to figure out the meaning of unknown words, understand difficult concepts, and comprehend content area materials. Choice reading and silent reading were mentioned as ways to get students to read more regularly to help improve their fluency and English language skills. Using multiple ways to respond and answer questions was mentioned by all nine classroom teachers as essential for newcomer students. Allowing students to write, speak, draw, act, and/or create a product were all cited as alternative ways to allow students to show what they have learned. Finally, teaching content and English language skills simultaneously was stated nine times as a way to balance content area knowledge with language acquisition skills. Participants explained and elaborated on the various strategies they use in the classroom to help their students learn language and content.

Subtheme: Scaffolds and Differentiation. This subtheme provides an answer to the central research question: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia? It also answers the sub-

questions: How do participants describe the process of second language acquisition for their students and how do participants describe the process of content areas knowledge acquisition for their students? The words scaffold and differentiation were directly referenced 23 and 16 times throughout data collection. Several examples of providing scaffolds and differentiating instruction were mentioned by all 12 participants in the study. The most common words and phrases related to the theme scaffolds and differentiation were accommodate, modify, adapt, and use multiple modes of representation and expression. Helene stated, “Accommodations, differentiation, and scaffolds are essential for new students to learn” (Helene, Writing Prompt, March 19, 2019). Amy explained how she uses differentiation in the classroom on a regular basis when she gives her students opportunities to respond to an assignment or question in numerous ways. She explained, “Also giving them lots of opportunities to respond in various ways—spoken, written, drawing, illustrations, stories, etc.—all help to find out about their understanding” (Amy, Writing Prompt, March 23, 2019). Participants mentioned that lack of language does not equate to lack of intelligence, and it is not fair to expect a student with limited English skills to respond in writing or orally when they do not have access to all the words they need. A picture, translated text, performance, or digital presentation are all just as effective to show what a student has learned.

Amy, Madison, Monica, and Gary all use stations in their classroom to help adapt their lesson plans to meet the levels of their students. In an English language development class, each station represents a core component of literacy—reading, writing, speaking, or listening. There are directions for the assignment at each station and the students are expected to work independently for a set amount of time (Amy, Observation, March 13, 2019). An example of a stations lesson includes a reading station where the teacher reads aloud with one to four students

and checks comprehension throughout the time period, a writing station to review the formation of thesis statements, a speaking station where students use their computers to record answers to questions based on a current event, and a listening station where students listen to audio of a story then have to respond to higher level questions about the material (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019). The books and other texts used in the stations are leveled so students can choose the material that corresponds with their reading level. When asked about holding students accountable and checking their engagement with the lessons, Madison responded, “Surprisingly, I do not have too many behavior issues. The students are generally engaged because they know these skills will help them in all their classes and even in their lives beyond school” (Madison, Interview, March 13, 2019). The scaffolds used in the stations provide support for students to read and write at their own level but allow for informal assessments. Participants also mentioned the use of manipulatives and kinesthetic learning opportunities as great visual ways for students to show their understanding. Helene spoke about the use of scales in her physics class when she teaches balancing equations (Helene, Interview, March 19, 2019). When her students can touch and move items in the scale they see balancing in action. “It doesn’t matter if they can speak the words in English if they can show how many elements should be on each side” (Helene, Interview, March 19, 2019). These learning opportunities also help break up the monotony of teacher-directed instruction which is difficult for newcomers because they cannot keep up with the speed and language of their teachers.

Participants cited the regular use of bilingual and English dictionaries in the classroom and on standardized tests as a simple scaffold that allows students to check their progress and utilize dictionaries to check or translate words. “The goal is to have students gradually use their dictionaries less and less as their language and content knowledge increases” (Monica, Interview,

March 28, 2019). Gary uses personal vocabulary journals in his classroom to encourage students to write down words they do now know. Any time a student comes across a word they are unfamiliar with they write it down in their journal. Then, they take time to look up the word, define it, use it in a sentence, and hang it on the classroom word wall so their classmates can learn it too (Gary, Interview, March 20, 2019). Helene also cited the use of word walls as an important component for shaping newcomers' vocabulary. "The students learn both English and math. Providing sentence frames and word walls is essential for the newcomers" (Helene, Writing Prompt, March 25, 2019). Students need to see, hear, and speak what they are learning in order to fully comprehend difficult concepts.

The physical classroom observations provided great examples of visual scaffolds that teachers gradually adjust as the school year progresses. Madison explained her use of graphics in the classroom as a way to develop student vocabulary and help newcomers learn English words and phrases. She begins the year with almost everything in her classroom labeled—desk, door, bookshelf, computer, etc. Then, at the end of each quarter she removes the labels of the items her students have mastered. She also changes the posters and decorations in her classroom quarterly to correspond with the unit and seasons of the year. "Seeing the words directly associated with the item helps newcomers make the association with the word in English. They see it every day and it really sinks in" (Madison, Interview, March 13, 2019). Monica explained her use of student-created anchor charts for each unit as key visuals to aid her students' understanding. In her classroom, she had a labeled diagram of types of rocks and the components that make up the descriptions. "The word sedimentary might be really difficult for a newcomer student, but if they can see the sediments and make the connection with the pieces in the word, they will get it" (Monica, Interview, March 28, 2019). Every poster and sign

throughout the school is a learning opportunity for limited English speakers. “The more exposure newcomer students have to text, the more they can learn” (Katie, Interview, March 20, 2019).

Subtheme: Resources. This subtheme provides an answer to the central research question: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia? It also provides context for the three sub-questions: How do participants describe the learning environment, how do participants describe the process of second language acquisition for their students, and how do participants describe the process of content area knowledge acquisition for their students? Resources were mentioned by all 12 participants in the study. The word was directly mentioned 32 times, and specific resources were mentioned, explained, and described in all participant interviews for a total of 158 codes. Writing prompt responses included nine references to resources. The nine physical classroom observations all showed evidence of the impact resources have on newcomer ESOL classrooms.

When asked what supports are needed to be a successful ESOL educator, Amy responded, “Resources are so important because you need all these books at different levels. You can’t teach a kid to read if all you have is a ninth-grade book” (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019). Abigail added, “Materials. We use handwriting books, alphabet flash cards, leveled texts, and the list goes on and on” (Abigail, Interview, March 15, 2019). Monica echoed the theme of resources when she stated, “We have all the resources we need” (Monica, Interview, March 28, 2019). Monica also showed me shelves of books in her classroom with science texts related to topics her students learn about in biology class. She explained that her students cannot access the ninth-grade textbook because the reading level is so high. So, her department chair found a series of nonfiction children’s books about biology topics that was purchased for her classroom.

“It would take a more creativity and time to teach these concepts with accessible information,” said Monica (Monica, Observation, March 28, 2019). Helene explained her school’s commitment to online resources that make an impact in the classroom. “My students have access to one to one technology that allows me to utilize math websites and training programs every day in the classroom” (Helene, Interview, March 19, 2019). Each participant felt passionate about the access their students had to supplementary materials that enhanced their learning experiences.

Resources were mentioned often throughout the data collection process. Leveled books, literacy intervention programs, and choice reading materials were commonly used throughout newcomer classrooms to help expand reading skills. Besides books, participants also mentioned an ESOL instructional coach, computers, iPads, coteachers, and supportive library staff as resources that helped improve newcomer ESOL teacher experiences. One school had a full-time staff member, an ESOL instructional coach, whose role was to help general education and ESOL teachers in the classroom. When speaking about this important resource, Sabrina explained,

Our ESOL instructional coach is an irreplaceable resource that allows our staff to truly meet the needs of our ESOL learners. Teachers do not always have the time to adapt tests, PowerPoints, note sheets, textbooks, and everything else we use in the classroom. I know I wouldn’t be able to address all their needs in the classroom if I didn’t have this support. (Sabrina, Interview, March 27, 2019)

Having access to someone trained with transferrable strategies for all content areas allowed Sabrina to make connections with her newcomer students with materials they could understand.

Technology was also mentioned several times throughout data collection. “Technology can leverage language issues,” stated Gary (Gary, Interview, March 20, 2019). Computers and

iPads were used throughout content area classrooms for translation, vocabulary building, literacy intervention, and project-based learning. Computers were also mentioned as tools to help individualize learning to help increase motivation and engagement. Six participants worked in schools where every student was given a laptop. All six participants regularly use computers in their lessons for note taking, lessons, and choice reading.

Supportive library staff was a recurring resource mentioned by eight participants. Librarians were called upon to help teach lessons, provide insight into databases accessible for ELLs, and search for relative books for choice reading and classroom use. Katie, an EOSL department chair, relied heavily on her librarians to support her newcomer ESOL teachers. “There aren’t many other people in the building who have such a vast knowledge about high interest books that students actually enjoy reading” (Katie, Interview, March 20, 2019). She refers her ESOL teachers to the library often so students can visit to find and use materials in the classroom. Because there is a strong relationship with the ESOL staff and the library, the librarians work to find books, databases, and other resources for low language levels and complex content for the ESOL classrooms. The support of the school library helped newcomer ESOL teachers find resources for their content area units. During the focus group session, participants were asked if there was anything else they would like to add about working with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia. Sabrina stated, “I think it is important for the entire school to understand the programming and structure of the ESOL department, especially if your school has a large ESOL population” (Sabrina, Focus Group, April 24, 2019). Several participants joined the conversation adding that this understanding will allow for more sharing of teaching strategies, useful resources, and collaboration among staff members (Focus Group, April 24, 2019). Conversation about resources spanned throughout all sources of

data collection and recurred as a resounding item that newcomer ESOL teachers need to develop lessons and curricula for their student populations.

Theme Four: Recognition of Student Circumstances. The fourth theme coded from the data is the recognition of student circumstances; this code was used 144 times throughout data collection. This theme provides insight into the central research question: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia? It also provides an answer for the sub-question: How do participants describe the learning environment? The data showed that there is not a distinctive newcomer classroom; students cannot be categorized or generalized because every classroom is different than the next. Student backgrounds, language, nation of origin, and educational experiences all differ greatly. Abigail spoke about a student who entered her class in January of 2019. She teaches literacy essentials, which is a beginner language class. He was illiterate in his home language, Spanish, and English. He had very little education in his home country and came the United States as a 15-year-old. Abigail began by teaching him the alphabet with flash cards (Abigail, Interview, March 15, 2019). This student was joined in class by six other students—three Spanish speakers, a Vietnamese speaker, an Urdu speaker, and student who speaks Tigrinya. Every student had different English and education skills that she had to address. “In that class, we started with handwriting. I had tears from one student because the alphabet, letters, and writing motions were challenging and new” (Abigail, Interview, March 15, 2019). The students in Abigail’s class are working towards graduating from high school within four years; however, they can stay in the public-school system until age 22 if needed. Her students’ educational experiences directly impact her instruction and adaptations in the classroom; they shape the curriculum and the way she presents new material.

Amy addressed her students' backgrounds when asked how she knows if a student is adjusting well to life in America. "I've found that a lot of these kids who've been through such traumatic things on their way here just want to be normal and have a normal life. They just want to have fun. They just want to be a kid" (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019). Amy explained that the newcomer teachers at her school are trained to not pry into students' lives and journey to America. The conversation could take place organically, but most students do not want to relive trauma from their home country or journey to America. There are a lot of political conversations happening about immigrants and refugees which adds to the stress in newcomer students' lives. Many student's legal status is known by the school counseling office, but that information does not have to be shared with teachers. Gary noted the stereotypes and difficult rhetoric students face in his written response. He stated, "Empathy for this subgroup will help them deal with adjustment issues better than when we view them as a burden or threat... It's especially true with the type of acerbic pronouncements we hear in the political discourse" (Gary, Writing Prompt, March 21, 2019). Sandra also addressed the difficult conversations students face at school regarding their backgrounds. She explained,

I can't imagine leaving the only place I've ever known—my family, my friends, my home, and all my belongings—to travel to a new country. It is the biggest risk of a lifetime. And these students, and sometimes their families, do it because it is a better option than staying in their home country. And they are flying business class on an airplane. They are walking, through the trenches, alone and without food because that is still a better option. (Sandra, Interview, March 14, 2019)

Many students leave their home country, especially students from Central and South America, without their primary caregiver. They face the journey with their friends or on their own. Rosa,

a school counselor, explained her school's support system for students who are meeting or reunited with parents for the first time. She said,

A lot of people don't realize that when students come to America to be with their parents, they might be meeting their mom for the first time. Or seeing her for the first time in a decade. And they had to leave their caregiver behind, a grandma, aunt, cousin, etc., so they are sad and bitter. (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019)

Rosa's school has a reunification program that helps students create meaningful relationships with their parents or new caregiver in America. She has found a direct correlation between students' relationships at home and their success in school. "If a student goes home and faces stress—arguments, lack of personal space, difficult relationships—research shows that will carry over into the classroom" (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019). This program helps to bridge the difficult conversations and provides strategies for getting to know one another. Rosa has fliers and advertisements for this program in her office and spread throughout the counseling suite in her school (Rosa, Observation, March 27, 2019).

As a school counselor, Rosa also faces many conversations about newcomer students' futures. She sees two main trends—these students think they cannot go to college because they need to work full time right now or they cannot go to college because they cannot get federal funding. There is a stereotype surrounding many of her newcomer students that casts them as people who will graduate high school and move directly into the work force. "Sure, they can go with to work if they want to, but they don't have to. I tell them, just because your dad works two jobs, 15 hours a day, doesn't mean you have to" (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019). Rosa and her school's counseling team set up workshops throughout the school year to educate newcomer students' and their families about post-graduation options. She presents on two- and four-year

colleges, trade schools, certification programs, the military, and the workforce. She wants her students to know all their options and she works very closely with her school's career center to bring in public speakers, college representatives, and former students to show the options newcomer students have for their future. "The problem is that students and their families genuinely do not know the options. They already have so much to learn in this new country and this is just something additional" (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019). Providing resources and learning opportunities for newcomers and their families was a recurring idea throughout the data collection process.

Other challenges presented in interviews, written responses, and the focus group were students living situations. Many students live in apartments or homes with extended family. Amy explained,

I have a student who comes to my classroom every lunch period and every day after school. All she wants is a quiet place to do her homework. She lives with her parents, aunt and uncle, three cousins, and three siblings. She has no space and no time alone.

(Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019)

There were many situations where students were tasked with taking care of younger siblings and cousins while their parents worked late hours or multiple jobs. "My students work all day at school, then they go home and work to take care of their siblings. Some of my students leave school and go work full time jobs. It's so hard for them" (Maria, Interview, March 4, 2019). Not every student faces these challenges at home or outside the classroom, but many students must work through difficult situations to prioritize their studies and work towards graduation.

Subtheme: Understanding Student Backgrounds. Understanding student backgrounds was a recurring theme throughout data collection; it was coded 46 times. This subtheme helps

answer the central research question: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia? There were several cultural references made throughout the in-person interviews. All nine teachers who were interviewed mentioned getting to know their students by learning and asking questions about their background and culture. “Understanding where my students come from allows me to develop a relationship with them. They teach me a lot about the world, too” (Gary, Interview, March 20, 2019). Cultural differences impact student performance and participation in the classroom. Participants mentioned eye contact, volunteering to answer questions and raise hands, and speaking in front of the class as regular components in American classrooms that do not translate to other places around the world. When asked about the dynamic of her classroom, Helene explained, “Some teachers think students are lying or being disrespectful when they do not make eye contact with them. But, many Asian cultures discourage eye contact. It is thought to be aggressive and rude” (Helene, Interview, March 19, 2019). Many Middle Eastern students were raised to only speak when they are spoken to or directly asked a question. Participation in class and volunteering to answer questions does not come naturally to them, so it takes a lot of time to develop these skills. Speaking in front of the entire class is not easy for any high school student, but especially for students who lack language skills and content knowledge. “I find that my females who were raised in male-dominant societies cannot and will not give presentations alone. It is not part of their culture and I cannot force them to do it” (Abigail, Interview, March 15, 2019). Students cultures can provide barriers to education, but overall participants expressed positive experiences related to students’ backgrounds and the learning opportunities they bring to the classroom.

When asked about the students in her classroom, Madison explained, “The diversity of my students allows for so much more learning in the classroom. Our world is so global, and I feel like my classroom is representative of what the world should look like” (Madison, Interview, March 13, 2019). All 12 participants mentioned the diversity and variety in their classrooms as a positive aspect. They explained that a lot of their relationship building comes from inquiring about students’ culture and experiences. Their students are happy to share customs and traditions from their home country. When asked about incorporating students’ backgrounds into the classroom, Monica explained,

I had a student who was extremely shy and did not share much information. I started to ask her about her home, Ethiopia, and she opened right up. She was excited and passionate about sharing her holiday traditions, cultural songs, and dances with me and the class. She even brought in a meal to share because she wanted her classmates to try it. (Monica, Interview, March 28, 2019)

Katie summarized the positive impact of diversity in the classroom best when she stated, “Teachers should be committed to continuous learning. And that includes learning about how their students can teach them, too” (Katie, Interview, March 20, 2019). Some participants noted the challenges that come from working with newcomer ELLs in the focus group session. There was a consensus that the current newcomer curriculum at the high school level is great for students who come to America without interruptions in their education, but when students have not consistently attended school in their home country, it is more difficult to help them catch up. Three participants suggested the development of a new program designed for students with interrupted or separated formal education (Focus Group, April 24, 2019). Katie stated, “There is so much to cover in so little time. We have to scaffold and differentiate everything we do. And

even then, we cannot always reach those students” (Katie, Focus Group, April 24, 2019).

Understanding student backgrounds was essential for newcomer ESOL teachers to figure out what their students already knew about content or language skills. Background knowledge is a basis for building upon prior learning and expanding that into new content.

Research Question Responses

The central question that guided this research asked about the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia. The experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomers ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia are unique and varied. Each participant gave a detailed description about their experiences with students through in-person interviews, written responses, a physical classroom observation, and a focus group. The above themes and subthemes derived from data detail specific experiences from teachers, counselors, ESOL instructional coaches, and ESOL department leaders. Participants were asked to describe their overall experience as an ESOL educator in one word or phrase during the in-person interview. The table below represents their responses.

Table 2

Responses to Interview Question #16/15

Participant	Answer
Abigail	Hard
Amy	Dynamic
Carina	Interesting
Gary	Rewarding
Helene	Inviting and embracing differences

Katie	Challenging and rewarding
Madison	Dynamic
Maria	Ambitious
Monica	Adjustments and accommodating
Rosa	Every child needs a human who is irrationally crazy about him or her
Sabrina	Flexible
Sandra	Difficult

During the focus group session, participants were asked to talk about their experiences with working with newcomer ESOL students in the first open-ended question. The two resounding words/phrases throughout this discussion were adaptability and weariness. Participants agreed that being flexible and adapting to the student population are core components of working with newcomer students. Units of study, lesson plans, and activities will vary from year to year and class to class depending on student characteristics and attitudes in the classroom. Maria spoke about the diversity in her classes when she stated, “I have two sections of ESOL biology and sometimes I feel like it is two different courses. I rarely use the same lesson plan because my students are just so different” (Maria, Focus Group, April 24, 2019). Abigail echoed her thoughts when she explained, “It is so important to understand how your students learn best. You have to present material in at least three different ways” (Abigail, Focus Group, April 24, 2019). Adapting classroom materials and consistent modification in the classroom also led to a discussion about physical and emotional weariness after years of working with the newcomer ESOL student population. Sabrina expressed, “I think any teacher is tired at this point of the school year, but newcomer ESOL students demand not only more attention, but more mentoring, conversation, emotional support, and social stimulation—it’s exhausting”

(Sabrina, Focus Group, April 24, 2019). Maria spoke about teacher burnout and cited colleagues who moved onto different careers after only a few years of working with this complex student population. She said, “The thing is to take care of yourself and to rest and set boundaries with the children” (Maria, Focus Group, April 24, 2019). Based on the data collection and analysis, newcomer ESOL teacher experiences vary based on several factors—student characteristics, attitudes, language level, academic abilities, learning styles, and curriculum. Just as the newcomer ESOL student and classroom cannot be generalized, neither can teacher experiences.

Three sub-questions supported the central research question. The first sub-question asked how participants describe the learning environment. Participants described the learning environment as diverse and culturally rich. Every classroom looks and feels different. The student population, teacher, and backgrounds of the classroom community shape the learning environment. Each participant described the ethnicities of the students they work with in their classrooms. Over 30 nations were represented in this study and over 15 languages. Teachers generally explained that they set the tone for the classroom community by building relationships and determining a consistent schedule early in the school year. Getting to know their students and establishing trust amongst peers was an important aspect in creating a comfortable, welcoming learning environment. Helene wrote about the importance of relationships in helping her create a positive learning environment. She stated,

Building good relationships with students is very important because it is a foundation upon which students will build a tower of academic knowledge. Newcomer ESOL students can be sensitive as they are adjusting to the new culture. They feel before they can understand. Big warm smiles, specific, positive feedback, and encouragement will

trigger student to stay on track and help build confidence in themselves. (Helene, Writing Prompt, March 21, 2019).

When newcomer ESOL students feel valued and assured, more learning will inevitably take place.

The physical classroom space was also an important factor that helped to set the tone for positive learning experiences. Observations of nine classrooms and three office spaces resulted in a plethora of physical evidence that helps to establish a warm, welcoming learning space.

Labeling objects in English was a common occurrence in a newcomer classroom. This simple task helps students learn new vocabulary that probably would not be covered in their core content classes. Student artifacts about themselves and their cultures were hung in Abigail and Monica's classrooms as products of a reflective activity used in the beginning of the year as an ice breaker (Abigail, Observation, March 15, 2019; Monica, Observation, March 28, 2019).

These artifacts helped students make connections with their peers and teaching allowing for a space of tolerance and acceptance. Office spaces of a school counselor, ESOL department chair, and ESOL instructional coach contained many posters and fliers with motivational quotes and images. Rosa's school counseling office contained posters with quotes in English and Spanish to help motivate and inspire her students. She also had college flags hung around her office with schools that her former students now attend (Rosa, Observation, March 27, 2019). The learning environment is a significant factor in newcomer ESOL students' classroom experiences. It can help foster more thinking, learning, and growth for students.

The second sub-question asked how participants describe the process of second language acquisition for their students. Participants were split into two schools of thought in regard to teaching second language acquisition. Some participants thought language skills should be

directly intertwined with content area lessons. Amy purposely created units that would expand English vocabulary and engage with content her students would learn in high school (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019). For example, she created a United States history lesson on the civil war because many of her students did not know America had a civil war in their past. Gary taught vocabulary in tiers to provide his students with explicit instruction of words that teachers often skip over with the assumption their students know them already. Academic words such as summarize and analyze are taught in the tiered system. He also wove English language grammar skills into his units since most of his students had no prior training in grammar (Gary, Interview, March 20, 2019).

The other half of participants supported their students with a separate class, English language development, to supplement their English language learning skills. These teachers taught content area vocabulary in their lessons but saved English language specific skills for those teachers who taught English language development. “Thank goodness for the ELD class. I just would not be able to teach my students all the content they need if I had to teach that and English language” (Madison, Interview, March 13, 2019). The consensus was that time constraints and on-time graduation really push the limits for how much teachers can cover in one year with their newcomer ELLs

Finally, the third sub-question asked how participants describe the process of content area knowledge acquisition for their students. Content area knowledge acquisition for newcomer ELLs comes in the same way as general education students; however, the strategies used to teach the content vary. To summarize participants explanations, lack of language does not equal lack of intelligence. Participants described their students as eager learners who want to learn content to improve their knowledge. The challenge is how to present complex information to students

with limited language skills. The specific strategies used to teach ELLs are outlined in the pedagogy and practice section. The most common strategies mentioned in interviews, written responses, and the focus group were multiple modes of representation and expression, the use of visual supports in the classroom, and kinesthetic activities. Amy spoke about how choice allows students to use their strengths in the classroom during her interview. She said, “I allow my students to respond to questions however they feel most comfortable—especially when they first arrive. That means I will get written sentences, pictures, video responses, or PowerPoint presentations. And, I am okay with that” (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019). She recognized that students need to be able to express their learning in multiple ways. Four participants cited the use of visual notes, audio notes, and note sheets as ways they present and record information with their students. Visual supports were apparent in all nine classrooms. Anchor charts, word walls, and content-related decorations were abundant. Monica hangs student-created anchor charts on the wall for each unit of study (Monica, Observation, March 28, 2019). Visual supports help students see content material as they are learning and performing in the classroom. Kinesthetic activities, such as using manipulatives and props in the classroom, were recurring ideas in data collection. Helene used a balance scale with blocks representing chemical elements to teach balancing chemical equations in her classroom (Helene, Observation, March 19, 2019). Gary had magnets on his white board with prefixes, affixes, and suffixes to help his students learn English vocabulary (Gary, Observation, March 20, 2019). Providing instruction that appeals to the multiple intelligences and allowing students to show their learning in different ways were frequent ideas explained by participants as ways their students acquire content area knowledge in the newcomer ESOL classroom.

Summary

Chapter Four discussed the 12 participants who were interviewed, observed, and provided written responses for this study. Detailed profiles of each participant with information about their ethnicity, teaching experience, certifications, and teaching philosophies were presented. The four research themes that emerged from data collection were explained in depth with supporting detailed provided from participant interaction. Theme one was the learning environment. The two subthemes, relationships and educating the whole student supported the theme. Theme two was support for ESOL programs. Subthemes of school district/community support, administrative support, and support from colleagues reinforced the theme of support. Theme three discussed the pedagogy and practices used in newcomer ELL classrooms. Two subthemes, scaffolds and differentiation and resources, were also explained. Lastly, theme four was recognizing students' circumstances. The subtheme of understanding student backgrounds supported this theme.

Finally, Chapter Four concluded with an answer to the central research question that guided this research, what are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia. Answers were also provided for the three sub-questions: how do participants describe the learning environment? How do participants describe the process of second language acquisition for their students? How do participants describe the process of content area knowledge acquisition for their students?

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers and staff members who work with newcomer English Language Learners (ELLs) at the secondary level in two Northern Virginia public school systems. Chapter Five consists of the following: (a) a summary of the findings, (b) a discussion of the findings and the implications considering the relevant literature and theory, (c) implications, (d) delimitations and limitations, and (e) recommendations for future research. Findings are organized by the four themes that emerged from data collection and analysis—the learning environment, support for ESOL programs, pedagogy and practices, and recognizing student circumstances. The discussion explains how the theoretical and empirical research is extended by the data gathered in this study. The ways in which this research affirms and expands upon existing research are discussed. Theoretical, empirical, and practice implications for stakeholders are presented. Finally, recommendations for future research and study extensions are suggested.

Summary of Findings

This study examined newcomer ESOL teacher experiences at the secondary level in two school districts in the Northern Virginia region. Stephen Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition was examined to determine how it applied to newcomer teacher experiences. This study was based on one central research question and three sub-questions. The central research question asked: What are the experiences of ESOL teachers and staff members who work with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level in Northern Virginia? Based on the data collected through in-person interviews, physical classroom observations, a writing

prompt, and a focus group, the experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers are exclusive and numerous, and every staff member has a differing perspective about their approach to working with this complex group of students. The learning environment, support systems, pedagogy and practices, and understanding of student circumstances were all identified as major factors that impacted newcomer ESOL teacher experiences.

In addition to the central research question, this study explored three sub-questions that focused on the components of Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition. The first sub-question asked how participants describe the learning environment. This was answered through the data extracted in the descriptions of the learning environment and the impact of teacher-student relationships. The theme of learning environment was described as one of the most important aspects influencing the learning of secondary ESOL students. The results showed that students were more comfortable and open in a welcoming environment that encouraged risk taking and eliminated the fear of making mistakes. Educating the whole student was a factor that helped enhance the learning environment. Newcomer ESOL students need academic, social, emotional, and psychological support from their teachers.

The second sub-question asked how participants describe the process of second language acquisition for their students. All participants who currently teach in a classroom acknowledged that

The final sub-question asked about the acquisition of content area knowledge for newcomer ESOL students. The data showed that newcomer ESOL students often have strong educational skills, but they do not have the language and words to express their responses. According to the data, using alternate methods and strategies to represent answers, teach content, and present ideas were the main ways newcomer ESOL teachers taught content information.

Student backgrounds and circumstances directly impacted their learning within the newcomer classroom. The theme of recognizing students' circumstances and understanding student backgrounds emerged as ways teachers made connections with their students and gained an understanding of how students best accessed new content material in a second language.

Discussion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to gain information about the experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers at the secondary level across two school districts in Northern Virginia. The purpose of this section is to discuss the study findings in relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Data collected through individual interviews, writing prompts, physical classroom observations, and a focus group provided insight into the lived experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers. Data was organized into four main themes (a) the learning environment, (b) support for ESOL programs, (c) pedagogy and practices, and (d) recognizing student circumstances. These themes will add to the research on newcomer ESOL education at the secondary level. This study has theoretical and empirical implications, which are discussed below.

Theoretical

The findings of this study directly support Stephen Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition and its five main hypotheses. Data from the 12 participant interviews shows a connection between classroom experiences and the ways students acquire new language skills as outlined by Krashen (1982).

Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

Krashen's (1982) acquisition-learning hypothesis summarized that students first acquire language subconsciously through the acquisition phase then consciously learn language in the

learning phase. The idea of immersing students in English language within a secondary newcomer ESOL classroom, as described in the acquisition phase, was mentioned several times in participant data. Madison spoke about the labeling of items in her classroom as a way to expose her newcomer students to English vocabulary (Madison, Interview, March 13, 2019). Desk, chair, computer, white board, etc. were all words that students read on a daily basis. Madison did not explicitly teach these words and items, but her students subconsciously acquired new vocabulary because of repetitive reading and exposure to these words. The learning phase, according to Krashen (1982), involved more explicit instruction of learning the rules and structures of a language. Gary spoke about the use of tiered vocabulary in his class to help students decode and comprehend new words in the context of his English instruction (Gary, Interview, March 20, 2019). Gary worked through roots, affixes, and suffixes with his students so they could develop cross-curricular strategies to decipher unknown words in all their classes. Madison and Gary provided direct examples of the theory of second language acquisition at work when their students implicitly and explicitly learned language skills and word parts.

Monitor Hypothesis

The second hypothesis in Krashen's (1982) theory, the monitor hypothesis, emphasized the relationship between the acquisition and learning of new language skills. Acquisition is responsible for the fluency, smoothness, and flow of language, and learning is the monitoring and editing of words as they come out in speech (Krashen, 1989). Participants were asked about the process of second language acquisition during their in-person interviews. This data from this research supports Krashen's (1982) idea that learning and acquiring new language skills are separate notions that need to be refined over time if students are going to truly comprehend and retain new language. Maria summarized this process when she stated, "I have to distill a limited

amount of vocabulary for each unit. I have to choose the words that are most important for the content and language development” (Maria, Interview, March 4, 2019). She acknowledged that if students are going to learn and comprehend language, they cannot be overloaded with words and terms. In order for students to acquire and learn new language skills, they must be able to monitor their learning without feeling overloaded or overwhelmed with new words, concepts, and ideas. If too many new terms and concepts are presented at once, students will not retain the information or language into their long-term memory,

Natural Order Hypothesis

The natural order hypothesis showed that students will learn certain words and ideas before others through a natural process of language development (Krashen, 1982). Participant data showed that newcomer ESOL teachers understand that students will all learn language and content at different times and in different ways. The data gathered in this research expands upon that idea by illustrating how differentiation is used in the classroom to support multiple modes of learning. During the focus group session, participants were asked about most difficult part of working with newcomer ESOL students. Responses included the idea that teachers must get to know each individual student on a personal, academic, and socioemotional so they can create effective lessons that meet each student’s needs (Focus Group, April 24, 2019). There was a consensus that taking the time to learn about their students is essential for newcomer teachers because their curriculum is dependent on this factor. Amy stated,

I teach English language development, so I know my course and what I have to cover in a school year. However, I don’t know what texts I will use, what level materials to prepare, or what assessments I will use until I meet my students and learn about their reading, writing, speaking, and listening. (Amy, Focus Group, April 24, 2019)

Abigail echoed her sentiment by adding,

In a regular English class, they know what texts they will use ahead of time—whether its Romeo and Juliet or Macbeth or whatever. For us, we have to wait to meet our students, assess their reading level, find adapted materials, and then ensure it is readable and challenging for our students. (Abigail, Focus Group, April 24, 2019)

Newcomer ESOL teachers cannot use traditional grade level texts in their classrooms because their students are reading are varying levels, and in most cases, well below grade level. The natural order hypothesis concludes that using texts well beyond a student’s reading level would not result in comprehension, but rather frustration and a lack of understanding. This research expands upon that idea by explaining how and why newcomer ESOL teachers choose text appropriate to help teach content and language at student-centered language levels.

Input Hypothesis

The input hypothesis is strictly concerned with how students acquire new language. This hypothesis theorizes that students can comprehend language and language skills at one stage higher than their current linguistic competence (Krashen, 1982). In a newcomer ESOL classroom, teachers will use both WIDA level and grade level materials at one level above their students’ measures; materials beyond one level above may not be comprehended. The theme pedagogy and practice cover the methods newcomer ESOL teachers use in the classroom to teach new information. The subtheme resources support this theme with a discussion of materials teachers use in their classrooms. Creating and allowing for multiple modes of representation and expression were discussed by participants as common ways to adapt instruction so newcomer ESOL students can input information visually, orally, auditorily, and kinesthetically. Because every student comprehends information differently, it is important the

newcomer ESOL teachers present the same information in multiple ways. Level of comprehensible input directly relates to the materials used in the classroom and the way new information is presented. The data collected in this research shows that comprehensible input, as identified by Krashen (1982), is crucial to acquiring a second language. Helene cited the use of online resources that allowed students to listen, speak, and create responses as paramount in helping her students recall information. She wrote, “Many online resources are used to help newcomers retain lessons learned. It is repetition and it helps students become confident each day to become familiar and comfortable with both numerical and verbal expression” (Helen, Writing Prompt, March 21, 2019). Helping students retain information and comprehend skills and content are the goals of all classroom teachers. The input hypothesis shows that students will not be able to learn new information if it is presented at levels beyond their ability. This data supports Krashen’s idea by showing that it is essential for newcomer ESOL teachers to understand their students learning levels and abilities so they can create lessons and use materials adapted for their students.

Affective Filter Hypothesis

The final hypothesis in Krashen’s (1982) theory is the affective filter hypothesis. Motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety will all directly impact a student’s ability to learn. Newcomer ESOL students all bring unique backgrounds and experiences to the classroom. The theme recognition of student circumstances and the subtheme understanding student backgrounds directly relate to Krashen’s idea that emotional variables can impact education. Participants in this study cited several resources available in their schools that help newcomer students adjust to their new life in America. This research supports Krashen’s idea of an affective filter impacting student performance. All participants were asked what they do to help

their students adjust in the in-person interview stage of data collection. Responses included access to a bilingual school psychologist (Maria, Interview, March 4, 2019), making students feel welcome and comfortable (Abigail, Interview, March 15, 2019; Helene, Interview, March 19, 2019), learn about their educational and personal backgrounds (Gary, Interview, March 20, 2019), use student ambassadors to guide new students (Katie, Interview, March 20, 2019), educate the students and their parents on the American education system, and be available to answers questions in person and by phone during the school day (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019). Each response contains information and/or strategies that can help alleviate student stress so they can focus on learning. All 12 participants also mentioned the importance of creating a welcoming classroom community and environment that they develop and maintain throughout the school year. The theme learning environment discusses the various ways participants get to know their students and help them make connections with their teachers and peers throughout the school day. Five participants stated that the learning environment is the most important factor influencing a newcomer ESOL student's ability to learn. The learning environment can directly impact a student's ability to learn and acquire new language.

Empirical

The four themes identified in data collection related to the empirical research found in the review of the literature. Those themes are (a) the learning environment, (b) support for ESOL programs, (c) pedagogy and practice, and (d) recognizing students' circumstances. The data supporting the themes and the relationships between the themes and empirical research are outlined in the descriptions below.

The Learning Environment

The learning environment includes the physical location, materials present within the room, and the physical beings and attitudes of the people present within the classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Current literature and Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition both assert the need for a welcoming, comfortable classroom environment as the most conducive setting for learning. This need is heightened with newcomer ESOL students because they are new to America and they may not have a support system present outside of school. This study affirms current research that shows supportive learning environments lead to improved educational outcomes (Ross et al., 20120). ESOL students must meet the same graduation requirements as general education students in the state of Virginia, but they lack the language and content area skills needed to meet this goal. There was a 101% increase in ELLs in the state of Virginia over the past decade (Ruiz Soto, Hooker, & Batalova, 2015). When newcomer ESOL students are thrown into mainstream classrooms without supports or accommodations, they cannot access grade level materials and thus are forced down a path of disappointment and discouragement. Newcomer programs allow schools to adapt instruction, support, and accommodations for students who are new to America. The main goals of newcomer programs are to provide instruction in core content areas, help students acculturate to the United States, and continue to develop students' native language literacy skills (Short & Boyson, 2012). The learning environment is the setting that allows these goals to come to fruition.

Throughout the data collection process, all 12 participants mentioned the importance of the learning environment as a tool to foster learning and help develop newcomer ESOL students' academic, emotional, and social maturity. There is evidence that a constructive learning environment leads to more learning. Research supports the idea that newcomer programs should

foster confidence and independence in learning and social skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Educational programs for ELLs are grounded in sociocultural theories that weave together culture, social, and academic ideas (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Madison's responses also supported this claim, "I would say the dynamic of my classroom environment is loud and genuine. I feel like the kids feel very comfortable. I think they want to come to class and learn" (Madison, Interview, March 13, 2019). Helene responded, "My students are willing to help each other. They don't put each other down because someone is confused" (Helen, Interview, March 19, 2019). Carina teaches an elective course that blends ESOL students and general education students. She emphasized, "The gen ed students and the ESOL students come together as one. I try to use mixed grouping and leveled grouping to help foster these relationships" (Carina, Interview, March 20, 2019). Monica added, "From the beginning of the school year, I try to create an environment that fosters curiosity and creativity. I don't want my students to be afraid to take risks and make mistakes" (Monica, Interview, March 28, 2019). If the learning environment prohibits student communication and questioning, newcomer ESOL students will not feel comfortable asking questions to clarification or information. This eliminates their ability learn and adjust to a new academic culture. Empirical research shows that newcomer ELLs can improve their literacy development and language skills with regular classroom participation (Pang, 2016; Teale, 2009). The results of this study validate existing research engagement in newcomer classrooms was increased when students were comfortable with the setting.

Teacher-student and student-student relationships are additional influential factors that shape the learning environment. Newcomer ESOL teachers work to help their students develop academic skills, but they also balance cultural and emotional learning within their classroom.

Educating the whole student is an important component of newcomer classrooms. Abigail stated, “The most important part of working with newcomer ESOL students is the relationship we develop with them. What we know about our students guides our interactions and expectations of them” (Abigail, Writing Prompt, March 25, 2019). Rosa explained, “My students know I expect greatness from them. The bar is not lowered because they don’t speak perfect English. They have had a hard-enough time making it into this country, I am not going to let them feel lesser” (Rosa, Interview, March 27, 2019). Rosa’s statements echo current research trends that show how cultururation issues impact newcomer student engagement with their teachers and peers (Short & Boyson, 2012). Finally, Gary discussed what his students need from him as their teacher. He said, “I believe our students need empathy from us. Empathy for this subgroup will help them deal with adjustment issues” (Gary, Writing Prompt, March 21, 2019). Many newcomer students face very busy lives outside of school. They work full time, care for younger siblings or relatives, help parents and guardians, and/or balance extended family’s needs. Newcomer teachers develop surroundings that include learning experiences to help students become more engaged with their education and improve their emotional wellbeing. Current research shows that positive learning environments for newcomer ELLs include support or students, their families, and the school community (Short & Boyson, 2010). The results of this study extend empirical evidence of the positive impact the learning environment has for newcomer ESOL teachers and students.

Support for ESOL Programs

Multi-tiered levels of support are necessary for the creation, implementation, and success of newcomer ESOL programs. Support should begin at the district and community level and then filter to individual schools to include administrators and colleagues. Current empirical

research cites a deficiency in the support and education ESOL students receive in the American education system. ELLs are the fastest growing population of students across the United States with an estimated 9.4% of the student population learning English as their second language (Figueroa Murphy & Haller, 2015; Olsen Beal & Rudolph, 2015; Peercy et al., 2017; Torres & Tackett, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Takanishi and Le Menestrel (2017) noted that the number of ESOL students entering American public schools is rapidly rising; however, the quality of education for these students is not improving with those numbers. Throughout data collection, all 12 participants mentioned the need for support to run influential newcomer ESOL classrooms. Katie, an ESOL department chair spoke about community support within her school. Each year, her school's student government association hosts international night to celebrate and showcase the diversity in her school. This event is open to students, staff, and the community. She has been working at her school for 18 years and she cannot remember a year where this event was not sold out. She said, "The amazing part is that so many audience members don't even have kids that go to my school. They come to watch the students represent their heritage because it is such a unique event" (Katie, Writing Prompt, March 22, 2019). Her school district also created a new program that is specifically designed to help newcomer ESOL students graduate in four years. Previously, many newcomer ELLs were aging out of the public-school system before they could meet graduation requirements. "My school district realized that something had to change. They couldn't allow ESOL students to continuously take courses that didn't meet graduation requirements. The new programming is 100% better and truly helps these students meet their goals" (Katie, Interview, March 20, 2019). When school districts can adapt their academic structure to meet their students' needs, it shows a commitment to all learners.

Administrative support is the next tier to help foster an inclusive environment that values newcomer ESOL teachers' expertise. Administrators supportive roles were mentioned 28 times throughout the data. Current empirical research on newcomer ESOL programs includes several different models for implementation that can be adjusted to meet student needs. In this research, both schools employed a designated program with specific pathways for newcomer students. Both programs hosted newcomers on-site and included classes and resources to support academic, social, emotional, and physical barriers newcomer ELLs face. Administrators cited in the data were focused on educating the whole student and including cultural supports to aid in the adjustment process. Sandra, an ESOL instructional coach, referenced her assistant principal as a catalyst who helped raise awareness of the supports the newcomer ESOL students in her building need throughout all their classes. Her assistant principal helped to pilot and implement a database called the EL Portfolio which allows all teachers and staff members to access information about a student's language level, academic progress, and information about standardized testing accommodations. She said, "We have the EL Portfolio that tells all you want to know about the students. Our assistant principal knew we needed this and she helped ensure that it was created for us" (Sandra, Interview, March 14, 2019). Amy praised her administrative team for allowing her department to use a leveled literacy intervention program that greatly benefits her struggling readers. She said, "Anything we needed, she would do her darnedest to get it. If the county wasn't supplying us, she did everything she could to get it done" (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019). Sabrina, a general education teacher, spoke about administrative support. She stated, "There is no way any teachers or staff would get what they want or need if our admin wasn't on board. That is essential for the success of all programs, and especially ESOL" (Sabrina, Interview, March 27, 2019). Administrators plan an important role

in overseeing the function and implementation of ESOL programs. Without their support and commitment, newcomer teachers would not have the resources they need to meet their students' needs.

Finally, support from colleagues is the third tier of support necessary for newcomer teachers. There is a growing body of empirical research about the preparation of ESOL teachers. Research shows that many teachers are not prepared to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (de Jong, Naranjo, Li, & Ouzia, 2018; Marx & Saavedra, 2013; Peercy et al., 2017). Silva and Krucer (2016) found that less than 17% of teacher preparation programs require and/or offer courses about teaching ELLs. Research on new teacher candidates showed that they did not feel adequately prepared to teach content material and second language skills (Tigert & Madigan Peercy, 2017). The rapidly growing population of ESOL students across America has left many school districts rushing to provide professional development, resources, and strategies for classroom teachers; however, data shows that only 29% of teachers have the necessary training to address the diverse language needs of ESOL students (Silva & Kucer, 2016). This study corroborates the existing research that says preservice and novice teachers so not feel prepared to work with English language learners in the classroom. Two participants in this study were general education classroom teachers who work with newcomer students in their elective classes. Both teachers expressed a strong need for more support on how to properly address the needs of their newcomer learners in the classroom. These two teachers are lucky enough to work in a school that has a defined newcomer program with clear pathways and supports for students, teachers, and other staff members. They relied heavily on their school's ESOL instructional coach for strategies, resources, and activities to use in the classroom that are adaptable to their diverse populations. Carina, a physical education teacher, expressed

the need for more training when she stated, “I think at our school right now, every teacher could benefit from more training. Training as far as how to differentiate, how to find their level, how to make expectations higher. How teach higher level learning while using lower level skills” (Carina, Interview, March 20, 2019). She also spoke about how she must learn about teaching ninth grade standards to students who may be reading and writing at second grade levels. “I was trained to be a PE teacher. I probably had one class about diverse learners and here I am on the front lines needing more support” (Carina, Interview, March 20, 2019). Sabrina, a family and consumer science teacher, also works with newcomer students in her elective courses. She spoke about how lost her students would be if she did not sit down with the ESOL coach to learn about how to meet the needs of her newcomer ESOL students. She said,

My strategy was to try and give them the information in multiple ways—talk about the PowerPoint, give them a copy of the notes, and then let them write down the information. Well, that didn’t make sense because they couldn’t understand the words I was saying or showing them. I needed to learn to simplify my language, put less on a slide, create adapted note sheets, and everything else my coach taught me. That was on the job training. (Sabrina, Interview, March 27, 2019)

Both Carina and Sabrina had courses in their teacher preparation program that mentioned working with ELLs, but they did not feel they had learned actual strategies on how to meet their needs. Support from the colleagues at their workplace was huge for them in developing lesson plans and units that were accessible to their newcomer ESOL students. Research shows that the collaboration of ESOL teachers and instructional specialists can help improve performance in a newcomer classroom (Martin-Beltran & Madigan Percy, 2014). This study provides evidence

that supports that research because both Carina and Sabrina were more successful when they worked together with the ESOL instructional coach.

Pedagogy and Practice

Much of the current empirical literature related to pedagogy and practices for ESOL students discusses classroom strategies, testing accommodations, and literacy intervention for ELLs. The research focused on secondary school students emphasizes the language and literacy gap present in students who enter the American public-school system at the high school level. Research from Ruiz Soto et al. (2015) and Shafer (2018) showed that ESOL students range from newcomers to native born citizens who speak over 150 languages and may not speak English at home. There is extensive research on ways to help students close this gap and improve their language and literacy skills. Current research suggests the teaching of explicit reading strategies to help students activate background knowledge, figure out the meaning of unknown words, improve decoding and fluency, and expand vocabulary (August et al., 2016; August, McCardle, & Shanahan, 2014; Pang, 2016). The topic of accommodations for testing secondary ELLs is consistently among the most researched topics in ESOL education. Solano-Flores et al. (2014) recognized the need to provide accommodations and support to help ELLs pass state standardized tests because of profound language barriers. How to provide equitable resources to bridge the language gap for newcomer ELLs so they can access grade level assessments is a heavily researched subject. In this study, participants were asked what strategies they use in the classroom to help their newcomer ESOL students master both content knowledge and second language skills. Several strategies were presented to help students learn new content and language.

Scaffolds and differentiation were mentioned 23 and 16 times respectively throughout data collection. Each classroom teacher explained how they work to create lessons and activities that meet each student at their current academic and language level. Maria, a science teacher, emphasized pre-teaching vocabulary as a valuable way to expose students to difficult words they will see in passages. She said, “I do pre-teach and reteach in my classes. So, the prefix, suffix, root words are all emphasized regularly. I focus on the essential vocabulary since this is a vocab heavy class” (Maria, Interview, March 4, 2019). Amy spoke about beginning the year with many scaffolds in place then gradually removing them as the year progresses. “In the beginning of the year, I have word walls, images, posters, anchor charts, and sentence stems for each unit. Then at each quarter’s end I will remove one of those” (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019).

Helene wrote about her use of sentence frames and words walls in her classroom.

“Accommodations, differentiation, and scaffolds are essential for new students to learn. The students learn both English and math. Providing sentence frames and a math word wall is essential for the newcomers” (Helene, Writing Prompt, March 21, 2019). Many of the strategies mentioned as ways to differentiate material for students help teachers present materials related to content and language simultaneously. They can address numerous standards by using instructional practices that appeal to multiple learning styles and provide literacy and content training. The data gathered in this study extends the existing research on way to help ESOL students improve their language and literacy skills at the secondary level. Participants used explicit reading strategies, taught content-specific vocabulary, and provided content area language supports to help their newcomer ELLs master complex language and content which were all researched as ways to help bridge the language gap for ESOL students (Ardasheva & Tretter, 2017; August et al., 2016; Pang, 2016; Thomason, Brown, & Ward, 2017).

Resources were mentioned 32 times throughout data collection as classroom tools that help students access content and language at appropriate levels. Current empirical research explains that newcomer ELLs cannot access grade level materials at the secondary level because the language is beyond their comprehension (Kim, 2017). If newcomer teachers only used grade level texts in the classroom, their students would not be successful. Participants in this study detailed non-fiction and fiction books, news articles, textbooks, and digital materials that contain grade level content at low English language levels. Monica displayed a biology series of leveled books that discuss many of the topics she teaches in her class, but they are written at a second-grade level. Topics such as cell structure, plant formation, and ecology were presented in the books using simple language and images (Monica, Observation, March 28, 2019). Madison, who teaches English 9 to newcomers, emphasized her skill-based curriculum as essential to helping her students close the gaps between them and their grade level peers. She said, “My students might not read and comprehend the same books as other 9th graders, but they can make inferences, draw conclusions, and find the main idea. We hit all the required standards using different material” (Madison, Interview, March 13, 2019). The data collected in this study shows that the instructional practices used in the classroom must be appropriate for newcomer ELLs. Newcomer teachers must be creative and purposeful when planning their units of study so they can meet their students’ needs and present information at varying levels. This study confirms previous research that shows ESOL students need language and literacy skills woven into content area instruction. The research also provides insight into newcomer classrooms that have students from multiple nations who speak different languages.

Recognizing Students’ Circumstances

Newcomer ELL programs at the secondary level vary greatly from one school district to the next. Research into these programs has existed since their infancy, but because of constant changes to structure and models, there is a lack of cohesive research on best practices and models for implementation. Immigration trends in America have shifted since the turn of the century to include migrants from all over the world, with an upward trend of students arriving from Central and South American nations this decade (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2018). The two school districts studied in this research had complete newcomer programs with set pathways to graduation and explicit course structures were present. These programs contained supports beyond academics that allowed for teachers, counselors, administrators, and community members to engage with and get to know newcomer students. Recognizing students' circumstances and understanding their backgrounds was essential for teachers to create meaningful curricula that would expand newcomer ELLs academic and cultural knowledge. Newcomer ELLs are a unique population of students and every classroom will vary greatly. Research into newcomer students shows that limited or interrupted formal schooling, inadequate literacy skills in their home language, personal responsibilities outside of school, and ineffective cultural understandings are all common challenges faced by newcomer ESOL students (Breiseth, 2015). Not all students who immigrate to America come to escape a hardship in their home country; however, most of participants in this research discussed situations where students faced adversity. Amy spoke about a student who had an undiagnosed learning disability who ended up dropping out of school because she was so discouraged by the difficulty of the material (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019). Rosa, a school counselor, explained how she supports students and their families because they are all brand new to America and have so much to learn. "I answer any questions I can. Even if that means talking about restaurants and parking spots" (Rosa,

Interview, March 27, 2019). Gary spoke about many stories that his students told him over the years. “We are trained to not ask questions about their journey to this country, but sometimes it comes out organically in discussion. These kids have been through so much” (Gary, Interview, March 20, 2019). Helene offered simple ways that she tries to brighten her students’ days. “Sometimes a smile or a hug goes a long way” (Helene, Interview, March 19, 2019). Katie often offers quiet, uncrowded spaces for students to gather to quietly work. She knows that outside of school, some students do not have a space where they will not be interrupted (Katie, Interview, March 20, 2019). There is abundant research about the impact students’ home lives have on their performance at school. Newcomer classrooms must focus on academic and socioemotional development because both impact student success (Short & Boyson, 2012). Data shows that problems at home can negatively influence student performance. Newcomer ESOL teachers must recognize that their classroom is a refuge for students. It is a place where they come to learn, but also make friends, ask questions, and feel welcome.

This research corroborates current empirical research on the impact the home environment has on the academic setting by extending that information into the newcomer ESOL setting. Understanding where students come from and what they have been through, especially for vulnerable student populations, allows for more connections and positivity in the classroom. Newcomer ESOL teachers often serve as mentors, role models, and liaisons for students and their families. It is a difficult job that newcomer ESOL teachers must recognize when they are working with this vulnerable group. This research sheds new light on the characteristics that can make up a newcomer classroom, but also shows that there will never be a homogeneous newcomer classroom that can be generalized; therefore, newcomer teachers must always be

prepared to adapt their academic curriculum and commit to developing the character of their students.

Implications

This study was designed to reveal the experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers and staff members at the secondary level in two Northern Virginia school districts. Teachers, administrators, school counselors, newcomer ELLs, parents, community members, and school district personnel can benefit from the results found in this study. The data from this research can inform stakeholders and provide perspective for working with newcomer ELLs at the secondary level. This section contains the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications that emerged from this research.

Theoretical Implications

Participants in this study were explicitly asked questions related to Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition. The data gathered in response to these questions, other interview questions, the writing prompt responses, classroom observations, and the focus group session confirm that there are different stages of English language development and content area learning as stated in Krashen's (1982) theory. Second language learners will comprehend and acquire new language skills in different ways and at different times. Newcomer ESOL teachers work in classrooms that have students from different nations who speak different languages and have varying educational backgrounds and experiences. The methods and practices used to instruct newcomer students were noted and explained in the data collection. For example, Amy, an English language development teacher, spoke about her use of stations that combine reading, writing, thinking, and listening in the classroom (Amy, Interview, March 13, 2019). She has books and other texts adapted to varying student reading levels. The strategic planning of

activities that appeal to multiple learning styles and levels shows that Krashen's (1982) acquisition learning hypothesis, monitor hypothesis, input hypothesis, and natural order hypothesis are reflected in the planning and execution of lessons in this newcomer classroom. The acquisition learning hypothesis states students will acquire new language subconsciously through conversations, signage, and immersing themselves into a new culture (Krashen, 1982). Students will also consciously learn new language through the teaching of sounds, words, and rules related to language. Amy's classroom blends acquisition and learning opportunities with peer discussion and explicit instruction in reading strategies and writing techniques. The monitor hypothesis explains the relationship between acquisition and learning by suggesting that fluency and flow of language will come naturally once new language is acquired and learned (Krashen, 1982). The natural order hypothesis proposes that new language learners will acquire certain grammatical ideas and structures early while others will take more time (Krashen, 1982). The newcomer ESOL teachers in this study did not expect their student to master all grammatical structures at once or become fluent with grammar after explicit teaching. These skills take time and practice to master. Lastly, the input hypothesis attempts to answer the question of how people acquire language (Krashen, 1982). The activities present in Amy's classroom contain text, audio, discussion, and writing that challenges students to use the skills they currently have and expand upon those they are still learning. The level of instruction is catered towards student's current comprehension abilities and it works to push students out of their comfort zone to meet and conquer challenging content. Preservice teachers, current teachers, linguists, and secondary schools with newcomer programs could benefit from the data collected in this research that shows Krashen's (1982) theory in action within a classroom.

Finally, Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis was illustrated through the repeated theme of creating a welcoming learning environment. This hypothesis suggests that students will learn best when they are motivated, confident, and comfortable in the classroom. Each of the 12 participants mentioned the importance of the learning environment within data collection; this theme was coded 117 times total. Building relationships and getting to know students were cited as ways to learn more about their learning style and strengths and weaknesses. This created an environment of trust and confidence, so students were not afraid to ask questions and take risks. The positive learning environment presented in this research contributed to more learning experiences and more engagement from students. Current classroom teachers who work with ELLs could benefit from using the affective filter theory as evidence to build learning environments that foster relationships and collaboration. Schools and districts who are working on community building and school culture could benefit from the positive classroom environment results shown in this research.

Empirical Implications

Current literature has documented the growing population of ELLs present in public schools across America. ELLs are the fastest growing population of students in the United States with a 60% increase over the past 10 years (Figueroa Murphy & Haller, 2015; Olsen Beal & Rudolph, 2015; Percy et al., 2017; Torres & Tackett, 2016). The observational data gathered in this research provides evidence to show that classrooms across America are full of students who come from different nations, speak different languages, have varying educational experiences, and approach school in different ways. Secondary classrooms with newcomer ELLs are complex and cannot be generalized with one teaching style or structure. The pedagogy and practices that emerged from this research show that differentiated instruction, regular scaffolding, and leveled

resources can help students with lower language skills or varied learning styles access high school level content. When teachers get to know their students, they gain an understanding of how they learn best and what supports they need to be successful. The newcomer ESOL teachers in this study used materials that appealed to the multiple intelligences regularly in their classrooms. Students had access to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic supports so they could access and retain information. The instructional practices for newcomer ELLs discussed in this research can be used in ESOL classrooms at every level. The collaboration and support among colleagues, administrators, and community members created an environment where student interests and needs were at the forefront of planning and conversation.

Many of the educators interviewed in this research had strong data to support their classroom practices. Increased test scores, on-time graduation, and more engaged students were outcomes of student-centered instruction that focused on presenting information at a comprehensible level. Many school districts across America struggle to close the gap between ELLs and non-ELLs because they do not have the resources or personnel to focus on this student population. The data from this research shows that newcomer ESOL students can access secondary content even though they have lower English language skills and content knowledge compared to their grade level peers. Equitable access to curriculum and high school graduation is possible if there are supports in place to meet the needs of newcomer ELLs. Newcomer ESOL teachers play a vital role in shaping the language and content knowledge of their students. School districts with ESOL students could benefit from the instructional practices, creation of supportive learning environments, and examples of supportive communities presented in this study. Based on the results of this research, it is recommended that schools with newcomer students establish a library of leveled resources to meet the needs of their multi-lingual learners.

Also, professional development is needed to train teachers and staff members on instructional practices, relationship building strategies, and cultural awareness to help newcomer students reach proficiency in the classroom. Preservice and current teachers should have the opportunity to learn about what works well in newcomer ESOL classrooms so they can meet the needs of their diverse student population.

Practical Implications

This study has practical implications for many stakeholders involved in the secondary education of newcomer ESOL students. For newcomer ESOL teachers, information about successful classroom practices is available in this research. A dialogue of challenges, obstacles, and difficulties related to this student population is documented in the data. Parents and family members of newcomer ELLs can benefit from learning about the resources available for helping students adjust to life in a new country. Language supports, education planning, socioemotional resources, and cultural training are all present in strong newcomer programs to aid in the education of the whole student. Administrators, school counselors, and instructional coaches can examine the themes presented in this study to develop effective instructional teams to teach newcomer ELLs. Effective instructional practices for balancing second language skills and content acquisition were presented and data to support their efficiency was analyzed. Communities with immigrants and second language learners can benefit from the knowledge gained in this research because there is information about meeting student needs and creating inclusive environments where students feel welcome and comfortable.

Colleges and universities that prepare preservice teachers to serve newcomer ESOL students at the secondary level should review the four themes that emerged from this research because they were established as the major components that shape newcomer ESOL teachers'

experiences. Current research shows that many preservice and current teachers do not feel prepared to meet the needs of ESOL students. Information from this research can be used to inform classroom practices for a diverse student population with varying abilities and strengths. School districts with ESOL students can use this research to help develop professional development programs to support teachers and instructional staff. This research shows that when teachers create a welcoming learning environment, feel supported in their classroom, have access to appropriate materials, and gain an understanding of their students backgrounds they will be more successful in meeting the needs of newcomer ESOL students at the secondary level. Based on this research, it is recommended that regular professional development and training is available for pre-service, new, and veteran teachers who work with ESOL students. Teachers who feel prepared to meet the needs of their students will be more successful in a newcomer classroom.

School district personnel can benefit from reviewing the results of this study if they are working to develop new curriculum for ESOL students or if they are working to adapt current standards for newcomer ELLs. Any district that is enrolling newcomer students for the first time can use this research to help develop professional development and training sessions for their staff members. The instructional strategies and classroom practices mentioned by participants, such as the use of word walls, anchor charts, kinesthetic activities, and sentence starters, can be used in classrooms with ESOL students to help aid their transition into secondary schools. Gaining knowledge and understanding the circumstances faced by newcomer students will allow teachers, administrators, and other staff members to prepare programs and services for their students who have diverse academic, social, and emotional needs. School district leaders can use this study to frame newcomer programs and staff a team of committed professionals who

understand the variety of demands this student population brings to the classroom. Overall, by reviewing the results and themes present in this research, secondary teachers will become more refined professionals who are ready to work with students who read, write, speak, and think at different levels.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations are conscious boundaries of a study decided upon by the inclusion and exclusion of certain aspects by the researcher (Simon & Goes, 2019). The specific choices of the researcher created a specific scope of the study with a defined focus. A qualitative, transcendental phenomenology was the best method of research for this study because it allowed for a subjective perspective of the phenomenon of newcomer ESOL teacher experiences at the secondary level in Northern Virginia. This method required thick, rich descriptions from a purposeful sampling of participants who experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The process of data analysis in this methodology allowed for epoche, or the bracketing of biases, outside influences, and personal beliefs that could have impacted the study. This bracketing led to a deeper understanding of the true experiences of each participant. Delimitations in this study include location as this was defined to two school districts in the Northern Virginia region. This location was chosen for convenience to the researcher and the accessibility to participants who work with the large newcomer ESOL population in this area. Participant selection called for teachers or staff members who regularly work with newcomer ESOL students in two school districts were invited to participate in this study. The purpose of this choice was to force data that would provide details related to the goals of the study.

Limitations are instances or occurrences that transpire within a study that cannot be controlled by the researcher (Simon & Goes, 2019). The geographical location of the study,

Northern Virginia, established boundaries that forced perspectives to be defined to that area. The choice of the location eliminated factors that could impact newcomer ESOL teachers in different areas of the country. Another limiting factor is the fact that both school districts in the study had prescribed newcomer programs. The perspective of participants was shaped by the established guidelines for newcomer ELLs at their schools—many school districts across the nation do not have newcomer programs. The participants in the study were limited to 11 females and one male teacher or staff member. This study only collected data from teachers who were willing to share their ideas and thoughts. The phenomenological design of this research has limitations because it requires participants to be able to express and articulate thoughts and feelings about the phenomenon. Phenomenology also requires interpretation by the researcher, so phenomenological reduction is essential to reduce biases and assumptions. Finally, it is difficult to produce generalizable data from this research because of the small sample size and geographical constraints.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study addressed the issue that newcomer ESOL students are a unique population that require a classroom and teacher equipped to help them learn subject area matter and new language skills quickly and efficiently. Gaining insight into newcomer ESOL teacher experiences at the secondary level in Northern Virginia helped provide insight on how to address that diversity in the classroom, but there is still more work that needs to be done. The Northern Virginia region has a large population of immigrants and ESOL students, so the opportunity for research is great with students living in this area. There is a need to address schools and school districts across the country who do not have prescribed newcomer programs for their students. Learning how districts and schools with differing ESOL populations address unique student

demands in the classroom could help provide insight into mixed ESOL and general education classrooms or other exceptional settings. Future research could inquire into the teacher perspectives from those who work in areas where they do not have the resources to support newcomer ESOL students. Different geographical locations could replicate this study to gain perspective on newcomer ESOL teachers' experiences in other specific areas.

The newcomer ESOL student and family perspective would be an important area to learn about in future research. In this study, there is a clear pathway to graduation for students with limited English language skills; however, the perspective is limited to how teachers approach newcomer classrooms. Gaining insight into how secondary students and their families feel in a new nation, school, and language could be valuable to shape future newcomer programs and research. Future research could also study newcomer ESOL teacher experiences at the middle or elementary school level. This study could be replicated to gain the perspective of teachers across different grade levels because the student populations will vary greatly at different age levels.

Finally, a quantitative design could be used to study newcomer ESOL student success and graduation rates in the Northern Virginia region and other regions across the United States. This research gives insight into teacher experiences, but positive student results, including graduation and preparation for higher education and/or the workforce, are at the foundation for all teaching and learning in secondary schools.

Summary

This study explored newcomer ESOL teacher experiences at the secondary level in Northern Virginia. 12 teachers and staff members participated in data collection which included an in-depth interview, a physical classroom observation, a writing prompt, and a focus group session. Moustakas' (1994) steps for data analysis were used to code and analyze the data. The

first theme that emerged from the data was the learning environment; the learning environment includes the relationships created among teachers and students and the idea of educating the whole student including academic, emotional, and social aspects. The second theme was support for ESOL programs at the school district and community level and within individual schools with administrators and colleagues. The third theme of pedagogy and practices focused on the scaffolds, differentiation, and resources used by teachers and staff members. Finally, recognizing student circumstances and understanding student backgrounds concluded the fourth theme.

The collected data along with the literature review highlighted the importance of creating a welcoming classroom environment, preparing ESOL teachers, understanding students, and utilizing effective strategies in the classroom to meet the needs of all learners. The data from this research extends current empirical literature and provides a novel view into the experiences of newcomer ESOL classroom teachers and staff members. Participant data corroborates existing research on the growing complexities of working with newcomer ELLs. Two important products that emerged from this research are the differentiated instructional practices used by newcomer ESOL teachers at the secondary level and the support necessary for newcomer teachers to be successful in educating students who lack language and content area knowledge. Results of this study have implications for teachers, administrators, school communities, linguists, preservice teachers, school district personnel, and colleges with teacher preparation programs. Newcomer ESOL teacher and staff member experiences at the secondary level in two Northern Virginia school districts are multifaceted; providing constructive, relevant instruction that helps newcomer students expand their content knowledge, language abilities, and cultural understandings are at the forefront of newcomer education.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER

DATE

Dear ESOL Teacher, School Administrator, Counselor, Educational Coach, or Staff Member:

As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements to finish my doctorate. The purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of ESOL teachers in a newcomer classroom at the secondary level. The research questions will focus on how secondary school newcomer ESOL teachers describe their experience with a newcomer classroom environment, how students acquire second language skills in the learning environment, and how content area knowledge is learned even though there is a significant language and cultural barrier. Newcomer students are those who have recently, within the past two years, arrived in the United States. I am writing to ask you to participate in my study.

If you are a Virginia state certified educator with at least three years of teaching experience, two of which are in ESOL, OR an administrator, counselor, educational coach, or other school-based staff member, and you currently work with newcomers, I invite you to participate in my study. Participation will include a sit-down interview, contribution to an online focus group, a response to a writing prompt, and a classroom or office observation (I would like to visit your classroom while no students are present to see the organization/arrangement). An optional observation will occur only if you elect to allow the researcher to observe a lesson. It will take approximately two hours for you to complete all participation requirements of this study. Your name, the name of your school, and the name of your school district will not be used in this study—it will be completely confidential and anonymous. You will have the chance to review all interview and participation information before it is used in the study.

If you elect to participate, you will receive a \$10 Amazon gift card for your contributions. To participate in this study, please read the consent document attached to this letter. Complete the consent form indicating that you would like to take part in the study, and scan and return it to LConrad@Liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Lindsey M. Conrad
Doctoral Candidate/Principal Researcher

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Teacher Experiences with Newcomer Students at the Secondary Level: A Phenomenological Study

Researcher: Lindsey Marie Conrad
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on the experiences of newcomer ESOL teachers at the secondary level in Northern Virginia. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a Virginia certified educator with three years of teaching experience, two of which are in ESOL, and you currently work with newcomers on a regular basis, OR an administrator, counselor, educational coach, or other school-based staff member who currently works with newcomer students. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Lindsey Conrad a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe teacher experiences in a secondary newcomer ESOL classroom in Northern Virginia.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a semi-structured interview. This interview will take approximately 1 hour and will be audio recorded.
2. Respond to a writing prompt via email with 6-8 sentences with information about the most important part of being an ESOL teacher. This will take approximately 20 minutes.
3. Allow the researcher to perform a classroom or office observation to view the format and setup of your room. This will be done while no students are present. This step should take approximately 15 minutes.
*An **optional** teacher observation will occur only if the participant elects to allow the researcher to observe a lesson.
4. Participate in an online focus group via Google. This will allow the researcher to ask for clarification of information from the interview or for the participant to give additional information. It will be guided by specific questions. This step should take approximately 25 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of Participation: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study with a \$10 Amazon gift card. The gift card will be sent after the semi-structured interview, writing prompt, classroom observation, and focus group are completed. The gift card will only be given to participants who participate in all four aspects of the study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym. Your name, your school, and school district's name will not be used in the research. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer. Data may be used in future presentations pertaining to this study. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group; however, pseudonyms will be used for the online focus group.

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 Liberty University. 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 contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Lindsey Conrad. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 570-262-9867 or LConrad@Liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Linda Holcomb, at LJHolcomb@Liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information 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 of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Gender:

Age:

Job title:

Highest degree completed:

College/Graduate school degree(s):

Years of teaching experience:

Teaching certification(s):

APPENDIX D: WRITING PROMPT

Please respond to the following writing prompt with at least 6-8 sentences of your own thinking.

Newcomer ESOL students are a unique population and every individual student will have different needs—some students will adjust to school in America easily, while others are truly shocked by the differences in their new nation. In your opinion, what is the most important part about working with newcomer ESOL students?

APPENDIX E: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM

Location of classroom within building:

Arrangement/number of desks:

Designated/special areas (reading corner, art center, literacy center, etc.):

Decorations:

Resources (dictionaries, computers/technology, books, etc.):

APPENDIX F: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 18, 2019

Lindsey Conrad

IRB Approval 3619.021819: English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Teacher Experiences with Newcomer Students at the Secondary Level: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Lindsey Conrad,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. 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.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

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

Sincerely,



G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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