

THE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONTENT AREA INSTRUCTION FOR
MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER STUDENTS: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Amy Lundgren

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of middle school content area instructors (CAIs) who teach English language learners (ELLs) in public schools in ELL-heavy districts. The theory guiding this study was Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), as research studies indicate the ability of ELLs to access content area instruction when teachers effectively scaffold them in their ZPD to use discipline specific literacy strategies. Data were collected using one-on-one interviews with 10 content area teachers in six ELL-heavy public-school districts to participate in the study. Further data collection was completed using focus groups of teachers from each school who met for one hour to participate in detailed discussions of teaching perspectives and understandings, as well as lesson plans collected from instructors. Data were analyzed through open and source coding to develop clusters of meaning from significant statements and generate themes to describe the phenomenon. Several findings were obtained that highlight how scaffolding ELLs can be used successfully in CAI lessons. All the teachers who participated in this study encouraged the provision of CALI during discipline specific instruction and understood the importance of ELLs' development of CAL. The findings indicate that vocabulary instruction, modeling, visuals, activation of background knowledge, and small group instruction are the most effective methods of supporting and scaffolding ELLs in CAI. Finally, a pivotal finding from this study was that the motivation of ESL students is critical to their academic performance and willingness to develop CAL.

Keywords: Small group instruction, zone of proximal development (ZPD), scaffolding, differentiation of instruction, achievement gap, English language learners (ELLs).

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the following: to God, my creator, from whom all good things flow!

To my parents, who gave me moral lessons on discipline from an earlier age and helped pay for my studies.

To my supervisor, who was the guiding light every step of the way as I researched for this dissertation.

To the husband, who suggested I study for a PhD and supports me in many ways.

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I would like to begin by acknowledging, Dr. Talada's efforts in seeing me through this lengthy process. When I struggled in locating participants for my study or had other research issues, she assisted me in finding a reasonable plan to solve the problem. I am so grateful to have had her support. I would also like to thank Dr. Lunde, who has responded quickly and thoroughly to me during this process. I was very lucky to have the two of them on my committee.

I would like to recognize the support of my family. My parents raised me to value education, supported me to obtain my first bachelor's degree, and have prepared me for this pursuit throughout my childhood and adult life in many ways. My husband, who constantly supports my work and educational pursuits and encouraged me to pursue a PhD degree. He has sacrificed so much for this process, and I cannot thank them enough for their support and encouragement. I also want to thank God for getting me through this process in one piece.

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List of Abbreviations

Content area instructors (CAI)

Content area literacy (CAL)

Discipline specific literacy (DSL)

Discipline specific content (DSC)

Discipline specific instruction (DSI)

Discipline specific subjects (DSS)

Common core standards (CCSS)

English language arts (ELA)

English language learners (ELLs)

Small group instruction (SGI)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Professional development (PD)

Second language learners (SLLs)

Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL)

IDEA Public Schools (IDEAPS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Many studies have been done on content area instruction for English language learners (ELLs) and many more have been done on strategies for teaching this population (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Leavitt & Hess, 2017; Marsh, 2018; Pyle et al., 2017; Short et al., 2018; Snyder et al., 2017). This study adds to the existing information by providing a description of the perceptions and experiences of middle school content area instructors in public schools in ELL heavy districts on teaching ELLs. This study was guided by the theories of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) and differentiation of instruction (Tomlinson, 2014). This chapter covers background information for this study including the history of ELLs in Texas, the problem statement, an overview of the purpose statement, the significance of the study, and the research questions. It is concluded by defining relevant definitions to the study and summarizing the chapter.

Background

The number of ELLs in the United States has been increasing for decades, but teachers continue to be unprepared to teach this population (Garza-Reyna, 2019; McFarland et al., 2020). Currently more than five million students in the United States are classified as ELLs (Dormer, 2016). These students have been known to lack English literacy and academic skills, leading to an achievement gap, which has been extensively studied for many years but persists even today (Baker et al., 2016; Garza-Reyna, 2019; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Nationally, 93% of seventh-grade ELLs and 97% of eighth-grade ELLs score below the national standard on reading and math tests, whereas 72% and 71 % of native speaking students score below the standard, respectively (Cataldi et al., 2017). These statistics show only a one- or two-point increase in the

score for ELLs over a decade and only a five-point improvement in the achievement gap over three decades (McFarland et al., 2020). This achievement gap is most closely linked to Latina/os who make up close to 90% of ELLs (Sikes, 2017). Texas is home to the second largest cohort of Hispanic students in the United States.

Historical Context

The number of ELLs in the United States has more than tripled in many states from less than 5% in the 1970s to more than 20% in 2020, and the enrollment of Hispanics in public schools increased from 42% to 52% from 2007 to 2019 (Bach, 2020). Latina/o students account for the majority of the English as a Second Language (ESL) population and 89% of these students are considered ELLs (Sikes, 2017). Furthermore, the number of students identified as ELLs increased distinctly in the last three decades (Agency, 2020; Sikes, 2017). This increasing number of ELLs in the United States demonstrates the need to ensure this population receives adequate educational funding and services to prepare them for instruction in the English language. Yet, schools have been unsuccessfully working to improve their performance in instructing secondary-level ELLs for the past five decades, despite showing some improvement in early years teaching. This discrepancy is likely due to the differences in instruction provided for early years and secondary school students (Agency, 2020; Sikes, 2017).

Research shows that the type of bilingual education one receives in elementary school affects their academic preparedness for secondary and post-secondary education. Currently, only 11% of all college students are Latina/os, a large underrepresentation despite the bilingual education mandates for elementary schools (Garza-Reyna, 2019). Academic preparedness is one of the factors influencing one's likelihood of attending college, and studies show this preparation is also affected by the type of bilingual education received in elementary school. These findings,

along with the varying types of bilingual educational programs that are used throughout the country, prompted Garza-Reyna (2019) to research which bilingual program is more successful in preparing ELLs academically for college, based on results from the ACT test. The findings indicated that those educated through bilingual programs that foster the development of one's LI displayed greater academic benefits, such as dual language programs. Researchers also found that these dual language programs were more successful in academic preparation of ELLs than transitional bilingual and immersion programs that are popular in secondary schools (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Leavitt & Hess, 2017). Further research indicated that schools in the secondary level are pushed to move ELLs quickly through ESL programs, resulting in mainstreaming students out of transitional bilingual programs into content area classes before they are academically and linguistically prepared (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Leavitt & Hess, 2017). Sending ELLs with limited English language ability to content area classes with teachers who lack needed preparation for this population (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016) has resulted in an improvement of services to elementary students, but not secondary students. The static state of ELL performance in secondary education is vivid from academic results (Cataldi et al., 2017; McFarland et al., 2020), scores from standardized tests (Cataldi et al., 2017; Leavitt & Hess, 2017), and the predominance of Spanish speaking Hispanic students in the state compared to demographics of other locations (Bach, 2020). Despite the rapidly increasing population of ESL students in the United States, the majority of districts lack enough qualified teachers and professionals to serve ELLs due to lack of funds and resources. As a result, schools are limited in their ability to provide qualified bilingual educators and support other needs of ELLs (Lou, 2020). This truth is reflected in the unpreparedness of teachers in educating ELLs.

Content area instructors are largely unprepared to teach ELLs across the United States. In

response to the challenges addressed by the growing population of ELLs in small towns in the United States, Hansen-Thomas et al. (2016) investigated the preparedness of instructors to provide instruction for ELLs. The findings from this research indicated that the majority of instructors expressed a lack of training in teaching ELLs, unmet desire for professional development to improve their services, a feeling of incompetency related to lack of cultural understanding and preparedness to effectively address content area instruction with ELLs (Leavitt & Hess, 2017). According to research, teachers who are prepared and knowledgeable in teaching ELLs have specialized skills and strategies to understand the cultural and linguistic challenges faced by students, more effectively engage pupils throughout the instructional period, and access students' prior knowledge to systematically build on it. Contrarily, it is a daunting task to prepare and train instructors to provide such instruction (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Leavitt & Hess, 2017). In studying ESL programs, the researchers found that teachers in small towns experience greater challenges in meeting the needs of ELLs because of the lack of financial and material resources to provide the culturally responsive instruction needed by this population. In addition to the lack of funding across the country for ESL programs, rural schools typically have even less funding to support ELLs than urban areas because of the lower number of students they serve, which limits their ability to acquire teachers, professionals, and resources needed to serve this growing population even more severely than that of urban schools (Garza-Reyna, 2019). It is clear that ELLs need prepared, well-trained instructors who have the materials and resources needed to meet the unique needs expressed by Second Language Learners (SLLs) by providing culturally responsive instruction targeted at improving their literacy and academic preparation for content area instruction.

Social Context

Latina/o ELLs, the largest population of ELLs, are five times more likely to drop out of high school compared to affluent White students, as discussed above (McFarland et al., 2020). People who drop out of high school are twice as likely to live in poverty (Cataldi et al., 2017). Those who grow up in poverty are more likely to have difficulty reading, which slows their academic progress throughout school years. Poverty often leads to low literacy and academic development of students because the home environment is centered on surviving instead of learning and development (Leavitt & Hess, 2017). Students who grow up in poverty are not read to by parents, parents tend to have low literacy skills, babies are not spoken to frequently enough by parents during language development, and children have less extracurricular opportunities, which lead to low literacy skills. The lack of literacy skills perpetuates the achievement gap and academic unpreparedness, causing these learners to drop out of school and continue in the state of poverty.

At least 60% of ELLs live in poverty (Monte, 2016), and this destitution taxes society economically over time. The government spends about \$8 trillion a year on welfare to support low-income families (Giannarelli et al., 2020) in addition to affordable or free lunches and breakfast, which cost an additional \$14.2 billion (School Nutritional Association, 2020). It would cost much less to provide adequate instruction and resources to ensure students in poverty are educated to their fullest potential, including helping parents better prepare students for the academic environment, providing opportunities for students to participate in educational extracurricular activities and summer camps, providing up-to-date educational resources in schools, and ensuring schools have highly qualified instructors who are prepared to teach these students. However, large portions of school budgets continue to be determined by property taxes in one's community and the performance of schools, which further perpetuates the poverty crisis

(Allegretto et al., 2022). Schools with high academic performances typically have quality resources and instructors, which puts them at an advantage for increased funding based on federal standards. Poor communities have less funds to employ highly qualified teachers and purchase appropriate, current materials for teaching, which limits the funds these institutions can gain from academic performance, leaving the communities to struggle to provide students with the education they need (Giannarelli et al., 2020). Therefore, using property taxes to determine school budgets causes educational institutions in poor communities to fall behind the national standards of performance. Students living in affluent communities have a clear and unprecedented advantage in the current educational system.

The study is particularly important in the states or cities with a high number of ELLS, including FL, CA, TX, and Memphis TN, where the majority of Latina/os reside. The population of the Hispanics living in these states is 26%, 39%, 38%, and 7%, respectively, (Bureau, 2020). Memphis Tennessee's population is 25% Hispanic (Data USA, 2017), whereas the total population of Spanish-speaking ELLs in the country is 70%, as mentioned above. Many of these students reside in rural or urban locations where it is more difficult to find highly qualified teachers with appropriate experience and qualifications to teach ELLs (Leavitt & Hess, 2017; Lee, 2017). Determining the perceptions and experiences of teachers in public schools on teaching this population of students is an essential step in determining why certain instructional approaches are being used and what kinds of teaching methods and future research should be proposed in the future.

Theoretical Context

The complexity of texts used in middle school requires higher literacy skills than those of elementary school students (Proctor et al., 2019). Content area texts at the secondary level

require more complex reading comprehension skills; hence, students need to be prepared with scaffolding and appropriate literacy instruction. However, content area instructors rarely provide reading instruction, assuming students are already prepared with the academic literacy needed to understand the material (Goodwin, 2016). This lack of preparation to meet competency standards leads to many middle school students scoring low in achievement tests (Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Graham, 2017). As discussed above, although 38% of fourth graders and 37% of eighth grader non-ELLs scored at or above proficiency in national CCSS tests, only 7% and 3 % of ESLs did so, respectively (NAEP, 2019). These statistics point to the need for evidence-based reading instruction to improve literacy and reading comprehension of middle school students, better preparing pupils to succeed academically in content area instruction (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Graham, 2017).

Studies show that small-group instruction (SGI) is more effective in building literacy and reading comprehension skills than whole-group instruction (Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Graham, 2017). SGI is considered a good strategy for working with ELLs with meaningful texts in which teachers build background knowledge, teach vocabulary in context, and guide group discussions (Ardasheva et al., 2016). Other researchers have also determined that SGI is more effective in helping students improve literacy skills than whole group instruction because of the opportunities for explicit instruction the ability group students according to needs, and the close interaction students experience with the teacher and one another (Ardasheva et al., 2019; Graham, 2017). SGI was found to be effective in building critical reading skills of vocabulary, phonics, fluency, phonemic awareness, and reading comprehension (Graham, 2017).

Despite the effectiveness of SGI, middle school ELA and content area teachers alike commonly use whole group instruction, citing the need to meet CCSS (Elleman & Oslund,

2019). Small group settings have been demonstrated to be more effective for constructing knowledge on critical concepts, but middle school teachers usually fail to differentiate instruction by focusing on meeting standards above the individual needs of learners (Graham, 2017). Teachers are guided by beliefs, knowledge, concepts, and institutions of perceptions about language process that are intertwined with the method they chose to deliver class instruction. Middle school instructors voice the difficulty of keeping the whole group actively engaged during SGI and concerns about behavioral issues that are related to poor work habits, copying, off-task behavior and inadequate completion of assigned work (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). These outcomes are all related to class management and effective differentiation of instruction (Tomlinson, 2014). If students know the expectations, expectations are enforced, and the material is interesting and at the appropriate level, they will be engaged in their work. Students who receive difficult work are bound to copy from others, but those whose assignments are properly differentiated are more likely to be engaged in completing their assignments (Tomlinson, 2014).

When SGI is used with DI strategies to support ELLs in understanding content and discipline specific material and scaffold learners through their ZPD language, learners are more likely to develop the content area literacy (CAL) skills needed to be successful in mainstream classrooms. Prospectively, the theoretical framework for CAL instruction relies in concepts related to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory, Tomlinson's (2014) theory of differentiation of instruction, and Cummins' (2000) theory of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Applying the principles of these theories will give educators the most pertinent tools for making CAI accessible and comprehensible to ELLs. As outlined below, applications of Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the ZPD, differentiation of instruction, and CALP,

as described by Billings and Walqui (2017) in their report, “Zone of Proximal Development: An Affirmative Perspective in Teaching ELLs”, are central to effective instruction of ELLs.

According to research, ELLs continue to struggle in content area classes (Baecher et al., 2017). Billings and Walqui (2017) reviewed two of the main features of Vygotsky’s (1978) theory on the ZPD to teaching ELLs, which include potential developments of learners and the role of collaboration in the learning process. This study by Billings and Walqui highlighted the importance for all educators to provide appropriate learning experiences for all students that support them in realizing their potential development via the ZPD. Little research has been done on the application of the ZPD to teaching content area classes for ELLs, especially within the last 5 years. Three of the most recent articles cite the need to use various teaching strategies and supports to scaffold students through their ZPD to help them meet language and academic goals in discipline specific classes (Van Garderen et al., 2021). Considering the limited body of research on applications of the ZPD to content area instruction for ELLs, more research needs to be done on this topic. My study provides additional evidence supporting the ability for ELLs who are properly scaffolded to improve achievement in content area instruction by determining the strategies teachers in IDEA public schools in Texas use to support ELLs in building literacy and academic skills.

Situation to Self

Problem Statement

The problem is that ESL and content area instructors in traditional public schools are struggling to meet the literacy needs of a large percentage of Hispanic ELLs (Baecher et al., 2017; Leavitt & Hess, 2017; Lee, 2017). Teachers in the United States face increasing numbers of ELLs who lack academic preparedness in their classrooms, yet these instructors are not

professionally or personally prepared to instill needed literacy skills this population needs to thrive in the academic environment (Garza-Reyna, 2019; O’Neal et al., 2018). With more than 95% of ELLs in middle school scoring below proficiency standards in standardized tests, it is clear that ELLs need explicit literacy and reading comprehension instruction to improve their performance (Garza-Reyna, 2019). Despite years of research on the achievement gap between ELLs and native speakers, the current format of instruction in secondary education is still not sufficient to address the needs of ELLs.

ELLs need explicit vocabulary, reading comprehension, phonics, phonemic awareness, and fluency instruction with many opportunities for guided practice, which is best done in small groups (Ardasheva et al., 2019). However, most instruction in middle school is done in whole groups, with middle school teachers voicing a lack of comfortability for including SGI in their lessons (Graham, 2017). Therefore, middle school teachers need further professional development on SGI to better prepare them to meet the literacy demands of middle school students and ELLs. Research has shown that SGI is an efficient and effective way of differentiating instruction and scaffolding students through their ZPD. SGI enables collaboration among peers, in which students guide one another to understand content and achieve academic goals. However, limited research has been done on strategies to support ELLs in their ZPD. Even less research has been done to investigate the effectiveness of small groups to differentiate instruction or scaffold middle school ELLs through their ZPD (O’Neal et al., 2018). In this study, I used a qualitative phenomenological method to investigate middle school content area teacher’s perceptions and experiences on teaching ELLs, contributing to the literature on ZPD and SGI with ELLs.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of middle school CAIs who teach ELLs in public schools in ELL-heavy districts. In this research, the perceptions of middle school content area instructors in public schools were defined as the perceptions of middle school content area instructors towards ELL instruction. The theoretical framework for this study was based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the ZPD and Tomlinson's (2014) differentiation of instruction.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the implications of the paradox in the inadequacy of ELL literacy instruction in TPS and the high success rate claimed by charter schools on preparing students, including ELLs, to attend higher education. Based on this paradox, it was imperative to determine the lived experiences and perspectives of CAIs in public schools of ELL-heavy states who teach ELLs. This study supplies the knowledge base needed to fill in the gap of research regarding the phenomenon of study. It is essential to add to the body of knowledge on effective CAL strategies for ELLs by determining the strategies middle school CAIs use to prepare ELLs with academic and literacy strategies needed to succeed in higher education.

Empirical

This study adds to the research on differentiation of instruction and ZPD for ELLs in middle school and CAL for ELLs. Studies that done on CAIs for ELLs in middle school indicate that teachers are enthusiastic yet weary of this demographic, lacking confidence in their ability to meet the needs of these learners (Garza-Reyna, 2019). This result points to a lack of understanding of how to use differentiation and scaffolding techniques to support these students

through their ZPD, methods for teaching literacy strategies in discipline specific subjects, and appropriate differentiation techniques to keep students engaged with grade level instructional content that meets their needs among middle school teachers (Goodwin, 2016). It is imperative to fill in the research gap in the area of CAL by determining effective strategies to scaffold students through the ZPD to understand content area texts and teach appropriate CAL strategies. This information is crucial to develop literacy skills and academic vocabulary as needed and encourage more TPS to provide much needed training and support to CAIs in developing effective strategies for CAL instruction.

Theoretical

Little research has been done on using ZPD or differentiation of instruction to provide ELLs with CAL and much less on using differentiation of instruction and knowledge of CALP to scaffold middle school ELLs through their ZPD in content area classes. Multiple sources contain descriptions of the difficulties CAIs experience in helping ELLs understand discipline-specific content (DSC) and the perpetual achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs that results from the methods of helping ELLs learn English (Nguyen, 2021). However few researchers have investigated the need to scaffold these ELLs beyond learning to engage with the language within CAIs. This lack of instructional quality for ELLs is prevalent throughout the United States, as demonstrated by the low percentage of ELLs graduating from four-year institutions (Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019). Given the persistent teaching gap and success in charter schools in teaching ELLs, it is clear that more research needs to be done to determine the perceptions and experiences of middle school content area teachers in ELL-heavy states on teaching ELLs.

Practical

As mentioned above the majority of Latino students are in Texas, yet no studies have been done on literacy strategies DSI can use for middle school ELLs in ELL-heavy states, including FL, TX, and FL (Leavitt & Hess, 2017; Lee, 2017). Research on the ELL achievement gap reveals a markedly distinctive lack of preparedness of CAIs in providing CAL for students and teaching ELLs. The large population on Latinos in FL, CA, TX, and TN coupled by the fact that Latina/os are the majority population of ELLs (Sikes, 2017), suggests the need to conduct more studies in this particular population of students in rural Texas to determine effective strategies CAI can use to scaffold ELLs. Determining the perspectives of these instructors may help identify an effective solution to the lack of progress the state is experiencing in preparing ELLs for content area instruction in secondary schools, as explained in the history of ELLs in Texas.

Research Questions

This study of how content area teachers perceive CAL instruction for ELLs was guided by a central research question and three sub-questions.

Central Research Question

How do middle school content area teachers in public schools in ELL heavy districts describe their experiences teaching ELLs?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of ESL teachers in public schools in ELL heavy districts who cooperate with content area teachers to provide content area instruction to ELLs?

Sub-Question Two

What are the experiences of content area teachers in public schools in ELL heavy districts who work with ESL teachers to support the needs of ELL students in their classrooms?

Sub-Question Three

How do content area teachers in charter schools in ELL heavy districts who have taught ELLs in both public and charter schools compare the effectiveness of instruction and its effects on ELL achievement?

Definitions

1. *Zone of proximal development* – Zone of proximal development is the distance between the level of a child’s actual development, determined using independently solved tasks, and the level of possible development, defined using tasks solved by the child under the guidance of adults or in cooperation with more intelligent peers (Vygotsky, 2011).
2. *Differentiation of instruction* – Differentiation of instruction is the tailoring of instruction to meet the individual needs of each learner using ongoing assessment and flexible groupings (Tomlinson, 2014).
3. *Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)* –CALP is a term used to describe the formal language used throughout academia, or the language needed to discuss content in the classroom (Cummins, 2000).
4. *Basic interpretational communication skill (BICS)* – BICS is an acronym referring to the language skills people need to interact with others on a daily basis (Cummins, 2000).
5. *English language learners* – English language learners are students or adults who receive ESL instruction or who are taking classes in English while not yet fluent in the target language (Cassady et al., 2017).
6. *Whole group instruction* – Whole group instruction is instruction that is done with the entire class of students (Graham, 2017).

7. *Small group instruction* – Small group instruction is instruction that is done with small groups of students who are grouped randomly, by ability level, by strengths and weaknesses, or by need (Graham, 2017).
8. *Literacy* – Literacy is the ability of students to read fluently with understanding (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017).
9. *Explicit instruction* – Explicit instruction is a clear and finite kind of instruction that is directly taught to students in a manner that does not leave anything to chance and makes no assumptions about skills and knowledge students may acquire on their own. Instructors model behaviors, provide students frequent opportunities to respond and include guided and independent practice in lessons, telling students what they need to do using direct explanations. Teachers proceed in small steps, check for understanding, and ensure active participation by all students (Yazdini & Mohammadini, 2015).
10. *Direct instruction* – Direct instruction is an instructional approach that is structured, sequenced, and led by teachers in which the teacher presents information to the class with explicit, guided instructions for students (Eppley & Dudley-Marling, 2018).
11. *Scaffolding* – Scaffolding is the act of offering supports to students to learn and develop a new concept or skill, gradually stepping back as students progress in their ability until they can perform the concept or skill on their own (Buxton & Caswell, 2020).
12. *Academic vocabulary* – Academic vocabulary is vocabulary used in academic context, which includes general words considered acceptable for academic use and the technical and sub technical words specific to each subject area (Hidayati & Niati, 2019).
13. *Reading comprehension* – Reading comprehension is the ability of students to understand the text they are reading and its purpose (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017).

14. *Metacognition* – Metacognition is the process used to plan, monitor, and assess one’s understanding and performance including a critical awareness of one’s thinking and learning and oneself as a thinker and learner (Teng, 2019).
15. *Latina/os* – Latina/os are individuals who come from Spanish-speaking countries in South America, also referred to as Hispanics (Garza-Reyna, G.L., 2019).
16. *Culturally responsive instruction* – Culturally responsive instruction is instruction that accounts for the specific needs and preferences of students from other ethnicities (Garza-Reyna, 2019).
17. *Discipline specific literacy* – Discipline specific literacy is the ability to read and understand texts from content areas (Mirra & Garcia, 2020).
18. *Content area instruction* – Content area instruction is instruction provided in specific disciplines including ELA, math, science, social studies, art, physical education, music, and language arts (Toste et al., 2018).
19. *Sheltered instruction* – Sheltered instruction is an approach to teaching English language learners in which the teacher applies Krashen’s (1982) theory of comprehensible input and integrates language and content instruction with the goals of providing access to mainstream grade-level content and promote the development of English language proficiency (Elsayed, 2018).
20. *English language proficiency* – English language proficiency is a measurement of an ELL’s ability to communicate and complete academic work in English, which is used as an accountability system in educational institutions (Kalinowski et al., 2019).

21. *Peer assisted instruction* – Peer-assisted instruction is a class wide tutoring program in which teachers carefully partner each student with a classmate to complete various activities that address the academic needs of both students (Pyle et al., 2017).

Summary

The problem is that middle school CAIs in TPS struggle to meet the needs of a large population of Hispanic ELLs. Although the number of ELLs continues to grow every year throughout in the United States, a majority of middle school teachers are struggling to meet the needs of these learners (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). This lack of preparation of instructors in teaching ELLs in content areas combined with low literacy levels of ELLs has led to a lack of academic preparedness of ELLs and an ever-present achievement gap between ESLs and native speakers (Goodwin, 2016; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Lumbrears & Rupley., 2019; Marsh, 2018). This achievement gap is perpetuated by the style of instruction presented in middle school combined with the increased complexity of texts students are expected to comprehend (Gottschalk, 2019). As the majority middle school teachers continue to prefer using whole group instruction to evidence-based small group instruction (Ardasheva et al., 2016), it was pertinent to determine the perspectives of public-school content area teachers in ELL-heavy states on teaching ELLs in this study. The shared experience on this phenomenon by public-school content area middle school teachers who instruct ELLs in discipline specific classes laid the foundation of this study, which aimed to describe the perceptions of middle school CAIs in public schools in ELL-heavy states towards teaching ELLs.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review provides a theoretical understanding of the ZPD and DI along with their applications and relationship to providing CAI for ELLs. Middle school students across the nation struggle to read content area texts, but many content area teachers are not prepared to teach the reading skills and strategies needed to comprehend the material (Rainey & Moje, 2012). This struggle is even more pronounced in ELLs who are typically given lower level content to compensate for vocabulary and literacy difficulties in DSS (Edgerton & Desimone, 2018; Thuy Nguyen & Pham, 2022). Despite efforts by the United States department of education to provide research-based literature on effective strategies for teaching ELLs, there remains a large achievement gap between ELLs and their affluent White counterparts (Lee, 2017). In this literature review, I will describe the historical context of the development of the ZPD and DI in teaching ELLs, examine common strategies for ELL instruction and the need for literacy instruction across all content areas, and suggest best practices for teaching ELLs in DSS. I will conclude this chapter with a description of the work of charter schools in preparing its ELLs academically and mentally for higher education and explain the gap in literature related to this phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to guide this research study was the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and differentiation of instruction (DI), which are influential in supporting ELLs in content areas (Tomlinson, 2014). Each of these theories represents achievements in meeting learning needs of diverse learners, including ELLs. Using the ZPD and DI to scaffold ELLs in developing academic vocabulary and DSL skills is supported in literature. Although

multiple connections can be made between the two, each has specific applications to effective instruction for ELLs. This section includes a description of the history of the two theories, their impact on ELL instruction, their applications to ELL instruction, and their relationship with CAI.

Vygotsky's (1978) Theory of the Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky's (1978) zone or proximal development is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level (of the learner), as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Vygotsky, a soviet philosopher, was not satisfied with prominent theories of his time on how humans learn because they failed to account for social interaction, an essential component for learning (Braaten, 2018). He argued that the behaviorist approach could not account for the higher psychological thought, which he found central to understanding the human mind. He also said that the constructivist approach failed to account for the role of social interaction, which he felt was key in children's learning. Based on his research, he proposed a radically different theory of the human mind with social interaction at its center, which reconceptualized the relationship between learning and development.

According to Vygotsky (1978), learning precedes development and development is dependent on social interaction, which is the foundation of his theory of the ZPD (Mirzaei & Rahimi, 2021).

Vygotsky believed that the goal of educators is to leverage a learner's strengths with accessible forms of instruction (Braaten, 2018). This theorist advocated for students with special needs by insisting that instruction for individuals with disabilities should involve the use of learning tools to encourage the development of compensatory processes that could supersede a child's limitations and enable them to accomplish the same language goals as their peers (Billings & Walqui, 2017). This theory impacted how individuals with intellectual disabilities

were educated by engaging students beyond their current level of development rather than assuming that one's development is limited to a certain point (Billings & Walqui, 2017).

Impact of the ZPD on Education

Before the introduction of the ZPD to the United States, education of individuals with intellectual disabilities and those with special needs involved the use of IQ tests and estimates of mental age to select the appropriate academic content, causing students to receive limited access to the regular school curriculum (Billings & Walqui, 2017). Vygotsky (1978) developed the sociocultural theory in response to this treatment of students with special needs, which he felt underserved learners of all kinds of ability levels. Basing instruction on a student's ZAD, as Vygotsky termed it, is detrimental to the pupil's learning and development because it causes children to remain unchallenged to develop beyond their current ability. Basing instruction on one's ZAD rather than their ZPD results in teaching that is too easy for children, which undermines the purpose of instruction and can cause students to regress through boredom with content. The same issue occurs for ELLS when instructors assume that a learner's limited proficiency in English means they cannot comprehend grade-level textbooks. Vygotsky's work demonstrates the importance of providing students with appropriate challenging tasks that lead them to progress to higher levels rather than basing instruction on their perceived ZAD. The theory has heavily influenced the pedagogical approaches used to evaluate typically and atypically developing students. Students now have meaningful instruction at appropriate levels based on an instructor's use of assessments to determine what each pupil needs to develop next.

Vygotsky's work provided a foundation for sociocultural theories of language learning, which highlights the importance of social interaction between language learners and their peers (Mirzaei & Rahimi, 2021). Educational research supports that language is a social process that

requires dialogical interaction and collaboration with others, leading to the use of PBL, cooperative learning, and the inclusion of ELLs in CAI. These research studies have led to the development of the CCSS and concept-based teaching in which teachers are encouraged to construct collaborative structures through strategic planning of purposeful academic tasks that engage students to participate in real world activities (Mandel Morrow & Kunz, 2016). These collaborations, which involve language as a social process for academic development in DSS, are pivotal for ELL instruction because the use of language is an essential part of the development of English language skills that is impossible in pullout classes; as explained below, ELLs need to be in content area classes. Understanding the need for ELLs to be exposed to language-building activities opens doors for inclusion of ELLs in CAI where they are exposed to grade-level language and content they need to learn (Wei, 2021). The next step is to prepare CAIs to provide supports students need to actively participate and engage in daily lessons.

Applications of the ZPD

Vygotsky's theory of the ZPD has numerous applications for teaching and learning of all students in numerous contexts, which have been the focus of extensive study since the acceptance of the theory by the educational community (Eun, 2017). It is clear that the ZPD can be used to guide instruction if instructors identify what students can do on their own and what they struggle to do, then aid learners to perform those more difficult tasks until they can do them independently (Hidayati & Niati, 2019). Vygotsky's (1978) research shows that teachers can provide targeted support for students to scaffold them to the desired level of skill or knowledge and move toward autonomy in a given area. Thus, the role of a teacher is to recognize and integrate the scaffolds that can support students to move from the ZPD towards learning goals or academic potential (Billings & Walqui, 2017). Based on research evidence in the effectiveness

of the ZPD to scaffold learners in building skills and concepts, there is no need to limit ELLs to content within their language level.

As will be described in detail below, if teachers provide learners consistent opportunities to engage with peers in mainstream classes through deliberately planning scaffolding and differentiation of tasks, they can guide ELLs through linguistic and academic ZPD to learning grade-level content independently (Billings & Walqui, 2017; Hidayati & Niati, 2019).

Vygotsky's theory of the ZPD has been applied to multiple areas of education including the instruction of future teachers, but research is limited in the use of the ZPD for supporting ELLs in CAI. Based on the effectiveness of the ZPD in scaffolding students with learning disabilities to improve reading and math skills (Billings & Walqui, 2017), more studies should be done on applications of the ZPD in supporting ELLs to understand content area texts.

The Relationship between CAI and the ZPD

The ZPD is an essential factor that contributes to the success of content area instructors in teaching literacy skills to ELLs. According to the literature, many content area instructors feel positive about having ESL students in their classes, but voice several concerns regarding the instruction of these learners, including the lack of time and resources devoted to teaching ELLs; the lack of background knowledge ELLs have in content areas; the language barrier between the instructor and ELLs; the lack of knowledge regarding ESL teaching strategies; and the failure to use research-based methods or belief that methods used in teaching native speakers are ineffective for ELLs (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Graham et al., 2018; McFarland et al., 2020). There is also a perception that CAI is most suited for students with a strong command of English skills (de Oliveira et al., 2020). It is clear from these concerns that teaching CAI to ESL students requires skills in scaffolding content and differentiating instruction (Rassaei, 2017)

If students cannot perform a task even with guidance and support, it is clearly too advanced for the individual, thus outside one's ZPD (Hidayati & Niati, 2019). ELLS often struggle with CAI because content and tasks provided are often outside the learners' ZPD. As a result, they lack background knowledge, academic vocabulary, and discipline specific reading strategies to access the information (Rassaei, 2017). Providing content at lower grade levels that students can read independently cannot support the production of academic vocabulary and reading strategies needed for grade level standards. Thus, educators need to scaffold students through their ZPD to develop skills and knowledge needed to access grade-level content of CBI (Billings & Walqui, 2017; Braaten, 2018).

Tomlinson's (2014) Theory of Differentiation of Instruction

Effective teachers have been differentiating instruction since they began teaching groups of learners, but the theory developed by Tomlinson (2014) has been pivotal in describing exactly what it means to support the needs and interests of all students and how to do it. Before the passing of laws such as the individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA) requiring students with special needs to be included in general education instruction, teachers delivered unilateral instruction to all students because they expected all children of a similar age to learn in the same way and have similar needs (Swanson et al., 2020). The number of students identified with learning disabilities or ELL status continues to grow as classrooms become increasingly diverse with greater need of effective DI. However, many instructors today still misunderstand what DI is and how to do it. Among other researchers, Tomlinson sought to clarify what it means to provide DI and demonstrate effective strategies to do so for the diverse community of learners that may be represented in classrooms, including those of high ability, middle-level students, those with special needs, those with disabilities, and ELLs (Tomlinson, 2017).

According to Tomlinson (2014), DI is a philosophy of teaching based on the principle that students learn best when teachers use formative assessment data and knowledge of individual learning needs, interests, and background to build content, processes, and products necessary for the individual learner to achieve readiness and move to the next level of ability. DI is a foundational teaching practice that moves instruction from a holistic approach to acknowledging that all students are unique with different needs and interests that must be recognized and accounted for when planning content processes and products of instruction (Tomlinson, 2014). Pivotal to the theory is the idea that all students must learn the same content and skills but each should be enabled to do so according to their own individual strengths, needs, cultural background, and interests through application of DI (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2018; Smadi & Al Masri, 2018). ELLs in DSC can best learn and achieve when teachers apply the theory of DI to their curriculum and teaching practice.

Impact of DI on Education

Effective teachers have been differentiating instruction long before Tomlinson proposed the DI theory. The theory developed by Tomlinson can be used to clarify the difference between effective and ineffective instruction and pinpoint where faulty instruction is likely to decline (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2018). Tomlinson's (2014, 2017) formulation of DI has had a global impact on education as institutions in many countries throughout the world emphasize the need for teachers to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of various types of learners. In Lebanon, Kotob and Ali Abadi, (2019) found that DI was effective in improving the academic achievement of low achievers in a mixed ability study. A Qatari researcher in Canada described ways DI can be effectively used to support ELL students in Canadian ESL classrooms to facilitate the language learning experience of these learners (Raza, 2020). Researchers in

Indonesia wrote that the aim of DI is to facilitate recognition of students' differences to allow them equal opportunities to achieve learning goals, and has been effective in fostering the reading comprehension, speaking, listening comprehension, and vocabulary learning for ELLs (Komang Arie Suwastini, 2021). These writings by researchers from universities and institutions around the world show that the strategy is being implemented by educational facilities in many countries to improve the performance of students with varying needs and learning profiles.

In addition to meeting the needs of students with special needs, the theory of DI has benefited teaching of ELLs, as instructors now understand the need to find ways of making curriculum more accessible to language learners (Magableh & Abdullah, 2021). Researchers studying the impact of DI on the reading comprehension skills of mixed ability classrooms composed of learners with a wide range of varied requirements, interests, and abilities effectively trained instructors in using Tomlinson's (2017) differentiation strategies to increase the reading achievement for early second-stage students (Magableh & Abdullah, 2021). However, the need for teachers to understand how to apply DI remains, as many instructors continue to differentiate by giving learners leveled content of different assignments to complete without regard to the specific goal of what individual learners should know, understand, and achieve at the end of the unit or lesson (Smadi & Al Masri, 2018; Tomlinson, 2017).

Applications of DI for ELLs

DI is an essential tool to make instruction accessible to all learners regardless of their English language ability, knowledge level, or language needs (Tomlinson, 2014). To effectively differentiate instruction, teachers should not only have a clear goal of what all students should know, understand, and achieve but also recognize that the roadmap to this goal is different for each individual (Tomlinson, 2017). They continually use frequent formative assessments to

guide instruction, adjusting instruction as need. DI is an effective way to ensure ELLs can access DS curriculum because, when done correctly, the instructor provides appropriately challenging material and activities that guide the student through their ZPD to meet curriculum goals (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2018).

DI is applied in secondary education using various strategies to support ELLs in content area classes. Effective applications of DI for teaching ELLs are seen in various ways. First, teachers recognize that ELLs may lack academic vocabulary and prior knowledge needed to understand content area instructions and use assessments to find and fill these gaps on a daily bases. Second, they use flexible grouping strategies to support ELLs in having more opportunity to use the English language during instructional time. Third, they explicitly explain and model effective reading comprehension strategies for texts of each discipline to ensure all learners are knowledgeable how to understand the material in their reading. Fourth, they develop an environment where all learners are comfortable to share thoughts and ideas relate to learning material through DI, SGI and flexible grouping strategies that keep ELLs supported in using the English language (Lou, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017; Wei, 2021).

The Relationship between CAI and DI

Research shows that many learners, including ELLs and non-ELLs, struggle with CAL for various reasons. At the heart of this struggle is the fact that CAL is complex, with different literacy requirements for each discipline, which students have not been taught in primary school (Smadi & Al Masri, 2018). Added to the unique demands of each content area are different methods needed to comprehend content-related material. DI is the most effective way of scaffolding students to use appropriate strategies to read and understand content area material including text, articles, and various digital materials. With frequent assessments and knowledge

of learner background and interests, DI provides instructors with the data they need to present instruction in ways that each individual can access content and respond according to their strengths (Tomlinson, 2014). It allows students to engage in appropriately challenging material and use their strengths to demonstrate understanding and application of concepts and ideas covered (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2018). The purpose of this study was to examine strategies content area instructors in Texas charter schools use to help ELLs, including their understanding and application of DI and the ZPD to their instruction.

Related Literature

In this section, I will describe literature related to literacy strategies and teaching CAI to ELLs. The difficulties educators face teaching ELLs has led to the long-standing achievement gap, which complicates the issue of literacy instruction for these learners. Delivering effective CAI to ELLs involves a deep understanding of their needs, the preparation of instructors to serve these students, and knowledge of practices for teaching ELLs, DSL strategies, and 21st-century literacy strategies.

Needs of English Language Learners

ELLs have unique needs from those of non-ELLs of the same age group and ability level because of their limited English proficiency level and lack of background knowledge in subjects integral to CAI (Nosratinia & Hooshmand Fateh, 2017). Thus, DSS instructors should teach ELLs reading strategies and academic vocabulary they need to build their literacy skills and use differentiation and scaffolding strategies to help these learners understand material in content area texts. In this section, I will describe the knowledge base of ELLs and ways of addressing their needs in CAI, including reading strategies, changes to literacy in the 21st century, the

requirements of the CCSS, the importance of digital literacy, and the need for pop culture sources in CAI.

Knowledge Base

Eighty three percent of Texas ELL students are considered economically disadvantaged (Sikes, 2017), causing many Latino ELLs to attend schools in high-poverty areas with little funding and resources to meet their needs (Allegretto et al., 2022). Despite their growing numbers, Latino students remain largely underserved, attending educational institutions that have the least qualified and experienced teachers (Allegretto et al., 2022). Poor, high minority urban schools where many Latino students attend have less access to highly qualified instructors than affluent, suburban schools, which is detrimental to the development of college readiness and literacy skills in these students. These factors account for the large dropout rate of Latinos and low attendance at higher education institutions by those who graduate secondary school, as described above (Mora, 2022). ELL students are reportedly underperforming in national and state standards, resulting in a significant performance gap on standardized tests between ELLs and non-ELLs, which heightens this gap in achievement and access to higher education (Allegretto et al., 2022; Weiss, 2020). All Texan students must pass the STAR achievement test to graduate high school (Bach, 2020), which is nearly impossible for 65% of eighth-grade ELLs who score below proficiency on national reading tests (NAEP, 2019). More attention should be given to ELLs, especially those considered new comers or those who recently immigrated to the United States, for them to pass these tests and build their capacity to do so.

ELL students are known to have limited knowledge of English and lack the academic vocabulary needed to succeed in mainstream classes (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Of the students who come to the United States from nonEnglish speaking homes, 77%

speak Spanish as their first language, and this demographic is the fastest growing population in the United States (Cataldi et al., 2017). ELLs also lack the background knowledge needed to understand content area texts, stemming from their lack of academic vocabulary and different cultural background from non-ELLs. Although many Latino students grow up in the United States, they have the same problem—missing important background knowledge—because it is impossible to understand and remember content knowledge when one lacks the key vocabulary terms required to access it (Nosratinia & Hooshmand Fateh, 2017). This lack of academic vocabulary and background knowledge has a deep effect on the achievement of Latino ELL students, many of whom attend underserved schools.

Reading and Learning Strategies

ELLs are also reported to lack the learning strategies needed to understand the academic content presented in mainstream classes, and require guidance and specific DI to develop successful literacy skills, including phonemic awareness, fluency, and reading comprehension, and improve their academic vocabulary (Cassady et al., 2017). Most ELLs in middle school have successfully learned to decode words but struggle to make meaning from texts and passages they read because they lack the technical vocabulary needed to understand the material (Lou, 2020). Studies show that vocabulary knowledge has a direct relationship with reading comprehension; therefore, teachers whose goal is to guide students to learn reading should be instructing them on both academic reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition skills (Williams et al., 2019). However, the results from more than a decade of NAEP testing show that upper elementary and middle school teachers have failed to do so. Only 35% of fourth graders and 33% of eighth graders scored at or above proficiency nationwide on reading tests in 2019(NAEP, 2019), suggesting that overall reading instruction has lacked major DS reading

comprehension and vocabulary acquisition strategies for decades, with the majority of instructors expecting general literacy strategies taught in early grades to be sufficient. However, schools continue to focus on teaching basic comprehension strategies and leave learners to develop academic vocabulary implicitly, through reading and working with academic texts (Kalinowski et al., 2019). As academic reading comprehension strategies needed to understand informational texts and vocabulary acquisition are key to developing the ability to understand and analyze content area texts, it is pivotal that all instructors provide explicit and implicit reading strategy and vocabulary instruction daily (Cassady et al., 2017; Wei, 2021).

Although NAEP results show that less than 70% of students demonstrate proficiency in reading skills, there continues to be a large gap between the performance of Latino and Hispanic students and affluent White students (Sikes, 2017). This achievement gap is exacerbated by the lack of preparation of instructors teaching ELLs and their perceptions of the population, which is further described below (Guler, 2018). Language learners have unique needs from those of non-ELLs because of their lack of vocabulary and background knowledge needed to fluently discuss material and participate in learning activities (Lou, 2020). To teach this population of students effectively, instructors need strong abilities in differentiating instruction and scaffolding learners through their ZPD to develop comprehension and vocabulary skills needed to perform successfully in CA classrooms (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2018).

ESL instructors should be trained to use the ZPD and DI to introduce ELLs to textbook and reading material similar to that used in general education classes to prepare these learners to succeed in mainstream classes (Billings & Walqui, 2017; Magableh & Abdullah, 2021). The students need to learn to use the discipline specific comprehension strategies of each subject area to understand the material they are presented with in mainstream classes (Linares, 2021).

However, it is clear from research that instructors remain largely unprepared to meet the needs of ELL students (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; McFarland et al., 2020), including those related to changes being made in 21st-century literacy instruction.

Changes to Literacy in the 21st Century

The CCSS have included 21st-century requirements to encourage instructors to adapt literacy instruction to its standards. A key change regarding ELL instruction is the need for all students, including language learners, to receive standard-based instruction in content area classes (Mirra & Garcia, 2020). Before the development of the CCSS, ELLs in secondary school were typically pulled out of classes for ESL instruction for all or part of the day, depending on their determined language competency. This practice of limiting CAI for ELLs has led to a large achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs, as demonstrated by a 20% gap in reading scores on the NAEP test, largely resulting from the lack of exposure to academic vocabulary and reading instruction (Desjardins, 2020). Policymakers hope that through the adoption of the CCSS, schools and administrators will be encouraged to better support ELLs in CA classes and will have the chance to improve these skills, which are pivotal to college and career readiness (MacSwan et al., 2017).

In addition to including ELLs in CAI, educators are expected to collaborate across content areas to deliver a more interdisciplinary approach to literacy instruction. Researchers suggested that an interdisciplinary approach in which students develop content literacy using texts for authentic purposes is more effective in promoting disciplinary and literacy learning than traditional models that keep each content area separate (Mirra & Garcia, 2020). It is more authentic and engaging to ask students to explore and compare perspectives of multiple informational texts within the context of different disciplines than to read and respond to one

discipline specific textbook. More authentic assignments encourage students to build deep understanding of content material as they analyze text to engage in solving real-world problems (Elnimer, 2018). To engage in this interdisciplinary approach to learning effectively, students should also develop digital literacy skills.

Teachers are also expected to incorporate technology into the curriculum in efforts to support the development of digital literacy in 21st-century learners (Bonnet & Rosenbaum, 2019). These changes are being made in response to the projected knowledge, skills, and concepts experts predict students will need to succeed in future society combined with the low achievement researchers are finding among students across the country in key literacy and math assessments (Elnimer, 2018). Digital literacy instruction incorporates aspects informational literacy in complex applications of analyzing and applying information gathered from digital text, video, and audio formats, and synthesizing key components to collaborate with others in completing authentic projects that require students to produce a digital product of their own based on their findings (Nzomo et al., 2021). As teachers will need to understand how to use technological applications to apply skills of information literacy to support students in completing these tasks, they should receive PD and training on the use of technology to support the development of digital literacy in pupils and ways to support students who may struggle with technological applications or literacy skills. They will also need a better understanding of the expectations of the CCSS.

The Requirements of the CCSS

The CCSS were developed to provide national instructional standards that would serve to guide teachers in better preparing students for college and career (CCR) preparedness with the purpose of providing additional specification to the skills and concepts students must

demonstrate (Di Domenico et al., 2019). The language of the CCSS and research indicate that these standards are built around concept-based teaching and learning because to help students meet them, teachers need to refine instructional patterns from a 2D to a 3D design; from teaching facts and skill-based instruction to concept based instruction of facts, topics and concepts (Toste et al., 2018). This shift is evident in the CCSS writings, which include information on what students should be able to know, understand, and do, which is the same language used in CBI objectives—what students should know, understand, and do (Elnimer, 2018).

In addition to CBI, teachers are also required to be experts in the discipline they teach and teach CAL skills as part of a DSL curriculum. This requirement is referred to as teaching disciplinary literacy (Clark et al., 2021), or teaching pupils the ways of thinking, reading, and writing that are embedded in the production, utilization, and communication of knowledge in each discipline (Garzón-Díaz, 2021). To provide DSL means teaching students to engage in shared ways of using language and symbolic tools to construct and critique ideas in each discipline (Elnimer, 2018). Although each instructor should be teaching the specific literacy strategies pertinent to said subject, the CCSS also expect teachers to collaborate with one another to provide DSC across content areas (Toste et al., 2018) Teaching standards of most content areas require students to analyze and compare texts from different disciplines to make and defend claims (Garzón-Díaz, 2021). Thus, the development disciplinary literacy requires interdisciplinary instruction where teams of subject area teachers work together to plan interdisciplinary units of instruction. Effective teaching of DSL also requires a high level of discipline-specific knowledge.

The requirements of the CCSS involve higher level of instruction that necessitates more highly qualified teachers knowledgeable in both disciplinary and literacy instructional strategies

(Reisman, 2017). However, teacher preparation programs have not yet adapted to this high level of expectations, so it is up to educational institutions to find ways to support instructors in improving their instruction to meet these standards. Many states use national and state exams to encourage schools to make these changes, but this strategy is often counterproductive, resulting in teaching for the test (Bach, 2020). When instructors focus on test preparation rather than CBI strategies of instruction, they focus on facts and skills rather than the purpose of the CCSS of better preparing students for 21st century college and career skills through CBI style curriculum (Garzón-Díaz, 2021).

Teachers should use the CCSS to guide their instruction according to CCR standards that have been developed to support college and career readiness in the population (Garzón-Díaz, 2021). However, the CCSS are not intended to be overarching standards that every student must meet to pass a class; the standards are adjustable according to the level of each individual, with the goal of reaching the highest level possible (Reisman, 2017). The CCSS also provide increased clarification on how instruction may be differentiated to meet the needs of all learners. The CCSS standards alone cannot overcome academic difficulties learners experience because of learning disabilities, poverty, and previous poor educational contexts; rather, they are only meant as benchmarks. These key ideas were also reiterated by other scholars who explained that the policymakers who developed the CCSS expressed the ability for teachers to modify the standards for needs presented by diverse learners including those of ELLs (Elnimer, 2018). To meet the demands of 21st-century literacy, the CCSS also encourage digital literacy instruction.

The Importance of Digital Literacy Instruction

Gunduzalp (2021) and Bonnet and Rosenbaum (2019) discussed the requirements of the CCSS, including language and content, across mediums as central components of literacy in a

digital age. The researchers examined what digital literacy entails and how to develop information and digital literacy skills in students. Media and digital literacy are an essential part of curriculum for all content areas because they expand the concept of texts. Print sources are just one form of text in a spectrum of multimedia resources, so students must learn to read both print and nonprint texts and content in a variety of modes and mediums by creating blogs, podcasts, and videos (Gunduzalp, 2021). According to Gunduzalp's writing, the ease of digital literacy access and the structure of digital media requires pupils to develop literacy skills unique to that of printed media, including becoming competent in searching for information using information technologies, accessing information and using it, and evaluating and presenting it by reshaping it. As society becomes increasingly digital, it is pivotal for instructors to be skilled in guiding students to develop both information and digital literacy skills to engage in 21st-century learning. Bonnet and Rosenbaum (2019) echoed these concerns when they described the problem that much of the digital media readily available online is not trustworthy, as a growing number of false news stories circulate online. The abundance of this irresponsible, unreliable news makes it pivotal that instructors help students learn to evaluate the authenticity and validity of digital information available to them.

Effectively making use of media sources involves rigorous research through a variety of sources (Bonnet & Rosenbaum, 2019). Pupils should be scaffolded to use the expansive information from the web for online research in developmentally appropriate ways. Media literacy requires the use of informational and nonfiction texts, which compliments the CCSS' rigorous focus on nonfiction texts (Elnimer, 2018). Such content can be found in a broad range of forms including journalism, news, commentaries on current events through blogs, wikis, and social media. Digital and media literacy connects students' experiences in school to broader

society through curricular engagement, which is important for ELLs' social and academic development, as language academic language is developed and expanded through continued introduction of new words and their productive practice (Bonnet & Rosenbaum, 2019). Middle grade teachers should use media literacy across content areas to bring together standards-based curriculum and students while teaching them essential skills in both digital literacy comprehension and analysis of the validity and reliability of sources (Bonnet & Rosenbaum, 2019; Gunduzalp, 2021). One often overlooked area of digital and media literacy is popular culture.

Incorporating Popular Culture Sources

Although the CCSS heavily emphasize the use of informational text throughout CAI, the majority of 21st-century learners are less motivated by traditional literacy content commonly presented in ELA lessons. The problem is that many instructors believe these traditional resources are important for developing good readers (Toste et al., 2018). Although classical and traditional novels are useful for reading comprehension and history lessons, they are no longer relevant to the present concerns and needs of pupils in the modern era. Digital media has brought a wealth of alternative material more interesting and relevant to learners and should be incorporated into the curriculum (Nzomo et al., 2021). Modern sources of media literacy can be used to strengthen and support study and discussion in the classroom in many ways. For example, one can use a video clip from a recent movie related to a key concept targeted by a lesson to scaffold students in using the more engaging content to build the concept and apply it by making connections to traditional sources (Drew & Thomas, 2017). The reality is that in using exemplary texts, teachers fail to consider the pleasure, engagement, and interest of middle

level learners in popular culture and limits their opportunities to connect their media worlds to traditional texts used in study.

Instructors report difficulty in using typical ELA and other traditional instructional materials to engage students. Learners reportedly find these materials dry and unrelated to their daily lives (Nzomo et al., 2021). Both academic instruction and student interest and motivation are pivotal to the development of DSL. Pairing popular culture sources to traditional texts can be useful in helping students analyze visual works other than within texts and draw on real world connections between texts and real-world situations, thereby using student interests to help them learn something they struggle with (Toste et al., 2018). Students with typically lower motivation are often more willing to engage in dialogue and tasks about film than books. Therefore, weaving in examples from current movies, television, music, and popular culture makes lessons come alive for students in a way that motivates students to read and relate to the material presented to them as they make connections to themselves and the more traditional material (Toste et al., 2018). Teachers can work to find ways of honoring their pupils' popular culture, fandoms, and interests as topics by not only using these more contemporary sources effective in guiding learners to apply key concepts in building connections between the two types of sources (Nzomo et al., 2021). These modern sources are also directly connected with the curriculum and values educators try to impart to the next generation.

Common Perceptions of Content Area Instructors on ELLs

Teachers have a range of expectations related to instruction and performance of ELLs, largely shaped by their training and understanding of SLA theories (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Researchers found that CAIs best prepared and most knowledgeable about teaching ELLs also have the best, most accurate perceptions of their learning attitude and ability to understand

DSS material (Weiss, 2020). Unfortunately, many teachers report a lack of knowledge related to ELL instruction coupled with a negative view of their learning behavior, which stems largely from this inexperience (Lachance et al., 2018).

Academic Performance Ability

Instructors tend to believe that ELL students lack the ability to perform well academically as non-ELL students and even doubt the accuracy of teacher recommendations when they are placed in higher-level classes (de Jong et al., 2018). Teachers interviewed by de Jong et al. (2018) demonstrated a hesitancy to question the accuracy of lower grades but readily questioning the accuracy of the instructor's assessment and grading practices of learners who receive higher grades or are paced in advanced-level classes. Furthermore, most educators believe ELLs' struggles are related to the English language content rather than the discipline-specific material being covered or another learning difficulty (Nguyen, 2021).

These perceptions that ELL students are lacking the English language ability to succeed academically affects the placement of this population of pupils. When ELLs are seen to struggle in a class, they are placed in remedial and special education classes more quickly than their non-ELL counterparts (Gottschalk, 2019; Weiss, 2020). When the same students perform at a higher than non-ELL classmates, instructors hesitate to accept the individuals into advanced-level classes (Nguyen, 2021). Such placement practices have detrimental effects on the academic achievement of these individuals who are not provided with sufficient college readiness skills nor opportunities to grow and develop (Lucas et al., 2018).

Perceptions on Teaching ELLs

The achievement of ELLs in CA classes and their placement in remedial or advanced programs have a strong relationship with how they are perceived by instructors. The support

ELLs receive to achieve academically is connected to the perception of their instructors toward their cultural and linguistic competence and plays a critical role in the type of educational service these students receive (Lachance et al., 2018). Unfortunately, many instructors have developed a negative perception of the ability of ELLs to learn content material, which affects the type of instruction provided in CAI. These students are typically expected to learn English quickly if they want, a false ideology that leads to a disproportionate number of ELLs being labeled as poor readers and placed in the lowest reading groups of the class and further denied opportunities to participate in advanced programs (Lucas et al., 2018). Lucas et al. (2018) found that 70% of teachers have this negative perception of ELLs, and reported that their lack of knowledge on how to instruct the population would render any support strategies offered ineffective for language learners and overall instruction less effective for all. These attitudes are perpetuated by the lack of training and professional development opportunities for teachers (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016).

Many teachers find ELL students much more difficult to instruct than non-ELLs. Interviews with content area instructors reveal perceptions that ELL students have lower academic potential, are harder to teach, and struggle more than other pupils to understand content material, and that the teachers feel underprepared to meet the needs of these students (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Villegas, 2018). Many educators also report the struggle to find time to devote extra attention in assisting ELLs. According to research studies, these perceptions are largely the result of the lack of preparation for teaching language learners and the lack of knowledge regarding SLA (Lachance et al., 2018). However, many of the instructors who struggle to teach ELL students also hesitate to spend the time to acquire sufficient training to

improve their situation, blaming the difficulties on the pupils rather than on instructional methods and lack of skill in scaffolding techniques for students (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016).

Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach ELLs

All educators, including CAIs, need a greater understanding of the pedagogical knowledge related to working with ELLs in mainstream classrooms related to second language acquisition and instructional design that supports linguistic and conceptual understanding (de Jong & Naranjo, 2019). Preservice teachers do not have enough opportunities to take ESL-related courses in undergraduate programs, leading to a lack of preparation for supporting the needs of ELLs (Villegas, 2018). Studies show that teachers with high levels of preparation and related ESL licensure have greater self-efficacy and preparation to address the needs of ELLs within their curriculum than those with little ESL training (Kim & Morita-Mullaney, 2018). Many teachers feel challenged in response to the linguistic and cultural diversity represented in their classrooms and the limited preparation they have to meet the needs of these diverse learners. This lack of training and understanding of ELLs and SAL lead many instructors to develop negative perceptions of ELLs, which are best addressed through professional development and training programs (Lachance et al., 2018).

Despite the lack of preparation for teaching ELLs, some instructors believe they have the qualifications and experience needed for their expertise and that further professional development or training in supporting ELLs is a waste of their time (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). However, these researchers report that most instructors are interested in further training and development but have limited resources to do so (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Several researchers have discussed the need to provide effective professional development and training opportunities to better prepare instructors in assisting ELL students (Babanski et al., 2017;

Lachance et al., 2018). Furthermore, many instructors holding certifications in ESL reportedly have undertaken minimal training or coursework to acquire them, perpetuating the issue of underprepared CAIs in relation to serving the needs of ELLs (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Researchers noted the need to ensure that preservice instructors take enough classes devoted to ESL instruction and SLA to serve the needs of ELL pupils (de Jong & Naranjo, 2019).

Literacy Instruction that Benefits ELLs

Students are failing in content area literacy because middle school students do not know the proper strategies to understand the content presented in their texts, including ELLs and non-ELLs alike (Proctor et al., 2019). Secondary content area reading is much more advanced and sophisticated than that of elementary school. Thus, sophisticated strategies are needed to understand the content and more advanced vocabulary knowledge. Because each discipline requires different reading strategies ELA teachers should not be considered the soul source of literacy instruction (Buxton & Caswell, 2020). The CCSS encourage literacy to be taught across content areas. However, content area instructors tend to expect students to learn all literacy strategies they need in ELA lessons. These teachers claim they have no knowledge of how to teach reading, and therefore, feel uncomfortable and ill prepared to do so (Lee, 2017; Lou, 2020). Several authors have discussed how each discipline requires a specific strategy for effective reading and writing, which is represented in the updated CCSS (Gabriel, 2018, 2020). This section covers a discussion of the importance of teaching discipline DSL strategies in all subject areas.

The Problem of Literacy Instruction

Studies show that middle school students struggle to read grade level texts in ELA as well as content areas because the difficulty of reading material is much higher in secondary

education and require more sophisticated knowledge and skills for adequate comprehension (Proctor et al., 2019). However, middle and high school instructors do not provide adequate instruction on reading comprehension strategies, according to research and the results of standardized testing for more than a decade (Bach, 2020). This lack of reading instruction compared to the difficulty level and sophistication of ELA and content area texts results in more than 50% of eighth-grade students failing to meet proficiency standards on state reading tests (NAEP, 2019).

Middle school students lack reading strategies needed to understand content area texts because literacy is often only taught in ELA classes (Toste et al., 2018). ELA is only one of the many disciplines students must learn, with its own set of requirements established by the CCSS (Gottschalk, 2019). Therefore, relying on ELA instructors to meet the literacy needs of all content areas is unrealistic and detrimental to future society. Thus, the creators of the CCSS expect instructors across content areas to collaborate in producing interdisciplinary curriculum that provides literacy instruction in all content areas (Garzón-Díaz, 2021). ELA teachers are expected to contribute by incorporating literacy sources from other disciplines into their instruction but not as the sole source of this literacy teaching. ELA teachers should guide students to make meaning from a range of literary books and informational texts using skills in arguing viewpoints and perspectives as well as analyzing how authors use various elements of literature (Mandel Morrow & Kunz, 2016). However, to succeed in content area disciplines, students need to master a different set of literacy and comprehension skills, depending on the subject (Lou, 2020). Therefore, if literacy is taught in ELA alone, secondary students will continue to struggle reading content area texts that are outside their ZPD (Linares, 2021).

Teaching Literacy in Different Subject areas

ELA has domain-specific literacy strategies students use to comprehend English literature, as do all content areas. In discussing the differences between ELA and science instruction, Lee (2017) wrote that the ways ELA addresses disciplinary norms of argumentation are different from those for science. Although ELA and science literatures converge on key issues, each discipline focuses on norms particular to its subject area. ELA instruction is centered on genres and modalities of communication whereas science education considers epistemic practices and content knowledge.

These differences in literacy approaches that pertain to each discipline mean that instructors in every subject area need to attend to disciplinary specific literacy for the improvement of students' academic literacy development and overall learning, which is challenging for many. Many subject-area teachers have deep understanding of how their respective discipline's knowledge is produced and communicated but are not fully aware of the reading and writing practices required for texts of their content areas or feel middle and high school students lack the readiness to learn such skills. Therefore, few content area instructors explicitly teach discipline-specific literacy practices to students, which leads to pupils struggling to learn the academic content of various disciplines (Lee, 2017). Scholars find that disciplinary differences among content areas may be contributing to the literacy challenges middle and high school because instructors are ill prepared to address challenges posed by the special demands of texts across the various disciplines.

In describing the need for content area instructors of every discipline to teach students literacy practices related to their given discipline, scholars described strategies used for each content area (Drew & Thomas, 2021; Garzón-Díaz, 2021; Mandel Morrow & Kunz, 2016). The researchers explained that science, history, ESL, and ELA instruction have the following

requirements: scientists produce knowledge through observable evidence gained through the process of experimental inquiry in which one develops questions, evidence, explanations of knowledge, justifications of one's explanations, and continual evaluation of the evidence of the work of the scientific community (Drew & Thomas, 2017). Thus, students must learn to ask researchable questions, review and synthesize findings, form a hypothesis, design and perform and investigation, record data and observations, interpret findings, draw conclusions, and communicate claims and conclusions in oral and written forms. Historians seek to interpret knowledge rather than observing, by engaging in data analysis and argumentation through the interpretation of multiple artifacts from the past (Garzón-Díaz, 2021). Thus, history students should be able to read across multiple texts to gain information about historical research that has been conducted about an event or person, interpret the data gathered, and draw conclusions about them using one set of accounts to corroborate or dispute another set. Those who study literature value divergent understanding of texts according to the type of literature they specialize in (Mandel Morrow & Kunz, 2016). ELA students should be able to make meaning from a range of literary works at both literal and inferential levels and to read critically and communicate their critiques in ways that align with the ELA content area.

Each content area has specific literacy requirements students need to master to understand content area texts (Gabriel, 2018). In response to student needs, the CCSS has created the goal of distributing responsibility for fostering literacy development across content areas. Instructors are asked to support disciplinary literacy engagement in content areas, whereas ELA teachers are expected to incorporate instruction on unique ways of reading and writing into English-related disciplines. Research indicates that many schools are underperforming in reading and math, and that a significant instructional change is needed to reverse the trend of low

performing students using robust comprehensive professional learning (Kim & Morita-Mullaney, 2018). Focusing on discipline-specific literacy instruction across all subjects allows ELA teachers to focus on their own discipline-specific purposes and processes and take responsibility to teach the literacy strategies pivotal to their own subject area (Clark et al., 2021). It is also beneficial if educators have more professional development opportunities to better understand, interpret, and incorporate requirements of the CCSS into their instruction through the help of mentors and other seminars (Gabriel, 2018).

Importance of Professional Development on Literacy Strategies

Although the need for content area instructors to provide reading instruction to middle and high school students is evident from research-based evidence, many content area instructors continue to resist providing this instruction (Gabriel, 2018). These teachers feel they lack the knowledge and expertise in reading instruction and that ELA instructors are better prepared for teaching reading comprehension, as such is their discipline (Gabriel, 2018). In fact, studies show that teachers who are properly trained with PD on effective CAL and supports for ELLs are better prepared to scaffold pupils in understanding content area instruction (Baca, 2021)

Many CAIs report being unsure how to support ELLs in CAL because teacher preparation programs notably lack instruction on teaching ELLs for CAIs. Kim and Morita-Mullaney (2018) wrote that teacher preparation programs are limited in the number of ESL-related courses offered to undergraduates, resulting in most teachers reporting feeling challenged in responding to linguistic and cultural diversity represented in their classrooms. According to research, preservice teachers many take one or two ESL classes as a part of teacher prep programs, but this cannot prepare one in SAL or knowledge of effective teaching strategies needed to support ELL students in understanding content material (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016).

States with large numbers of ELL students have higher requirements for ESL preparation, usually requiring teachers to possess ESL certifications. However, this certification can be obtained without great effort and demonstrates knowledge and skills helpful in teaching ESL but not necessarily in supporting ELLs to learn DSS content and skills. To support language learners adequately in CAI, instructors must learn how to teach DS reading comprehension skills and academic vocabulary to help these students to understand and immerse themselves in lesson tasks and discussions (Wei, 2021). This level of knowledge cannot be obtained from an ESL certification. The limited knowledge in supporting ELLs provided by teacher preparation programs have negative consequences for language learners.

Studies have shown that an instructor's perception of cultural and linguistic competency of ELLs is related to how they support these students, and that many teachers have the expectation that ELLs can learn English quickly if they chose to, leading to a negative perception of language learners on the part of these teachers (Guler, 2018). Guler's (2018) research revealed that teachers who develop negative misunderstanding of their ELL students are less likely to provide them the support they need to access content area material and are more likely to refer them for special needs services. These same teachers report a change in perception following PD classes that provide knowledge of SLA and methods of supporting ELLs.

Teachers who participate in PD on teaching ELLs develop skills in supporting reading comprehension and are more knowledgeable and accepting of the needs presented by ELLS. PD has been found to be effective in research on improving teacher learning and student achievement when it focuses on crafting instruction that meets needs of students and instructional practices related to supporting students' understanding of content material (Lo, 2017). Such PD can maximize student achievement. In other research, teachers who took just

two classes on ESL instruction reported improved perceptions of their students, which enabled them to better support the needs of their language learners (Guler, 2018). However, despite recognizing their lack of preparedness for teaching ELLs, there are many teachers who resist PD in teaching this population, citing it as a waste of time or that their teaching and expertise in their content area excludes their need for further PD (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Convincing such educators to take part in the said programs may require experts to justify an instructors' need for PD in supporting ELLs by clarifying what the training will include and how it will benefit the educators' teaching methods. The findings from these articles show that CAIs should be encouraged in partaking PD on teaching ELLs and this training should include knowledge and skills that are applicable for CAL in supporting ELLs.

Strategies to Improve the Literacy of ELL Students

Strategies used for improving the literacy of native speaking students do not always cross over to ELLs. Therefore, it is essential to consider research-based strategies for ESL literacy instruction. Common instructional strategies used to improve reading skills and academic preparedness of ELLs include peer-assisted instruction (PALS) (Pyle et al., 2017), modeling (Kopic, 2018), direct instruction (DI) (Simms & Marzano, 2019), sheltered instruction (SI) (Elsayed, 2018), cooperative learning (Keramati & Gillies, 2021), and academic vocabulary development (Lou, 2020). Each of these practices involves using social interaction to differentiate instruction and scaffold students through their ZPD to desired goals (Billings & Walqui, 2017).

Peer-assisted Instruction

PALS is a cooperative learning strategy in which lower achieving students are paired with higher achieving students to develop reading fluency and improve reading comprehension

strategies (Pyle et al., 2017). The students take turns reading books together and question one another on the contents of the reading. Pairs also guide one another in the pronunciation of difficult words, correcting mistakes of the reader, and guiding each other to understand the basic principles presented in the passage (Marieswari & Prema, 2016). Providing ELLs the opportunity to collaborate with peers allows them to work together to solve problems they would be unable to tackle independently (Kopic, 2018). PALS is an effective way of differentiating instruction or scaffolding students to understand content area texts and CAL concepts by encouraging students to help each other use various reading comprehension strategies to read and understand English texts (Sulistami et al., 2018).

The strategy has been implemented across subject areas with positive academic results. Studies have reported that peer taught lessons benefit ELLs with improved motivation, enhanced learning, and opportunities for authentic communication (Cole, 2018). Researchers reported that students and teachers effectively used peer tutoring to collaborate through discourse in which they scaffold one another to better use the language, negotiate form and meaning, and make insights and findings, which reveals the valuable learning opportunities that arise from peer teaching (Ferrari et al., 2021). Marieswari and Prema, (2016) found that both tutors and tutees demonstrate much greater learning of English language than those taught through traditional strategies. Other researchers found that peer-mediated instruction strategies resulted in favorable academic outcomes of ELL students in improving phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary outcomes (Pyle et al., 2017). Multiple studies also revealed that peer-tutoring strategies are effective in enhancing the academic language and reading comprehension skills of ELLs, demonstrating its usefulness as a scaffolding strategy for CAI (Casey, 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Sulistami et al., 2018).

The point behind the CCSS and CAI is to develop individuals who not only understand the reading but apply it through challenging projects and learning activities that guide students towards building deeper understanding of key ideas (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Therefore, CAL requires students to move beyond answering test questions and essay writing to develop real-world applications of concepts and skills. This goal can only be achieved through small group instruction, where students cooperate with one another to complete various projects and learning activities, including working with partners to read, understand, and apply content material.

PALs are typically used to improve reading comprehension and fluency of readers but its principles can be used in CAIs to support learners in moving beyond basic reading of material to helping one another analyze text and critically consider the relationship between the concepts and real-world problems or situations (Pyle et al., 2017). Teachers can have students complete varying activities in peer-learning groups to help one another accomplish tasks related to reading comprehension and application of content material, such as note taking and reading response activities. After explicitly instructing students on creating application questions, pupils can use PALs sessions to ask application questions following passage reading in which partners respond to one another's questions and ask for more details or clarify responses given during questioning (Cole, 2018). Such discussions will give ELLs more opportunities to discuss key concepts and build academic language. When taking notes, students can be asked to help each other write critical questions about the content that the students can discuss as a class to encourage students to engage in critical analysis of text material (Ferrari et al., 2021). Such application supports students in meeting content and state standards expressed in CCSS.

Modeling

Modeling is the practice of performing and explaining a reading comprehension or learning strategy. Instructors show pupils how to do something by asking them to listen and observe the teacher performing the strategy. Later, these students are asked to replicate this learning or reading strategy to complete assignments. During modeling, it is essential that teachers voice their thought process and communicate clearly what they are doing or need to do in a logical manner (Lou, 2020). Having ELLs watch instructors perform literacy strategies is effective because it provides them with a visual example of the practice being done by an expert (Cassady et al., 2017). This teaching method is applicable to many areas of ESL and CAL instruction.

Modeling should be used in all areas of instruction whenever new skills or directions are presented to clarify understanding and make communication more explicit (Wei, 2021). Strategies for understanding academic vocabulary, reading comprehension strategies, and anything an instructor wants students to do should be modelled by the educator beforehand. Modeling instruction and expectations provides ELLs with a visual representation of expectations, clarifying anything they may not otherwise understand verbally and providing students more opportunities to build content vocabulary through the visual representation of what the teacher is saying. When modelling, teachers should clarify understanding of expectations by questioning students on what was done and asking some students to repeat what they think the teacher did. This method helps ensure that when asked, the majority of the class will perform a skill or learning activity as desired. Thus, it is essential that teachers explicitly model tasks and learning activities to ensure all pupils complete them correctly and smoothly.

Several studies point to the effectiveness of modelling as a strategy for demonstration and instruction. It is seen as a tool for scaffolding instruction according to a learner's ZPD (Linares,

2021). Modelling is an important tool for teaching reading strategies to emergent readers and ELLs (Cassady et al., 2017) and supports the instruction of metacognition, which helps readers adapt strategies to monitor comprehension (Teng, 2019). Lou (2020) also wrote that explicit modelling practices for ELLs is important in scaffolding them to develop reading independence and comprehension and to engineer middle school reading strategies specific to content area instruction. Modelling is further mentioned as an effective tool for scaffolding ELLs to understand instructions and learner expectations (Cho et al., 2021).

Direct Instruction

DI is a teaching practice in which lessons are developed carefully based on small learning increments and clearly defined and prescribed teaching tasks (Simms & Marzano, 2019).

Lessons are structured, sequenced, and led by teachers or presented by students who direct the instruction. The aim is to provide clear instruction that eliminates misinterpretations in learning.

The basic techniques of DI include establishing learning objectives for all learning activities; purposefully organizing and sequencing a series of lessons and assignments that move students toward a stronger understanding and achievement of specific learning goals; reviewing instructions for activities or modeling processes to make directions clear for students; and providing students with clear explanations, descriptions, and illustrations of the knowledge and skills (Karim & Nassaji, 2018).

Direct instruction is considered by some as a systematic method of teaching reading comprehension but can be applied as a way of explicitly teaching and modelling content and skills that learners need to know, especially related to learning academic vocabulary and CAL strategies. Direct instruction is useful for scaffolding CAI for ELLs because each lesson is designed around a small chunk of instruction or skills learners should build, based on specific

learning objectives and purposeful instruction (Simms & Marzano, 2019). ELLs benefit greatly from the direction instruction model because the strategies involved are methods of scaffolding instruction found effective for ELLs or MLLs.

Some scholars found direct instruction ineffective, but this conclusion came from observations and studies of instructors who have not used the strategy correctly (Stockard, 2021). Eppley and Dudley-Marling (2018) wrote that the use of DI in reading instruction throughout U.S. schools is ineffective based on NAEP data. The researchers indicated that DI does not always improve reading skills along with skepticism of the validness of several studies on the effectiveness of DI instruction. However, the claims made by these researchers were based on faulty research designs and their exclusive focus on phonics and phonemics, rendering these results controversial (Eppley & Dudley-Marling, 2018). However, DI is more than phonics instruction and research-based evidence indicates when the practice is used correctly, DI is effective in improving reading fluency and comprehension of struggling readers (Stockard et al., 2018).

The practice of DI has been researched for decades with consistent findings that strategy has positive effects on comprehension and reading skills (Stockard et al., 2018). Students taught under DI methods experience higher academic achievement and demonstrate more confidence and self-efficacy in their learning than those of other programs (Stockard, 2021). Despite the proven effectiveness of the approach, many scholars and professionals remain skeptical largely because accepting the successfulness of this strategy may affect the funding opportunities for academics who seek to research effective reading programs and curricula to improve literacy and academic instruction of students (Stockard, 2021). Stockard et al. (2018) confirmed the effectiveness of DI based on their review of hundreds of research studies, pointing out the

validity of their research design and results. The authors reminded readers of the importance of DI when used correctly by instructors and suggested that those who find DI ineffective are not trained properly.

Sheltered Instruction

Sheltered instruction is providing opportunities for language development within content area instruction. Regular content is taught in mainstream classrooms that incorporate language learning objectives to assist ELLs in developing academic vocabulary needed for content areas (Elsayed, 2018). This instructional strategy includes language objectives to accompany each content objective, comprehensible input, focus on vocabulary instruction, hands-on learning experiences, building students' background knowledge, language practice opportunities, alternative assessments, practice application, and learning strategies (Westfield Public Schools, 2019). In this manner ELLs receive clear and accessible content and academic language instruction. Using sheltered instruction is seen as an approach to teach content in a strategic way to make subject matter comprehensible and promotes English language development for ELLs (Desjardins, 2020). Teachers modify teaching techniques to deliver core content to help students access it. This strategy gives students access to academic subject matter while learning English language (Elsayed, 2018). Students can negotiate meaning and make connections between course content and prior knowledge, allowing them to build content knowledge comprehension and thinking skills (Linares, 2021). To use sheltered instruction strategies effectively, teachers should continually assess student progress toward content and language objectives of lessons just as with DI and scaffolding.

Desjardins (2020) wrote that sheltered instruction can be used to better prepare ELLs academically for success in CA classes using sheltered instruction to integrate academic

language development and core subject curriculum. However, it is essential that instructors be properly prepared to do so, as those who lack understanding of how to administer sheltered instruction properly often provide watered down curriculum or instruction that is solely focused on language production. Instructors can scaffold content in disciplinary instruction, effectively providing sheltered instruction by using classroom resources to leverage linguistic knowledge and access students' background knowledge. The sheltered instruction strategy was found effective in scaffolding instruction to ensure ELLs can effectively participate in classroom discourse (Linares, 2021). When compared to regular instruction, sheltered instruction is also proficient in improving reading comprehension and critical reading skills in ELLs (Elsayed, 2018). Furthermore, the practice is used successfully in scaffolding students to access material presented in CAI, according to researchers who observed the strategy being used in science instruction to support the meaningful integration of science and language for ELLs and MLS (Buxton & Caswell, 2020).

Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning includes any small group instruction strategy in which students are placed in groups of two to 10 students to complete learning tasks or projects as a team. Grouping students to work together is proven to build social skills and problem-solving abilities, as it requires learners to communicate and cooperate with one another to meet a common goal (Awada & Faour, 2018). Students working in small groups scaffold one another to build skills required for each assignment according to their ZPD. Cooperative learning groups are especially beneficial for ELLs who are more comfortable communicating in small groups than in the whole class environment (Simms & Marzano, 2019). However, research shows that small group

instruction is widely but not consistently used, as teachers continue to prefer whole group instruction for the majority of their instruction.

ELLs learn best in small groups because they have more confidence to communicate in small groups and many find it rude to be outspoken in front of the whole class. Many ELLs come from cultures where it is considered impolite and arrogant to speak in front of the whole class and expect the teacher to dictate what they should know and do, and therefore, typically only speak when called on. ELLs who speak up in large groups are typically judged as selfish or showoffs by their peers, which is very discouraging for one who wants to practice communication skills. This cultural expectation makes it difficult for ELLs to participate in large group discussions or activities because of fear of being embarrassed. However, in small groups, it is much safer for students to express themselves because they have less chance of being judged as showoffs, and in small groups, there are less people to witness them making mistakes in the use of the language. Therefore, SGI is beneficial for ELL participation and cooperation in learning activities.

Academic Vocabulary Development

ELLs are held back in DSS because of their lack of academic vocabulary (Cummins, 2000; Gottschalk, 2019), which is the language of the classroom. Research shows that incorporating instruction of discipline specific vocabulary (DSV) is beneficial to both ELLs and non-ELLs because each content area requires a dense breadth of knowledge regarding specific terms and related content. It takes much longer to develop academic vocabulary than that of everyday life because students have less exposure to content area contexts where such knowledge is learned than that of regular communication. Studies indicate that ELLs need explicit instruction on academic vocabulary with many opportunities to use new words in

different, meaningful ways and connect new words to prior knowledge (Wei, 2021). Providing these learners with strategies to discover and remember new words and activities that expose them to new vocabulary allows ELLs to build academic vocabulary and concepts needed to succeed in CAI.

Although students want to learn content-related material and vocabulary language, ESL teachers typically perceive their pupils as lacking some essential vocabulary needed for basic communication with others. The instructors feel their learners need this knowledge before developing academic vocabulary to help them cooperate with other learners in content area classes. However, without the knowledge of content area language, they will still struggle to participate in CA classes because lack of language needed to express thoughts and ideas related to content material (Linares, 2021). ELLs usually learn BICS in ESL pull-out classes because language teachers lack qualifications to provide content area instruction, which requires deep knowledge of the subject matter (Desjardins, 2020). ESL instructors are experts in teaching language and prepare their learners to mainstream into CA classes with proper training and support from administration. In addition to knowledge related to language learning, they should understand issues related to CAL and strategies for building reading comprehension and academic vocabulary needed to succeed in mainstream classes (Desjardins, 2020). Thus, language teachers who teach pull-outpullouts need to focus more on academic vocabulary and key concepts of content material covered in CAI while providing BICS as needed to participate in lessons. ESL teachers can collaborate with CAI teachers to determine what language to teach each lesson or what content to use for extra practice with ELLs.

Strategies for teaching ELLs CAL

Although each discipline has specific reading strategies and a number of technical vocabulary that are pivotal to master for deep understanding of content material, basic literacy principles and several teaching strategies are useful in supporting the success of ELLs in CAI. These strategies include including sheltered instruction, differentiation, clear objectives, discipline specific reading comprehension instruction, academic vocabulary instruction, and activation of background knowledge. Teachers who use these basic principles throughout their instruction will be effective in improving the academic achievement of all learners.

Content and Language Integrated Learning

CLIL is content and language integrated learning, a strategy of combining content and language instruction for ELLs that originated in Europe. Students learn content in the target language from content experts whose native language is the same as the students (Graves & Garton, 2017). It is a strategy of using target language to understand subject matter and engage in deep learning of content material, thereby learning the target language and academic vocabulary at the same time (Garzón-Díaz, 2021). When implemented in the United States, where teachers usually do not speak the same language as their ELLs, educators use other ways of scaffolding language learners to understand the content (Graham et al., 2018). Using techniques of CLIC is much more effective than the current system used in Texan middle schools of placing ELL students in ESL pull-out programs until they pass a proficiency class. The reason for this conclusion is that the students can engage in academic concepts in the target language, giving ELLs more opportunities to learn content material needed for developing academic language and college readiness skills.

Pulling ELLs out of content classes increases the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs by decreasing instructional time in DSS. Many systems in the United States are

developed around pull-out classes taught by ESL instructors who are not content experts. These ESL teachers tend to build classes around language objectives targeted on building basic conversational vocabulary rather than academic vocabulary and deep understanding of content material needed to succeed in content area classes (Baecher et al., 2017). Once deemed proficient to pass out of these ESL pull-out programs, ELLs are placed into content area classes with little support to understand material, deeming pull-out programs inefficient and unproductive in preparing ELLs to meet the CCSS and further perpetuating the achievement gap. CLIL is an alternative to pull-out programs that provides ELLs more instructional time to learn content material by allowing more exposure to grade level content in a way they can understand and access the information (Garzón-Díaz, 2021; Graham et al., 2018). Thus, integrating content and language teaching is an important strategy, which supports the development of academic language that ELLs will miss in pull-out classes and gives these learners the chance to use and apply content language and concepts thereby building academic vocabulary. However, it is essential for all instructors to use this strategy correctly.

To implement CLIL, teachers need to make solid content and language objectives for each lesson and base instruction on these target objectives with meaningful activities, which involve the use of language to accomplish a project or task (Graham et al., 2018). As both content and language objectives are used to provide opportunities to learn and use English to develop understanding of content material ESL and content teachers must collaborate effectively to develop lessons in which language and content objectives compliment and support one another. The difficulty of CLIL lies in the lack of effective collaboration between content and language teachers that leaves language teachers in a place of following content teachers rather than working together with them to plan and deliver lessons. When content and language

teachers fail to collaborate effectively the lack of deep knowledge of content material and objectives makes it difficult for ESL teachers to match language objectives to content objectives being taught, therefore removing the purpose of CLIL.

Clear Targeted Purposeful Content and Language Objectives

Clear and targeted purposeful content and language objectives are SMART objectives; they are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound. These objectives clearly and specifically describe what students will be able to do by the end of a lesson or unit, they include specific criteria for mastery, they are possible for pupils to complete on time, and they express when learners are expected to have mastered them (Aghera et al., 2018). Educators are taught to write SMART objectives during teacher preparation programs, are tested on their ability to apply them during the certification process via edTPA testing, and are expected to practice using them under the current CCSS. Instructors can use the same objective for a whole class with modifications for ELLs or students with special needs as needed.

Clear and targeted objectives help teachers by clarifying what students should know understand and do by the end of each lesson, effectively targeting instruction on material that ensures students demonstrate and apply understanding of material according to lesson design (Aghera et al., 2018)). They help students by making clear and precise what they will know understand and do by the end of the lesson, enabling them to determine if they are successfully learning what instructors intend (Simms & Marzano, 2019). Making content and language objectives explicit takes the guessing out of learning so pupils can easily determine whether they have mastered key content and skills. When students know exactly what they should understand and do, they are more encouraged to actively participate in making meaning of content material

and seek understanding when they know they lack knowledge of key concepts or objectives (Aghera et al., 2018).

Teachers can most easily provide clear and targeted objectives by following the SMART model and using the principles backward design to organize and plan lessons and units. The understanding by design method is created around focusing lessons on what students should know understand and do at the end of a unit (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Educators who follow this philosophy begin unit planning by determining how students will show mastery of key content standards represented in the unit and then design lessons that guide students towards demonstrating this mastery. Once lesson objectives are determined, teachers show student versions that the pupils will easily understand during each lesson. Instructors can ask students to copy these objectives into their notebooks each lesson and evaluate their understanding and work quality at the end of each lesson (Simms & Marzano, 2019). Students who are taught in classes that use this procedure report better knowledge of what they are expected to master and are much more likely to ask purposeful questions related to content material when they realize they lack understanding about instruction or lesson details.

Academic Vocabulary Instruction

Academic vocabulary is any vocabulary encountered in an academic context. Academic vocabulary is the language of DSS that is not used in everyday conversation. Academic vocabulary is described as having three tiers; tier 1 words includes high-frequency words commonly found in text such as nouns, verbs, and sight words; tier 2 words are usually high-frequency academic vocabulary words that important for reading comprehension across the curriculum and are more likely to be found in text than speech; tier 3 words are low-frequency domain-specific vocabulary words that are found only in a specific subject and are key to

understanding new concepts in CAI (Wei, 2021). Teachers should provide explicit instruction on tier 2 and 3 vocabulary words to ensure all students can understand and participate in lessons. As tier 2 and 3 words are only found in content area texts, teaching academic vocabulary is an essential component of content area instruction that determines students' ability to understand discipline specific texts and passages (Wei, 2021).

A major factor in content learning ability is understanding of academic vocabulary presented in each discipline (Lou, 2020). Academic vocabulary is essential for developing successful readers. Scholars write that academic vocabulary development has a strong relationship to reading comprehension of individuals and a pivotal role in the ability to analyze text (Ardasheva et al., 2016). Academic vocabulary is essential for ELLs to use language and participation in activities and in content areas, but they cannot access it without support from instructors. ELLs' development of content area language is better facilitated when an expert within the context of the disciplines supports development of language functions (de la Garza & Harris, 2016). Academic vocabulary is a major dividing factor between ESLs and higher education. As the number of noncomprehensible words increases in text the ability of the reader to comprehend its message decreases; therefore, it is pivotal for instructors to make sure students have access to language supports and methods of understanding academic vocabulary presented in the text (Ardasheva et al., 2016).

Academic vocabulary should be taught both explicitly and implicitly (Wei, 2021). Explicit instruction should include teaching specific vocabulary words needed to understand material presented in each lesson; providing instruction on methods of determining word meanings; and morphology instruction that helps students know how to use prefixes, suffixes, and word parts to determine the meaning of new vocabulary words. Implicit instruction includes

providing tasks and learning activities that require students to use academic vocabulary and content material in meaningful ways (de la Garza & Harris, 2016). Students learn new words through purposeful discussions and by working on projects in cooperative learning groups as they discuss how to solve problems or respond to material presented.

Reading Comprehension Instruction

Reading comprehension strategies are methods used to monitor reading and understand the message and key features of a text. Varying strategies used by different disciplines and text types include the use of context clues, word attack, locating key words, making predictions, using graphic organizers, inferring meaning, monitoring understanding, rereading, summarizing, paraphrasing, and making text connections (Kopic, 2018). Context clues and word attack are strategies for understanding vocabulary words. Key words are useful for answering comprehension questions or determining important information and graphic organizers are used to organize key details mentioned in the text. Making predictions helps readers maintain engagement, whereas monitoring understanding and rereading are metacognitive strategies to guide readers in making pace changes in reading or reviewing information to help readers self-monitor comprehension. Summarizing is used to recall key details and demonstrate comprehension and paraphrasing is similar and making text connections makes the reading more meaningful allowing for deeper comprehension. Each discipline requires different strategies for comprehension; therefore, CAIs should include instruction on DS reading strategies in daily lessons (Lou, 2020).

As described above, each discipline requires learners to use different ways of understanding text because the content is presented in unique ways with different kinds of material reported in each discipline. Thus, instructors in each discipline should explain clearly

what strategies are needed to understand the content material and figures presented (Clark et al., 2021). Many CAIs expect students to be taught reading comprehension strategies needed to understand content material in elementary school but national test scores reveal students have no idea how to read to learn; only 35% of all fourth-grade and 33% of eighth-grade students perform at or above proficiency in reading comprehension skills according to the NAEP (2019). Based on these results it is clear that most middle school students lack reading comprehension strategies needed to understand grade-level content material, which is needed to prepare for higher education and participate actively in activities related to content area learning. Therefore, CAIs need to devote more instructional time to teaching content area reading strategies (Toste et al., 2018).

There are many methods of teaching students content area reading strategies but the most effective ones include explicit instruction of each strategy, modeling reading comprehension strategies, preteaching target vocabulary words including morphology, accessing background knowledge, teaching metacognitive strategies to monitor comprehension, and strategies for making connections to the text (Agency, 2020; Wei, 2021). Explicit instruction of reading strategies may include how to read figures that appear in content area texts and describing the reading strategy useful for a discipline text such as summarizing or paraphrasing passages. While explaining the strategy, the teacher should demonstrate it so that students can visualize how it works and ask pupils to practice using it (Wei, 2021). When preparing students to read any DSS passage, teachers should determine which words students will not know and preteach them to ensure all of them understand the text. As described above, vocabulary is pivotal for reading comprehension and students who encounter too many new words when reading will struggle to determine their meanings (Ardasheva et al., 2016). For the same reasons, accessing

background knowledge is also an important step in reading comprehension instructors should not miss, and it is done by determining prior knowledge and filling in any essential gaps (Ferrari et al., 2021). Metacognition is used to monitor reading comprehension and determine when to slow one's reading pace or reread a passage. Teachers support students to develop this strategy by explicitly teaching and modeling it and then guiding students to use the strategy as they read content area passages (Agency, 2020). Although many of these strategies may be taught in ELA classes, it is impossible for one instructor to help students understand how to read every vocabulary word and determine what will appear texts specific to each discipline (Toste et al., 2018).

Differentiation of Instruction

Differentiation of instruction is a method of making instruction of any content or skill accessible to all learners through various assessments, scaffolding, and modification techniques. DI was developed by Tomlinson who has written much material advising teachers how and why they should take up the practice, but many of the methods she describes in her writing are strategies good teachers use in the classroom. Just as teachers in one-room schoolhouses relied on strategies of differentiation to meet various needs presented by pupils of multiple ages, grade and ability levels, teachers today have a similar need to find ways of helping learners of multiple ability and interest levels who present with unique needs to cooperate as a learning community and meet lesson objectives and state standards. Some may misunderstand DI as simply giving assignment choices and leveling assignments and content material to the ability levels presented in the class. Therefore, teachers need training and PD to implement these teaching methods properly to benefit of all learners.

DI is essential for ensuring all learners can access and understand CAI. Multiple studies have shown that DI is effective in improving performance of struggling learners. DI is pivotal for ELLs who lack vocabulary cultural awareness and background knowledge to understand content instruction with support. Teachers who provide effective DI for all learners experience increased engagement from students who better understand content, know expectations, and feel supported to use their strengths to participate in learning activities (Tomlinson, 2017). Research shows that DI benefits ELLs with a better learning outcome, increased engagement and motivation, a greater sense of self-awareness and responsibility, and improved collaboration skills (Komang Arie Suwastini, 2021). In a study, Magableh and Abdullah (2021) compared DI and one-size-fits-all instruction and found that DI is effective in improving reading comprehension achievement of secondary stage students. Swanson et al. (2020) wrote that evidence shows it is critical for instructors to properly DI to educate students effectively with varying achievement and learning needs. DI was found to be effective in improving the achievement of both low and high achievers in a mixed ability classroom (Kotob & Ali Abadi, 2019). Puzio et al. (2020) found that when teachers are supported to use DI effectively, students have significantly higher achievement scores. They also described that there are many ways of differentiating instruction but there is little information available to guide educators through the decision-making process of applying the practice of DI effectively and purposefully.

There are many strategies that can be used to deliver DI but they revolve on establishing clear learning objectives and assessing students regularly to determine needs and supports that should be used to scaffold learners to learn lesson objectives. Some may need more steps than others but through DI all students will make progress and meet the goals at their own pace. Some useful scaffolding strategies may include the use of graphic organizers, visuals, and

modeling; providing audio texts to struggling readers; using manipulatives; and gap filling exercises. The key for effective differentiation of instruction is to gather assessment data continually throughout daily learning activities and modifying instruction based on needs and interests presented (Tomlinson, 2017). This method requires experience, strategizing, flexibility, logical analysis, and effective planning on the part of instructors who need to recognize when students need modifications or supports, which ones are most effective for given situations, and how best they can be used to help struggling learners achieve lesson objectives (Mandel Morrow & Kunz, 2016). Without clear objectives, teachers are more likely to fall back on levelling assignments and flexible choices instead of properly scaffolding and supporting students to improve their ability to master lesson and unit goals (Tomlinson, 2017).

Sheltered Instruction

SI is an instructional model in which grade level content is taught in strategic ways that make subject matter comprehensible while promoting English language development at the same time, similar to CLIL. The term shelter comes from modifying CAI so that ELLs can understand the content, essentially scaffolding students to access and apply the content and knowledge of their DSS texts and materials (Buxton & Caswell, 2020). Teachers simultaneously focus on both linguistic and subject area instruction using techniques to teach content while also developing the language skills of learners. The purpose of SI is to make content comprehensible for students while developing academic language proficiency through access to the core curriculum, which gives ELLs a greater variety of opportunities to use the English language to acquire content knowledge in dynamic ways (Desjardins, 2020).

Schools often fail to provide appropriate and accessible CAI to ELLs. In many schools, ELLs who typically struggle with CAI are provided watered down or below grade-level content

that matches their reading or language level rather than scaffolding the learners to understand material provided in grade level classes (Desjardins, 2020). Schools also have a hidden curriculum that highlights cultural affects embedded in how students should behave and display knowledge or understand that ELLs are unaccustomed to (Linares, 2021). ELLs clearly need support to engage in academic work, which SI provides by combining language and content instruction with supports for ELLs to foster language development and academic achievement in content areas (Desjardins, 2020). This approach provides students access to academic subject matter while learning a second language. Scaffolding strategies used in SI are excellent for building content knowledge comprehension and thinking skills of all learners by teaching skills that are helpful in developing secondary state reading skills and promoting the ability to communicate in the target language (Elsayed, 2018).

Teachers need training and professional development to affectively teach SI because without understanding scaffolding strategies and the needs of language learners, teachers often provide watered down curriculum with instruction that is only focused on language or limited instructional rigor and expectations of students (Desjardins, 2020). This lack of teacher preparation has led some scholars to doubt the effectiveness of SI, but the teaching method produces powerful results when correctly implemented. Similar to CLIL, teachers need to create sound content and language objectives that compliment and support one another to help ELLs with grade-level content. Instructors should provide scaffolds to language learners, such as content in their L1, modeling of objectives tasks and word usage, and explicit instruction of key concepts and skills such as reading comprehension and note-taking strategies (Elsayed, 2018). It is also essential that instructors provide challenging tasks that require learners to use language as they collaborate with one another to solve problems and accomplish a goal (Linares, 2021).

Background Knowledge

Background knowledge is the information needed to understand a text or passage, which may include historical happenings and discipline specific concepts related to the subject matter (Lou, 2020). Each subject has a sequential grade-level curriculum that builds upon itself so there will be a certain level of knowledge one is expected to have built before reading text or material without which it is difficult to access (Wei, 2021). For example, before reading about the process of DNA replication in biology, a student should already know certain words and concepts such as DNA, RNA, replication, tRNA, mRNA, cytoplasmic reticulum, and ribosome.

As mentioned above, background knowledge is the information related to a passage or text that is essential to know before reading to enhance comprehension of the material. Thus, without this knowledge, readers will struggle to comprehend the text presented (Wei, 2021). ELLs often struggle to understand material and instruction presented in content area classes because they lack the background knowledge (Simms & Marzano, 2019). They were never taught the information or have forgotten it. As the educational system has designed a cyclical and systematic system of delivering grade level content that builds upon instruction given in previous years, CAIs typically assume all students, including ELLs, have a certain amount of prior knowledge about grade-level material. However, preassessments will show that many students, including ELLs and non-ELLs, are missing essential information needed to access the content or material presented. Instead of continuing to fail students through these misconceptions, CAIs should regularly take the steps to ensure everyone has the same background knowledge before presenting their instruction (Gunduzalp, 2021).

Teachers access students' background knowledge through various assessments and questioning techniques. It is important to use varied methods to avoid boredom with the strategy

and increase engagement or meaningfulness of the activity. These methods may include tasks such as surveying students, asking students to draw something, questioning students on their knowledge, short multiple-choice question tests, making concept or mind maps, interviewing students, debating a topic with students, and asking pupils to demonstrate understanding (Gunduzalp, 2021). Once instructors determine what gaps learners have in knowledge about a typical subject they can build the essential background knowledge needed to clearly understand the lesson contents. Determining prior knowledge and building background knowledge prior to instruction not only ensures all students have the chance to learn from the lesson but also allows increased review and repetition of essential content needed to support long term memory storage of the material (Wei, 2021).

Best Practices for Teaching ELLs in DSS

Each of the ESL and CAL strategies discussed above have been proven effective in research, but some have been more successful in improving the literacy of students. Among these strategies, SI, SGI, reading comprehension instruction, DI, and building background knowledge have proven the most successful in research. Sheltered instruction and direct instruction have been proven especially successful in improving reading skills of students with dyslexia and struggling readers because of the systematic, step by step approach of providing interactive, assistive instruction according to the learning needs of the students involved (Elsayed, 2018; Rassaei, 2017). The focus on systematic development breaks reading down into sizable chunks that pupils can develop in small group instruction (Rassaei, 2017). These programs are effective not only for struggling readers, but throughout general education, as structured literacy programs support the reading acquisition of all students (Hamman, 2018).

Research has shown DI to be more effective than most other teaching strategies. The reason is that using this method allows instructors to tailor instruction according to students' needs and allows students to work at their own pace, which is the zenith of guiding learners through their ZPD (Silalahi, 2019). Some educators have negative feelings about DI because of its association with lectures. However, this strategy is not meant to be used in the manner of a lecture, but rather as a way of efficiently and effectively differentiating instruction, and when used correctly, it has been found to be especially effective.

Peer assisted instruction (PAI) has been demonstrated to improve the literacy and fluency of struggling readers. Many instructors prefer this approach because of its versatility in pairing higher- and lower-level students together. Higher-level students benefit from having the chance to teach and apply their knowledge while lower-level learners have more chances to practice and enhance reading skills as well as expressing and communicating ideas than during regular instruction (Pyle et al., 2017). Therefore, PAI is the epitome of involving peers to scaffold one another through their perspective ZPDs to higher reading levels (Silalahi, 2019; Vygotsky, 1978). Although each of these strategies has been successful in improving reading skills, not all of these instructional methods are suitable or beneficial for ELLs.

Effectiveness of Best Practice Strategies in Improving ELL Literacy

The most effective strategies in guiding literacy skills of ELL students are those that include ELLs in concept-based CAI and involve SGI in designing tasks and lessons using the ZPD and DI according to the needs interests abilities and readiness represented by individuals throughout each class. These strategies included practices of SI, DI, PALS, and other small group teaching strategies such as PBL, jigsaw groups, guided reading, and literature circles. It may take training expertise and guidance from experienced teachers and administration

knowledgeable in these teaching strategies, but it is possible for all teachers to provide the scaffolding and DI needed to support ELLs in developing literacy skills in CAI.

As it has been argued above, including ELLs in CAI is essential for the development of academic and DSS skills because doing so exposes ELLs to the content and language of DSS and allows them to develop strategies for understanding content area texts they will be deprived of if pulled out of these classes. ELA and literacy instruction can assist ELLs to develop foundational reading comprehension skills and tier 1 academic vocabulary but the instructors lack the expertise in DSS knowledge to teach essential concepts and the language needed to understand content area instructions and material. Because so much DSS information is included in content area texts, relying on ELA or ESL instructors to teach CAL skills will always leave gaps in the understanding of content area instructions for both ELLs and non-ELLs, as seen from the results of NAEP testing for more than 30 years. Nationwide, under 50% of students have been able to score at or above proficiency level in reading scores because of the way CAL is handled in upper elementary and secondary education. When CAIs are trained in effective scaffolding and DI strategies such as clear objectives SI, and SGI, all students, including ELLs, will perform better in DSS and state and national reading achievement tests, effectively closing the gap in achievement between Latino and White non-ELLs.

Small Group Verses Whole Group Instruction

Dividing students into small groups is a more effective way of meeting the needs of every learner, as the instructor is able to guide students according to their needs and readiness and provide more opportunities for interaction between students and instructors. Working in small groups also allows more time for ELLs to interact with other learners and develop their language abilities (Hidayati & Niati, 2019). While learners are working with instructors in small groups,

other pupils may work on taking notes, completing other assignments and centers or group projects, depending on the needs of the instructor and the content of the course.

SIG is essential in providing balanced literacy instruction to ELLs and other struggling readers according to the needs of each individual. Evidence shows that the SIG is the most efficient, effective instructional strategy in improving the literacy of ELLs and struggling readers (Richards-Tutor et al., 2016). However, most secondary education programs predominantly focus on whole-class instruction of students during mainstream classes, employing sheltered literacy strategies when seeking to make content more accessible to ELLs (Cowen, 2016). Students struggling to read will find little benefit from this whole-class approach, especially ELLs who generally lack specific vocabulary needed to access the information being discussed (Wei, 2021). With SIG, teachers have a greater chance to involve social interaction and scaffolding needed to push ELLs through their ZPD to develop strong content area reading and literacy skills (Hidayati & Niati, 2019)

SIG is more effective than WGI in meeting the needs of all learners as it allows teachers to use DI to guide students according to their ZPD, and students have more opportunities for interaction with other classmates and instructors. WGI is a unilateral approach that is effective when used to teach knowledge and skills that all learners need to know or develop, but is not conducive to dealing with strengths and weaknesses that are expressed by unique individuals or groups of learners. If WGI becomes the main form of instruction, pupils will continue to have gaps in understanding or abilities. Instructors who use WGI as their main form of instruction typically teach middle level learners, responding to the needs expressed by the majority of learners and leave students with special needs and advanced level learners behind. Thus, using WGI is not an effective way to support ELLs in developing CAL skills. The best way to help as

many students as possible to reach their full potential is to use SGI to support and guide the development of all learners.

Effective Small Group Instruction Strategies

PALS, jigsaw reading groups, and cooperative learning groups are all instructional techniques that focus on dividing students into small groups to work on assignments or reading tasks. Each of these teaching strategies have been proven effective in assisting ELLs to improve reading comprehension and communication skills, as described above. PALS has been proven effective in helping struggling readers, including ELLs to improve reading skills. Learners are often paired with others who speak the same language to facilitate effective communication (Pyle et al., 2017). Jigsaw groups are effective in involving ELLs in using academic language to engage in discussions related to DS concepts. The practice boosts the motivation in students by including them in an active learning environment (Nurbianta & Dahlia, 2018). Incorporating jigsaw groups into reading instruction has been demonstrated to be effective in improving students' reading comprehension (Garcia, 2022). Cooperative learning groups are also effective in similar ways to PALs and jigsaw groups, as they provide opportunities for ELLs to discuss deep concepts and problems in the English language (Seyhan, 2021).

Each of these points means that SGI strategies such as PALs, jigsaw groups, and cooperative learning groups are effective methods of scaffolding readers to develop reading and literacy skills. However, research in the effectiveness of SGI in improving CAL strategies for middle school students and ELLs is lacking. Therefore, more research should be conducted on the effectiveness of small group instruction in supporting ELLs to build knowledge and skills needed to go through the ZPD in content areas (Bakhoda & Shabani, 2017; Hidayati & Niati,

2019). Instructors should provide more DI to the entire class to support and scaffold ELLs through this process when providing CAI.

Closing the Achievement Gap in Public Schools

The United States has notably been working to improve the performance of minority and ELL students to lower the achievement gap in reading and math scores between affluent White students and their less advantaged counterparts. However, the results of the NAEP, STAAR, Florida Standards Assessment for ELA, and TCAP reading achievement tests as well as higher education enrolment statistics continue to reveal a large achievement gap in the performance of Hispanic and White students on CAL and college readiness standards. Although charter public schools are claimed to outperform traditional public schools in reading and college readiness standards, results from national and state assessments reveal a different trend. The results from the FL, TX, and TN state English/reading exams are a more significant measure of effectiveness of ELL instruction than the TELPAS or WIDA exam because the state assessments provide a measure of overall literacy skills. In contrast, whereas the TELPAS and WIDA tests are specifically developed as a measure of English proficiency that are used to determine the readiness of MS and HS ELLs to be placed into content area classes. As described above, the English proficiency needed to pass the TELPAS or WIDA assessment is completely different from that of CALP (Cummins, 2016).

Traditional Public-School Performance

For several decades, there has been a large statistical difference between the percentage of Latino students and White students enrolling in higher education. In the 1980s, 4% of students enrolled in four-year public universities were Hispanic. This proportion rose to 6% in the 1990s, 10% in the 2000s, 14% in the 2010s, and recently the enrollment rose to 20% (Mora,

2022). These statistics are, in part, due to the population increase of Latinos and, in part, due to the efforts of the no child left behind campaign in lowering the achievement gap between Hispanics and White students. However, the work is far from over, as Hispanic students continue to fall far behind White students' higher education rankings. Whereas 76% of Caucasian students enroll in four-year institutions, only 65% of Latino students are enrolling. Although these statistics show a marked increase in enrollment for Hispanics, most of these students are attending less selective four-year institutions (Hanson, 2022).

NAEP reading scores show that Texas performs worse compared to at least half of the United States in lowering the achievement gap in reading than others. The results for eighth-grade reading tests show that Texas has a 16-point difference in scores between Hispanic and White students, compared to a 15-point difference in Florida, a 13-point difference in Tennessee, and 19-point difference in California (NAEP, 2022). According to the results from the nation's report card (2022), the state of Texas was ranked 24th, Florida 39th, California 42nd, and Tennessee 38th in eighth-grade reading scores on the NAEP test. Giannarelli et al. (2020) adjusted these rankings for poverty and other student characteristics, notably being listed as a special needs student or an ELL, which placed each of these states much higher in their ranking. However, the fact that an organization would seek to use such adjustments to explain gaps in achievement serves to condemn its efforts towards lowering the achievement gap rather than redeem it. As the states of California and Texas include the largest two percentages of ELLs nationwide, the adjustments dictated above demonstrate that instructors lack the ability to use strategies such as DI and scaffolding serve the needs of these less advantaged learners.

Charter Public-School Performance

The results on the FL, TX, TN and CA state tests are similar for charter public schools (CPS) and TPS overall; however, many CPS have a different demographic that exemplifies a greater ability to support African American students, Hispanic students, and those who come from lower income communities (Petrilli & Griffith, 2022). The results from TPS demonstrated a greater gap in performance of these minority groups from affluent White students than those of CPS, which demonstrates that students attending charter schools receive instruction more suited to their needs and interests. CPS also send a greater number of students to higher education institutions as a whole than TPS (Singleton, 2019).

CPS report a greater percentage of attendance of higher education institutions by graduates and increased chances for lower income and minority students to take advanced placement and college preparation classes than TPS. According to research, 4% more graduates from CPS than TPS overall attend higher education institutions (Marcus, 2021; Petrilli & Griffith, 2022). Given that CPS have a larger population of Hispanic students and African Americans than TPS and several of them have a 100% Hispanic population, this greater percentage is quite statistically different in pointing to the superior ability of CPS in preparing minority students for higher education, therefore closing the achievement gap more successfully than TPS.

Summary

Research findings demonstrate that most students in public schools are largely underserved by an education system that fails to prepare teachers to provide literacy instruction specific to one's content area (Cataldi et al., 2017). According to research on discipline specific literacy instruction, content area teachers typically expect all literacy instruction to be provided by ELA instructors and are seemingly ignorant of the problems secondary students face in

transitioning from fifth grade academic and literacy expectations to that of middle school content areas. Based on the results of standardized testing in fourth- and sixth-grade reading, elementary schools have yet to prepare students with the discipline-specific literacy strategies needed to be competent in understanding content area texts (Garza-Reyna, 2019). Further future research is needed to uncover effective content area literacy strategies for building literacy in ELLs and lead to better content area literacy instruction for all students, including ELL and non-ELL. The statistically low percentage of Latino students attending higher education institutions (McFarland et al., 2020), compared with the success rate some charter schools in Texas and California, such as IDEA public schools, reveal the need for further studies on how these institutions achieve such success (IDEA, 2021). Therefore, in this study, I investigated the perspectives of middle school content area instructors in ELL heavy districts on useful teaching strategies for building discipline specific literacy skills in ELLs.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of middle school CAIs who teach ELLs in public schools in ELL heavy districts. I examined these perceptions using Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the ZPD in accordance with the theoretical framework and my philosophical assumptions. In this chapter, after examining my background and bias as a researcher, I will describe the research site and participants in detail and the procedures for gaining approval to conduct the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the school district, and the procedures for data collection and analysis. I will conclude the chapter with an explanation of how I addressed trustworthiness and ethical considerations and a summary of the study.

Research Design

This was a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study. A qualitative design was useful for this study for several reasons. My personal bias affected the validity of an empirical design. In addition, qualitative research was a good fit for my personality. I was interested in understanding the perspectives of discipline specific instructors on the problem as well as their methodology behind improving the literacy of ELLs, and I wanted to have deeper interactions with the participants to enhance an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

A phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study because I was interested in developing an in depth understanding of the phenomenon of study, which was the perceptions of middle school DSIs in ELL-heavy districts toward literacy instruction for ELLs.

Phenomenological designs seek to understand the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by participants (Van Manen, 2014). I used phenomenology, the science of human consciousness

and perceptions (Van Manen, 2014) in this study to understand the perceptions of middle school CAIs in ELL-heavy districts toward teaching ELLs. Moustakas (1994) wrote that Husserl is known for the development of phenomenology, which he based on the Brentano's philosophy of intentionality, or the directness of one's consciousness toward an object. Through Husserl's reflections and research, he eventually came to the conclusion that a connection between the real and abstract is made by a researcher's act of including the human experience and a person's view on the experience, which works to produce a person's perception of an experience that can vary from what truly exists (Moustakas, 1994).

A transcendental phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study because it required me to bracket out my biases, which was necessary for me to conceptualize fully the attitudes of participants toward DSI of ELLs (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To obtain the true conceptualization of the teachers and the phenomenon, I needed to approach the research with an open mind because the entire purpose of my study was focused on the understanding that I could prepare myself to observe the phenomenon in its purity with an open, receptive mind, as Van Manen (2014) explained. Lacking any relationship with research participants, I was in a position to develop a pure perspective of the participants' experiences and understandings of the phenomenon by engaging in the process of epoching or bracketing out (Moustakas, 1994) my biases as needed.

Research Questions

This study of how content area teachers perceive CAL instruction for ELLs was guided by the following research questions:

Central Research Question

How do middle school content area teachers in public schools in ELL heavy districts describe their experiences teaching ELLs?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of ESL teachers in public schools in ELL heavy districts who cooperate with content area teachers to provide content area instruction to ELLs?

Sub-Question Two

What are the experiences of content area teachers in public schools in ELL heavy districts who work with ESL teachers to support the needs of ELL students in their classrooms?

Sub-Question Three

How do content area teachers in public schools in ELL heavy districts who have taught ELLs in public schools and currently teach ELLs compare the effectiveness of instruction and its effects on ELL achievement?

Setting and Participants

The setting for this study was middle schools from six ESL-heavy districts in the southern United States that have a population of at least twice the number of ELLs than the rest of the state. Duval public schools in Jacksonville FL have 15% ELLs compared to 7% in the state of Florida. The state of Texas has a 20% ELL population compared to 46% of students in Dallas ISD and 72% of students in Austin ISD. California used to have the largest population by state of ELLs but presently it is down to 19%, just under Texas (Uro & Lai, 2019). Participants were purposefully selected from CAIs teaching at least three ELLs in at least one of their classrooms. In this section, I will articulate the criteria used for selecting the site and the study participants in detail.

Site

The research study was conducted on three to five middle schools in ELL-heavy states that have a population of at least 20% ELLs and include these students in CAI. The research was done in ELL-heavy districts because these locations have the largest populations of ELLs in the United States as well as the most Latina/os by population, which are the largest group of ELLs in the United States, according to the department of education (Petrilli & Griffith, 2022). Involving public school teachers with experience teaching in charter schools was an essential contribution to the study because charter schools have statistically outperformed TPS in preparing students to attend higher education institutions for the past decade (Marcus, 2021; Paredes, 2019; Petrilli & Griffith, 2022). These statistics suggest that charter schools experience remarkable success in preparing ELLs academically for higher education compared to that of traditional public schools. Based on these research observations, the setting of middle schools in ELL heavy districts was important for the research design because multiple authors have indicated that while the number of ELLs is increasing, few middle school teachers in proportion are prepared for teaching these students (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; McFarland et al., 2020).

To locate the research site, I investigated middle schools and school districts in ELL-heavy areas including Jacksonville FL, Dallas TX, Austin TX, Memphis TN, and CA first to find locations that have the largest percentages of ELLs via online searches and calling schools as needed. From this research, I generated a list of schools that met the requirements of the study. From this list, I downloaded staff directories and used them to locate possible participants at each site. I then emailed teachers in each district who fit the qualification for the study to obtain consent and confirm eligibility.

Participants

Participants included 10 CAIs at these sites selected from a pool of qualified candidates

who fit the requirements of the research design and volunteered for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Five middle school districts were included in the study; therefore, the focus groups included three to five members based on availability for interviews. The sampling of participants was purposeful because the research design included a specific requirement that participants had to be from a school district with a statistically large population of ELLs compared to state majorities. Candidates needed to be experienced CAIs currently providing discipline specific instruction to ELLs, with at least three ELLs in one of their classes. I used a convenience sample because in phenomenological studies, only participants who have experienced the phenomenon of study can be used. Therefore, a purposeful convenience sample was appropriate to ensure participants fulfilled the requirements of the research design (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). The CAI instructors could be of any age as long as they met the requirements of the study, as mentioned above.

To locate these participants, I sent an invitation email to all the experienced CAI at each site that had at least three ELLs in their classroom. In this email, I explained that I preferred a mixture of candidates who have and have not had experience teaching ELLs. Because of the research design, it was necessary for me to obtain perceptions of experienced CAIs because research demonstrates that the vast majority of middle school instructors prefer whole-group instruction strategies and resist providing instruction on discipline specific literacy strategies (Ardasheva et al., 2019; Graham, 2017). Thus, I had to determine whether these preferences are based on lack of experience or understanding of effective teaching methods to promote literacy or other issues, such as lack of appropriate PD or academic requirements of one's institution. It was also necessary for me to use a random sampling of participants from the staff recommendations to ensure that the results of the study relating to perceptions of teaching ELLs

were valid and credible. As little research has been completed on the relationship between ZPD and teaching content area instruction to ELLs, choosing only highly qualified participants with experience teaching DSL to ELLs may have undermined the results by producing candidates with bias towards a particular teaching method (Moustakas, 1994). Three to four participants from each site volunteered by responding to my email eliciting participation in the study, which also meant no survey was needed for this study. I used pseudonyms rather than the names of participants and specific districts in which the study was conducted to protect the privacy of all participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Researcher Positionality

In this section, I will articulate my research paradigm and the philosophical assumptions underpinning my research study. As a social constructivist, I am a firm believer in the use of differentiation of instruction to scaffold learners in ZPD to help ELLs perform well in CAI classes. I have used my understanding of differentiation and a constructivist design of PBL to engage ELLs in my classroom for the past decade.

Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism, which is linked closely with the sociocultural learning theory, posits that learning is a social process through which students collaborate in building knowledge and understandings (Vygotsky, 1974). As Goodwin (2016) wrote, learners will construct their own understanding no matter how instruction is presented, even when lecture are used. Effective content area instructors model the reading comprehension and literacy strategies they want learners to construct through both explicit and implicit instruction (Stockard et al., 2018). Students who actively collaborate to construct their understanding of concepts and reading texts are better able to remember and recall critical information than those who are taught by lecturing

(Stockard et al., 2018).

My choice of a qualitative phenomenological study was based on its methodological assumptions, as identified by Creswell and Poth (2017). The findings from previous research studies on improving the literacy of struggling readers and ELLs shaped the framework of this study. Research indicates that ELLs benefit from SGI and differentiation of instruction, which are strategies developed based on reading and learning theories of Vygotsky (1979) and Tomlinson (2014), who believed that learning takes place when students are scaffolded to higher levels of learning and development. My studies on teaching special education and TESOL as well as my experience teaching PBL to ELLs in China have largely shaped the development of this study.

Philosophical Assumptions

Based on the theoretical background of social constructivism, my philosophical assumptions posit that when content area teachers use effective strategies to scaffold ELLs in working with content area texts, these students can perform well in discipline-specific subjects, which will in turn lower the achievement gap that prevails between ELLs and their White affluent counterparts (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008; Garza-Reyna, 2019; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). As a social constructivist, interpretive meanings derived from understanding of how students learn and construct knowledge in a social environment (Vygotsky, 1978) through collaboration with peers and experts align with the teaching methods I regularly use in the classroom. Understanding the essence of the perceptions of middle school CAT towards literacy instruction for ELLs is paramount to educational reform and improvements in content area instruction of ELLs in traditional public schools.

Ontological Assumption

As an ESL teacher-researcher who embodies a biblical world view, I firmly believe that every child deserves equal access to modern educational facilities with current versions of texts and learning resources as well as qualified instructors who are prepared to use research-based teaching strategies that provide effective CAL. This view is founded in scripture which states that all mankind are created equal (Ephesians 5:21) and that education is an essential part of life, which helps people to “correctly divide the Word of truth” (2nd Timothy 2:15). In addition, the U.S. Declaration of Independence states that everyone is created equal and has God-given rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, which requires access to good education (Beveridge, 1946; Jefferson, 1997). Therefore, the vast gap in performance between charter and traditional PS in total Texas should not be as prevalent as it continues to be. Rather than expecting all middle school students to have mastered CAL strategies or relying on ELA teachers for literacy instruction, research demonstrates that differentiating instruction to scaffold learners using their ZPD is an effective way of guiding them to perform well in DSS (Billings & Walqui, 2017). As the human instrument, my position in this research study was to provide unbiased, detailed descriptions of the perspectives of middle school CAIs on teaching CAL to ELLs. Understanding these perceptions allowed me to gain insight into effective CAL strategies and ways to improve CAI in TPS.

Epistemological Assumption

In conducting a transcendental phenomenological study, I had to bracket out personal bias to revisit the phenomena “from the vantage point of pure transcendental ego” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 29). As the human instrument through which all collected data were analyzed and interpreted, I set aside my individual beliefs, thoughts, and preconceived judgments on strategies for providing content area literacy instruction to ELLs and the prevailing achievement gap to

objectively illuminate and clarify the perceptions of participants within the phenomenon. I sought to effectively Epoche out my bias so that I could arrive at the purest textural synthesis of the meaning and essence of the phenomenon possible (Van Manen, 2014).

Axiological Assumption

Presently I am a middle school English teacher in China with 8 years of experience teaching ESL, ELA, and science to ELLs. I have also spent considerable time studying strategies to instruct ELLs in the United States and abroad. This experience has instilled within me a passion for lowering the achievement gap that exists between ELLs and affluent Caucasian students. Considering the recently adopted CCSS and mandates to include ELLs in content area classes to encourage schools to provide effective academic and literacy instruction to ELLs, the focus on content area literacy instruction has become necessary for 21st-century students (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Marsh, 2018). My personal teaching and research background undergirded the assumptions that all learners deserve to receive high-quality content area instruction at the appropriate level and that ELLs can succeed in content area classes if teachers effectively scaffold these learners to read and understand content area texts.

As a social constructivist ESOL instructor, my approach to providing CAI to ELLs involves the use of differentiation of instruction and a collaborative PBL environment that requires collaboration in research and interactive group work among learners. This teaching methodology has fostered my studies in learning and understanding of English and teaching ELLs for the past decade. Active learning environments encourage students to use vocabulary, reading comprehension, speaking, listening, and writing skills to complete activities and research projects, using teaching strategies and assignments suited to the needs of learners within my classroom. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of ZPD is built from the sociocultural learning theory,

which posits that students learn best in a social environment in which learners interact with one another and the instructor. I have found that the sociocultural learning theory and differentiation of instruction provide innovative, effective approaches to encourage learners to collaborate and assist one another in completing assignments. With these theoretical paradigms in mind, I intended to give voice to the perceptions of discipline specific instructors towards teaching ELLs through a social constructivist framework.

Researcher's Role

My role in this study was to be an unbiased recorder of responses given by participants to questions on experience and perceptions of teaching ELLs (Van Manen, 2014). I did not have any relationship with participants outside the study and met with them for the sole purpose of gathering data. As the researcher performing a transcendental phenomenology, I needed to remain unbiased throughout the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to produce results that were not affected or engineered by my perceptions of prior experiences (Moustakas, 1994). During data collection and analyses, I protected the privacy and confidentiality of participants using pseudonyms, by reminding focus group members not to disclose information shared during meetings, and by keeping any data storage encrypted with a plan to destroy the information after 3 years following completion of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I assured participants that data would be kept strictly confidential, and that the privacy of their information would be protected using encrypted passwords on software in which data is kept and using pseudonyms for the sites and each participant of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994).

As a researcher and teacher of ELLs, I have developed substantial bias towards the academic situation of ELLs and effective strategies for providing these students with content

area literacy skills they need to succeed in secondary education and beyond. Based on these biases, it was paramount that I bracket out my prior knowledge and preconceived notions towards effective strategies for content area ELL literacy instruction (Moustakas, 1994). These biases were related to concepts that I have learned throughout research on effective teaching practices for ELLs, the achievement gap, problems of struggling readers, and effective methods of literacy instruction as well as my experience teaching English in international schools in China. I learned about using the ZPD to scaffold ELLs and differentiate instruction in the school I currently teach. In previous positions I learned the value of SGI using cooperative learning groups and teaching the primary years program, a kind of instruction centered on cooperative learning and inquiry instruction. While studying the achievement gap I found that rural public schools in in ELL heavy districts such as Dallas ISD and Duval schools are not hiring enough qualified instructors prepared to meet the needs of ELLs (Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Graham, 2017), and that middle school CAIs should be incorporating small group literacy instruction into their curriculum to improve the reading comprehension and literacy of learners as well as better prepare adolescent learners for the literacy challenges of secondary level education (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). As I continued my investigation, I came across charter school websites citing that a large percentage of graduates are accepted into higher education institutions (IDEA, 2021), I began to consider why these charter schools are more successful in preparing ELLs academically than traditional public schools. It was essential I do not allow any preconceived notions or prior knowledge regarding the performance of TPS and IDEAPS to affect my ability to arrive at the pure essence of the phenomenon as I endeavored to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, in conducting a transcendental phenomenology, I needed to make sure I effectively engaged in the Epoche to bracket out my biases and remain unbiased throughout

data collection and analysis (Moustakas, 1994). I could not allow my own perceptions or preconceptions to influence the answers of participants to the interview or focus group questions or the analyses of responses into themes and textural and structural descriptions. Keeping my own understandings and presumptions bracketed out of the study allowed for the pure essence of the phenomenon to emerge as it should in a transcendental phenomenology (Van Manen, 2014).

Procedures

The procedures for this collective case research study were based on the works of Creswell and Poth (2017), Van Manen (2014), and Moustakas (1994). I analyzed the perspectives of middle school CAI towards teaching ELLs and described them to develop a thorough, complete understanding of the essence of the phenomenon. In this section, I will discuss the process of obtaining site permission, completing the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application, selecting participants, and collecting and analyzing data. I will conclude this discussion by describing the framework I used for triangulating the study with multiple validation strategies that ensured trustworthiness of the study.

Permissions

The first step in this study was securing approval from the IRB (see appendix A), the school district, and the participants of each school. I needed to determine which public school districts most closely fit the requirements of the design, then locate the staff directories of the districts, and email consent forms to qualified candidates that fit eligibility requirements. I started seeking participants prior to receiving IRB approval to rule out any sites that are unwelcoming and ensure acceptance of the proposal. I emailed consent letters to CAIs and ESL instructors from six districts in southern United States until I obtained enough participants for the study.

Recruitment Plan

Once IRB approval I received from Liberty University (see appendix A), I obtained consent (see appendix C) from 10 eligible teachers of CAIs and ESL teachers in ELL-heavy districts of Florida, Texas, California, and Tennessee. I emailed eligible teachers consent forms with messages requesting them to complete a preliminary Google form to verify whether the candidates met the requirements of the study. These teachers were instructors of content area classes with a caseload of at least three ELLs in at least one of their classes. Once I defended the research proposal successfully, I began the research process.

Once permission was granted to complete the research, I solicited 500 CAIs with at least three ELLs in one of their classes to volunteer for participation in the study as described above. From the pool of volunteers, 11 teachers were randomly selected from the six districts to participate. One volunteer who was not randomly selected was asked to participate in a pilot study to ensure the interview and focus group questions were clear and purposeful. I modified the questions as needed based on results from the pilot study. Then, I informed the perspective participants who I selected randomly about the details of the study, requirements, and duration of participation, and asked them to sign the informed consent form.

Data Collection Plan

In transcendental phenomenology research, qualitative data collection consists of deeply observing and describing a phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014). The emphasis of engaging in the Epoche and reviewing data multiple times until the researcher arrives at the fundamental essences of the phenomenon is paramount for transcendental studies (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, I used three methods to collect data, including analysis of lesson plans, virtual semi-structured interviews, and three to five virtual focus groups, which I conducted using a web-

conferencing platform (Teams) to describe how CAIs in ESL-heavy districts perceive teaching ELLs.

I obtained written consent/assent from teacher participants (see Appendix I) before the data collection process to ensure that the study followed guidelines for ethical research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The consent form, sent via email to study participants, contained information about the study's purpose and methodology and a reminder that participants had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. The study participants returned the signed consent form by scanning and emailing it to the researcher. To protect the privacy and anonymity of study participants, I assigned the CAIs who I selected to participate in this study pseudonyms (Moustakas, 1994). I collected data for this research from lesson plans, participant interviews, and focus groups. Including multiple collection processes in the data collection ensured the validity of this study by helping in triangulating the data and using various perspectives to consistently describe the phenomenon's essence.

I did not commence data collection until after I received an approval from IRB (see Appendix A) and received all completed teacher consent forms (see Appendix C). During interviews and focus groups, ample time was provided for interviewee responses to ensure as much data as possible were collected. Interviews and focus group discussions took place via a digital conferencing platform (Teams) in a distraction-free location where participants could comfortably engage and focus on the conversation at hand (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I recorded each individual participant interview and focus group discussions within the Zoom platform and with the Apple app voice memo on the researcher's cell phone as a secondary backup. I used Teams to transcribe recorded interview and focus group responses.

Document Analysis

Once volunteers signed informed consent forms, I analyzed lesson plans of each participant to determine instructional strategies used by each participant. Before the interviews, I used manual coding to analyze lesson plan data and determine which strategies each participant used most often and purposes for which they were used to teach DSC to ELLs. I used data from this analysis to guide interview questions according to teaching methods used by each volunteer.

Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan #1)

I analyzed the lesson plans I collected for the following reasons: to inform interview questions related to teaching strategies for ELLs; to provide consistency of communication from participants; and to provide further evidence of teaching methods preferred by middle school content area instructors (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). Determining which literacy or reading instruction strategies are used most often provided additional data to validate the perceptions participants have towards teaching ELLs.

Individual Interviews (Data Collection Approach #2)

As discussed above, I developed interview questions to use in one-on-one interviews with each participant. I based the interview questions on the literature to establish validity and cross-referenced with the research questions to ensure they aligned with one another (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I asked an expert in the field as well as a dissertation chair to review the interview questions before submitting my proposal and piloted the questions with a small sample of participants from the sites that were not participating in the study to ensure clarity and understanding (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I ensured participants signed a consent form before participating in the interview. Each interview lasted 30 minutes to one hour and was completed over the period of 3 weeks at a time agreed upon with the participant via Teams, as discussed above. I recorded each interview for later review using Teams software. Before each interview

began, I reviewed procedures with each of the 10 participants to ensure they understood the format of the interview, requirements of the study, and the types of questions that would be asked.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we were just meeting one another.
2. Please describe your hobbies.
3. Have you been to a country outside the U.S., and if so, can you describe what you did and your perception of the country?
4. Please describe your best cultural experience.
5. Please describe your experiences teaching ELLs (CRQ).
6. Please describe your preparation to teach ELLs (CRQ).
7. Please describe reading instruction strategies you have found most effective for ELLs and why you think these strategies are so effective (SQ1).
8. Please describe teaching methods you find most effective to build literacy in all students and what makes these strategies effective (SQ1)?
9. Please describe your experiences cooperating with ESL or CAI as co-teachers of ESL teachers in public schools in providing CAI to ELLs (SQ2).
10. Please describe your perception of the literacy building strategies you observe your colleagues using and their effectiveness (SQ2).
11. What is your view of teaching literacy during content area lessons (SQ1)?
12. What role does CALI play in MS students understanding of discipline specific texts (SQ1)?
13. What role does CALI play beyond elementary school (SQ1)?

14. How might your students benefit from incorporating CALI into the curriculum (SQ1)?
15. Please describe any problems you can foresee with including CALI in your lessons and how these problems may be prevented (SQ1).
16. Please describe your perceptions of teaching content area lessons to ELLs (SQ3).
17. Have you taught at charter public schools and if so, how would you describe your experience compared to that of traditional public schools (SQ3)?
18. How would you describe the attrition rate of the charter school? And that of traditional public schools (SQ3)?
19. We've covered a lot of ground in our conversation, and I so appreciate the time you've given to this. One final question ... What else do you think would be important for me to know about CAI to ELLs?

The central research question focused on determining what kind of experiences the participants have had teaching ELLS. Questions 1 through 4 were knowledge questions (Patton, 2015), that were used to help develop a comfortable, nonthreatening environment for the participant (Moustakas, 1994). I adjusted the questions as necessary for each participant, based on the answers they gave to previous questions. Questions 2 through 4 were also designed to determine the cultural experiences the participant has had to prepare them to work with students from different ethnicities and backgrounds (Ardasheva et al., 2019). Questions 5 and 6 were designed specifically to determine how prepared the participant was for teaching ELLs (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Gottlieb, 2016; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; McFarland et al., 2020).

Sub-questions 1 and 2 were focused on determining the perspectives of participants towards co-teaching strategies between CAIs and ESL teachers. Questions 7-10 were designed to understand the perception of literacy instruction strategies and differentiation from building

literacy and teaching reading comprehension strategies. These questions were also important in determining the reading and literacy strategies participants found most effective. Questions 11-15 centered on CAI for ELLs to understand the participants' perceptions on teaching CAL, especially whether CAIs believe DSL or other small group sessions are effective for ELLs.

Sub-question 3 was related to perceptions of how charter public school instruction compares to that of TPS. Question 16 was related to the teachers' perceptions and experiences teaching ELLs, which was the main focus of the interview and what all questions lead up to. The purpose of question 17 was to compare the experiences of participants who have experiences working in both TPS and CPS. Question 18 was used to determine whether the success rate claimed by many charter public schools has any relationship to graduation or discipline policies. The final question was a follow up question to ensure the participants contributed as much details as possible. This question was designed to give the participant one final chance to offer valuable insight into the phenomenon of investigation (Patton, 2015).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

At the end of each videoed interview, I used Teams video transcription feature to acquire the transcription of the video. I also maintained additional backup audio files recorded on my cell phone with Apple's voice memo application for use in case Teams recordings became corrupted. I emailed digital copies of completed transcriptions to the participants for review, providing the volunteers a chance to make corrections or clarifications to responses as needed by emailing updated transcripts to me. This member checking of collected data ensured the validity and trustworthiness of my study. I stored all correspondence and transcriptions in a password-protected laptop and password-protected Google drive with an additional backup hard copy locked in a personal drawer.

Once the member checking and updating of transcription records were completed, I uploaded all files into Microsoft word, a tool used to record and code all qualitative data. I reviewed the interview transcripts multiple times through horizontalization to determine common themes and clusters. Horizontalization is part of the phenomenological reduction process in which all participants' statements were given equal value and repetitive statements as well as those that were irrelevant were removed (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, as themes and clusters emerged, I sorted the findings again to eliminate duplicate information. Then, I resorted the data for a third time to establish textural and structural descriptions of the perceptions of each participant regarding CAI with ELLs. I integrated these textural descriptions into a group textural description of data gathered from all participants and examined them from different perspectives. The third step of this analysis was to engage in imaginative variation, a form of coding in which I sought to vary possible meanings within the data to develop structural themes or clusters from the textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Throughout this process, I used memoing to keep track of notes and common themes that emerged from the textural and structural descriptions of data (Van Manen, 2014).

Focus Groups

The third method I used to collect data was focus groups, which provided information needed to clarify and establish further credibility to findings from interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Each question that was discussed in the focus group sessions was designed around the purpose of gathering more information related to perceptions and experiences of CAIs towards teaching ELLs in a way that allowed participants to share relevant information, advice, successes, and failures with one another. The data gathered from these conversations were pertinent to gathering and obtaining in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. As Creswell

and Poth (2017) determined that similar participants benefit focus groups, I organized each group to include those volunteers from each perspective site, which was also convenient for the participants, encouraging full participation.

Each focus group met once for up to one hour with the 3-4 participants who I selected from each site. The specific time and dates of each focus group session was determined and agreed upon as a group to ensure all participants were able to attend. During each of the sessions, I monitored individual responses to make sure the discussion was not dominated by one or two participants, while encouraging everyone to contribute equally in the discussion. I recorded the focus group sessions for further analysis as discussed above, but also took notes throughout each of the sessions to make sure I remembered the most important pertinent details related to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The questions for each focus group session were written based on literature and cross-referenced with the research questions, as the interview questions, to ensure validity and credibility of the study (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The questions focused on the ZPD, strategies for teaching and assessing ELLs, and on CAL instruction for ELLs. The following are the focus group questions that I asked each of the focus groups:

1. Share methods you have used to help ELL students with content area instruction (CRQ).
2. Describe shortcomings you have experienced teaching ELLs and reasons you think they exist (CRQ).
3. Describe successes you have had in teaching ELLs and how these successes came about (SQ1).
4. Describe your understanding of the ZPD and ways to scaffold ELLs to improve their

literacy (SQ1).

5. Describe CAL strategies you use for teaching ELLs (SQ2).

6. Describe methods you use to scaffold ELLs to understand content area texts (CRQ).

7. Describe the typical academic performance of ELLs in your classroom and reasons for such performance (SQ1).

8. Describe methods you use to differentiate instruction and why you prefer these methods (SQ2).

9. Describe methods you use to assess ELLs on reading and literacy and why you prefer using these methods (SQ2).

Questions 1-4 were used to understand the methods teachers employ to help ELLs academically (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; McFarland et al., 2020).

Questions 2-4 were helpful to determine how ELLs can be better assisted in the classroom to achieve improved results on academic assessments (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Leavitt & Hess, 2017).

Questions 5-7 were designed to determine which methods instructors used to teach CAL to ELLs as well as their perceptions about its effectiveness and usefulness for middle school students and for ELLs. Question number 8 was important for determining the teachers' understanding of differentiated instruction and ways they found effective in delivering this instruction. Question 9 was used to determine how the participants addressed student literacy, fluency, and reading comprehension to better determine the participants' understanding of CAL instruction.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

I analyzed focus group interviews the same way as interviews. I used pseudonyms to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants. Following each focus group session, I downloaded the transcription of the dialogue recorded by Teams and maintained a backup file of

the recorded audio on my cell phone via the voice memo app in case video recordings became corrupted. I emailed digital copies of completed transcriptions to participants for a review, allowing the volunteers a chance to make corrections or clarifications to responses as needed by emailing updated transcripts to the researcher. This member checking of collected data ensured the validity and trustworthiness of my study. All correspondence and transcriptions were stored in a password-protected laptop and password-protected Google drive with an additional backup hard copy locked in a personal drawer.

Once the member checking and updating of transcription records was completed, I uploaded all files into Microsoft word, which I used to analyze and manually code the qualitative data. I reviewed all interview transcripts multiple times through horizontalization to determine common themes and clusters. Horizontalization is part of the phenomenological reduction process in which all participants' statements are given equal value and repetitive statements as well as those that are irrelevant are removed (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, as themes and clusters emerged, I sorted the findings again to eliminate duplicate information. Then, I resorted the data for a third time to establish textural and structural descriptions of the perceptions of each participant on teaching DSC to ELLs. I then integrated these textural descriptions into a group textural description of data gathered from all participants and examined them from different perspectives. The third step of this analysis was to engage in imaginative variation, a form of coding in which I sought to vary possible meanings within the data, which was necessary to develop structural themes or clusters from the textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Throughout this process, I used memoing to keep track of notes and common themes that emerged from the textural and structural descriptions of data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Creswell and Poth (2017) wrote that structural descriptions represent the meaning and essence of the

participants' view of how a phenomenon was experienced. Therefore, the next step was to synthesize composite textural and composite structural descriptions by synthesizing the composite textural and structural descriptions into common meanings, or the essences of the phenomenon. The final step was to describe my findings from this process of analysis in written form and provide participants an opportunity to verify the findings.

Data Synthesis

All data were transcribed and recorded in Microsoft word. I analyzed the data via manual coding to find common themes and evidence-based insights. I pored over the data until the essence of the phenomenon of study emerged, and the participants checked the results of this analysis for accuracy. The data collection process included a series of lesson plan analysis, interviews, and focus groups.

Throughout the process of data analysis, I Epoched out my own experience regarding using differentiation of instruction, scaffolding, and PBL in teaching CAI to ELLs. I also sought to exclude my own bias, as described above, to uncover the pure essence of the phenomenon of the perceptions of middle school CAIs in ELL-heavy districts towards CAL instruction for ELLs (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I analyzed Lesson plans to discover themes of CAI strategies, perceptions of teaching ELLs, ELL instruction strategies, co-teaching strategies, and perceptions of teaching CAI to ELLs to find answers to the central and sub-research questions and inform the interview questions that were posed to each participant.

I transcribed each of the recordings of the interviews and focus groups verbatim with the assistance of the speech-to-text transcription application in Teams. These transcriptions were input into Microsoft Word and read multiple times to aggregate the data categorically in search of common themes that emerged from the three data collection methods (Creswell & Poth, 2017;

Moustakas, 1994). After using horizontalization to review lesson plan data, I used transcribed interviews and focus groups multiple times, themes, and clusters emerged and used them to generate textural and structural descriptions of the perceptions of each participant regarding DSI for ELLs. I then integrated these textural descriptions into a group textural description of data gathered from all participants and examined them from different perspectives. The third step of this analysis was to engage in imaginative variation, a form of coding in which I sought to vary possible meanings within the data to develop structural themes or clusters from the textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Throughout this process, I used memoing to keep track of notes and common themes that were emerging from the textural and structural descriptions of data (Creswell & Poth, 2019). Using this data analysis process allowed me to reduce the collected data into concise, workable pieces and determine which portions of the qualitative observations were common to all participants (Patton, 2015). The data analysis culminated in a written report containing the essence of the phenomenon and my interpretation of the phenomenon of study to answer my stated research questions.

Trustworthiness

I ensured trustworthiness throughout my study through practices of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. I also used other methods to ensure trustworthiness in this study. Member checks, bracketing or epoching, peer review, and triangulation of data assisted me in this process.

Credibility

Credibility in research is the extent to which the research is believable and appropriate with reference to the level of agreement with the participants and the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used member checks, peer review, bracketing, and triangulation of data to

establish the credibility of my findings. In member checks, I asked participants to review interview and focus group transcripts for accuracy. Following data analysis, I also asked them to analyze the findings for accuracy and provide any suggestions to improve any unreliable or misrepresented findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). Before performing interviews, I asked a field expert to review the research design and interview questions for accuracy and clarity. After completing data collection and analysis, I asked another expert to review the research study for accuracy and clarity of information and findings presented. According to Creswell and Poth (2019), peer review improves the validity of the findings. The Epoche is an essential aspect of a transcendental phenomenology that allows the researcher to increase the purity of research by bracketing out biases and presumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2019; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). Thus, I engaged in the activity of epoching to ensure I presented accurate findings that remained unaffected by research bias. Triangulation of data collection using the three different data collection methods of lesson plans, interviews, and focus groups, increased the credibility of findings by corroborating the evidence to validate findings (Creswell & Poth, 2019; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). I performed further triangulation using at least three different sites in performing the study. Such triangulation assisted me in determining accuracy of perceptions from various teachers and ensuring that the results were not influenced positively or negatively by one site (Creswell & Poth, 2019).

Transferability

Transferability in research is the degree to which the results of the study can be transferred to other contexts or settings (Creswell & Poth, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I made sure the results and procedures of the study were transferable by providing thick, rich, accurate details of the procedures and using a purposeful convenience sample, in which participants were

located based on whether they fit the design of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Requirements for participating in this study included teaching CAI to at least three ELLs in a middle school in an ELL-heavy district. Using this criterion allowed me as the researcher to obtain information relevant to the research methods. All these methods will allow others to follow the methods and procedures accurately to replicate the study (Creswell & Poth, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability

Dependability is the stability of findings over time and confirmability is the degree to which the findings of a study can be confirmed by other researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2019). I addressed dependability and confirmability by providing rich detail about the context and setting of the study, reviewing the data of the study thoroughly several times as I analyzed the findings, and having a field expert perform an external audit on the study. During analysis, I sought to present the detailed findings without leaving out any richness of the experiences of participants or the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). When I presented the findings, I used direct quotes from the participants to ensure accuracy of perceptions presented and to provide the rich details of the phenomenon. After explaining my findings and allowing participants to verify them as described above, I asked an external auditor to examine the process of data collections, analysis, and results to confirm the accuracy of findings and ensure they were supported by the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt & Halpern, 1988).

Confirmability

I maintained confirmability of my study by creating and maintaining a detailed audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in which I documented the timeframe of the data collection process. I chose the data analysis criteria during the research planning process before collecting and

categorizing any data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I made the data collected in this study reproducible by archiving a data collection plan that other researchers may choose to follow in further studies, thus conforming to the evidence that is presented in this dissertation.

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations needed to be addressed in this study, including data storage, privacy and confidentiality of participants and students, and the influence that negative results may have on the participating schools or instructors (Creswell & Poth, 2017). To address these considerations, I used pseudonyms for the sites and the participants and protected the privacy of data with encrypted password for every file and recording, and obtained IRB approval and informed consent from the participants before performing any data collection or analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I will delete all data files 3 years following the study. The participants also reviewed these ethical considerations who then signed an informed consent before collecting data, indicating that they were fully aware of potential risks and benefits of participating in the study. Finally, as a researcher with no relationship to the participants involved, I analyzed the data with an unbiased view (Moustakas, 1994).

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of middle school CAIs teaching ELLs in ELL-heavy public school districts. The participants were selected from six districts in the southern United States with a population of at least 50% Latino students and plenty of ELLs to suit the requirements of the study. Participants needed to be experienced middle school CAI and ESL teachers with at least three ELLs in one of their classes. Sources of data included lesson plans, interviews, and focus groups. I analyzed all documents and data using Moustakas' (1994) steps for analyzing phenomenological data,

including epoching, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and identifying textural and structural data. Through this analysis process, I sorted and coded common data to identify the most common themes and clusters. I used all the information gathered from this analysis to produce an understanding of the essence of the participants' perceptions towards teaching CAI to ELLs (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of middle school content area instructors on teaching ELLS. A phenomenological approach was needed to gain an in-depth understanding of the essence of the phenomenon (Farrell, 2020). The aim of this study was to gather the lived experiences of the participants and understand the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this chapter, I will highlight the results from the phenomenological study. The order of the data collection was intentional, as the participants first provided the interviewer lesson plans to inform interview questions and then participated in semi-structured individual and focus group interviews. After manually coding and analyzing the data collected from the study, themes emerged. I used Moustakas' (1994) steps to organize and analyze phenomenological data from the study, as a systematic and structured approach should be implemented when analyzing data.

Participants

I designed my study with 12-18 participants but instead I had 10. However, this sample size was above the minimum requirement for phenomenological studies of nine participants. I gathered an adequate amount of data from these teachers to obtain conclusive results. I selected participants were selected from a pool of highly qualified candidates who fit the research design as planned. Because I had trouble obtaining permission from IDEA public schools in Texas when originally seeking participants, I obtained participants from multiple schools in five districts in four states. Therefore, I was unable to group teachers by school for the focus group interviews, as originally designed. Instead, I grouped teachers by ability, arranging each focus group with at least three members from any of the four states who could meet at the same time.

As planned, I used convenience samples because each teacher had more than a year of experience teaching ELLs, had at least three ELL students in their classroom, and could share their teaching experience with ELL students and ways their districts support them.

Because I could not locate participants by getting permission from site administrators, having received IRB approval for my study and working with adult professionals, I found my participants by finding six school districts with a large number of ELLs, and locating the staff directory for each school or district and emailing ESL. I sent content area instructors a participant request form, which included the eligibility criteria for my study. Those who agreed to participate and confirmed eligibility were included in my study.

Participants included two ELA teachers, two math and science teachers, one science teacher, two history teachers, two reading teachers, and one resource teacher. Although the resource teacher was not a content area teacher, he had provided content area instruction to ELL students and supported CAIs in his school to assist SPED and ELLs during CAI. Thus, he had valuable information for the study. Table 1 below shows participant information.

*Table 1 Teacher Participants***Table 1***Teacher Participants*

Participant	Years taught	Highest degree earned	Content area	Grade level
Steven	3	Masters	Social Studies	8 th
Patty	9	Masters	Science	8 th
Sheldon	14	Masters	Special Education - All Content Areas	7 th
George	3	Undergraduate	English Language Arts	7 th
Harry	22	Masters	Math, Science coach	6 th -8 th
Reina	10	Masters	Math	7 th
Laquisha	15	Masters	Math and Science	6 th
Sarah	4	Undergraduate	English Language Arts	8 th
Lilly	35	PhD	Reading	6 th - 8 th
Sasha	30	Masters	Reading, Civics	6 th , 8 th

Steven

Steven is an eighth-grade teacher who has taught social studies for three years in Florida. He has a Master's degree in education and is certified in social studies. Steven enjoys watching movies and he has travelled to Jamaica. His favorite cultural experience was teaching with the diverse community of students in his school. Steven has not had any ESL support staff assist ELLs during his lessons but he uses translations and technology apps to help his students understand content material. He appreciates the ability of technology in differentiating instruction and supporting his students. Steven commented, "A lot of it to me comes down to technology like having uh Microsoft conversations or, any instant uh translation software is super helpful."

Patty

Patty is an eighth-grade science teacher in FL with 15 years of teaching and a Master's degree in education and in neuropsychology. She has experience teaching social studies and ELA in previous positions but is passionate about science. Patty enjoys surfing, offshore fishing, and spending time with family. She spends time in Nicaragua every summer and her best cultural experience was taking the Nicaraguan ferry through the lake to a volcanic island. Her favorite way of encouraging ELLs to build literacy skills is to involve them in creating one pagers, poster like pages of information about a topic of study. Patty explained, "It's effective for children. I use a lot in science because it brings in um kinesthetic learning. It brings in auditory and it brings in visual learners. And so you're reaching their different learning - different strategies."

Sheldon

Sheldon is a special education teacher in CA who concentrates his time in the resource room and supporting SPED and ESL students in content area classes. He has 9 years of experience working with ELL students. Sheldon likes to participate in a Middle Ages Club in which he enjoys fencing, leatherwork, and making and selling clothes and chain mail. He has visited the United Kingdom and his best cultural experience was studying abroad in England. One way Sheldon commonly supports ELLs is by building their reading and writing skills through summarizing texts. He noted, "Summarizing is one way that they can show their comprehension of the reading material."

George

George is an ELA teacher in FL with three years of experience who is currently studying for his teaching certification. He enjoys playing golf and cooking. George has never left the

country but plans to travel to Canada and Europe this summer. Teaching students from many cultures, backgrounds, and nationalities has been his best cultural experience. Like Steven, George has no ESL co teacher to support his ELL students and relies on technology to assist them in understanding material. He typically involves students in small group work because he believes the strategy provides multiple opportunities to support the needs of diverse groups of learners. He noted, “Small groups are effective because it allows me to work with the students in a more personalized setting. The small group allows me to address their specific needs and overcome the language or cultural barriers that come with being an ELL student.”

Harry

Harry, from Jamaica, is a math and science coach currently filling in for a seventh-grade math teacher, and he has taught in several states including CN, NY, NJ, and FL, where he currently teaches. Harry enjoys playing sports and writing. He is currently pursuing an EdD in education administration. Harry’s best cultural experience has been learning about African American history and meeting people from different cultures. He has not traveled to many places outside the United States but plans to travel around the world starting this summer. Harry had a wealth of knowledge to share about his experiences teaching ELLs and middle school students in general. He emphasizes teaching vocabulary in context and using active word walls to help ESL students build academic vocabulary they often struggle with. Harry said, “When I introduce the vocabulary and I like to use an active word wall - I can give the examples to show them what it's also not.”

Reina

Reina is an eighth-grade math teacher in FL with 10 years of teaching experience and a master’s degree in math education. She enjoys swimming, cooking, and going to the beach, and

she has travelled to the Bahamas before. Rina has not had many cultural experiences outside the United States, but can describe many useful strategies to support ELLs during content area classes. One of her favorite methods for supporting comprehension is peer tutoring because students often learn better from their peers than educators. She noted, “I think a good strategy is pairing them um with other students that understand and they can help them understand, because many times they learn better from their peers than they do us.” Reina also discussed the usefulness of sentence frames and exit tickets in generating vocabulary usage.

Laquisha

Laquisha is a sixth-grade math and science teacher in TX with 15 years of teaching experience and a master’s degree in math and science education. She enjoys reading and spending time with family. She has travelled to Spain, and her best cultural experience was watching the bull fighting there. Laquisha favors using pictures, visuals, and repetition to support ELL students to understand content during her lessons. She described putting pictures above vocabulary words in texts her students would use. Laquisha explained, “I use a lot of pictures and things, picture pictures for them because I know like on their star it does things like that for them, too.”

Sarah

Sarah is an eighth grade ELA teacher in TN with 2 years of teaching experience, and she now teaches in a charter school. She has an undergraduate degree in ELA and history education. Sarah enjoys reading, theater, wagon races, and camping. She has not travelled outside the United States, and her best cultural experience has been living in Memphis with a diverse population. Sarah has had experience in both traditional and charter public schools and was able to provide insight into some of the main differences she experienced between the two types of

institutions. Sarah explained, “Some public schools are mainly focused on that test score, and I feel like at this charter school, we're focused on the test score I guess, but we don't have teach to a test.”

Lilly

Lilly is a reading teacher in TX with 35 years of experience, mostly teaching ESL abroad in international schools. She has a PhD in curriculum and instruction and supports CAIs to build reading skills of ESL and SPED students who perform lower than grade level in reading. Lilly enjoys reading, swimming, and gardening and her best cultural experience was teaching in other countries including Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Saudi Arabia. She enjoyed teaching in Hong Kong the most because the children were very polite, and she was comfortable teaching there. Lilly has experience in both traditional and public schools, just as Sarah, and she communicated similar experiences working in each type of institution. Lilly is passionate about supporting ELLs to build reading and literacy skills and believes strongly in modeling anything students are expected to do, especially note taking. She noted that modeling annotating is effective because “it's specific about what tools look for what to remember, what to do for note taking, what's expected of them for testing. So there's multiple levels and so when learning a certain process of reading comprehension and getting to that point is pretty important to them.”

Sasha

Sasha is a reading and civics teacher in FL with more than 30 years of experience who has been teaching ELL students since the state began the ESOL program in the 1990's. She has a Master's degree in education and supports sixth grade students to improve reading skills but also teaches civics to sixth and eighth graders. She enjoys reading and writing and she has travelled to Canada and Germany. Her best cultural experience was visiting Germany, where she

wished she could extend her stay for another year. Sasha enjoys supporting newcomer students including ELLs who recently immigrated to the United States and have little understanding of the English language. Teaching this population of ELLs gives her insight into literacy building strategies appropriate for students with limited experience reading English texts. Sasha believes pictures and visuals such as flash cards are highly effective in helping students improve vocabulary. She said, “I think in addition to the pictures, making flashcards with a word um in English and then they look it up in their own word and practicing the flash cards.” Sasha is also knowledgeable of cultural relevance, which she incorporates into her planning by considering where students are coming from and her expectations of them.

Results

To gather information for this phenomenological study, I used lesson plans of participants, national and state tests from FL, TX, TN, and CA, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. Using these methods of data collection allowed me to gather comprehensive information that I analyzed in my study. I first gathered information from lesson plans and testing data to inform interview questions, as I analyzed them before and after the interviews. After obtaining the data from these documents, I conducted the individual and then focus group interviews. I also had additional time to reflect and write notes on transcriptions between individual and focus group interviews. After gathering all the data, I used Moustakas’ (1994) method of analysis for phenomenological study.

Individual interviews lasted 30 to 50 minutes and focus group interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes. I recorded and transcribed interviews, and participants freely expressed themselves during these interviews. I stored all the data I collected in a password-protected laptop to protect the privacy of participants.

I bracketed out my personal and professional views of my own answers to the research questions to clear my mind and reduce bias and used the process of reflection. I manually coded data from national and state reading tests, lesson plans, and individual and focus group interviews using different colored highlighters. I used inductive and hierarchical coding to organize codes and develop common themes. Then, I compared the common themes under the data collection methods and grouped them into two common themes with eight sub-themes under each research question.

As I analyzed the data from the lesson plans, national and state reading tests, focus group interviews, and interviews, I was able to identify three overarching themes with 10 subthemes that were significant to the participants' experiences and perceptions. I found that the CAIs' accounts of situations, challenges, and perspectives have many commonalities in the areas of scaffolding strategies, challenges experienced in teaching ELLs, and restrictiveness of public schools. The first theme was the strategies for scaffolding CALI for ELLs, which addressed methods the instructors use to support ESL students in improving reading skills. The second theme addressed challenges experienced by teachers in scaffolding ELLs to understand CAI, and the third theme addressed the restrictiveness of public schools compared to the instructional freedom teachers experience in charter schools (Table 2).

Table 2*Research Questions Alignment with Data Points*

SRQ	Individual Interviews	Focus Group Interviews	Lesson Plans
<p>SQ1: What are the experiences of middle school ESL teachers in who cooperate with content area teachers to provide content area instruction to ELLs?</p> <p>SQ2: What are the experiences of content area teachers who work with ESL teachers to support the needs of ELL students in their classrooms?</p>	<p>Please describe your experiences teaching ELLs.</p> <p>Please describe your preparation to teach ELLs.</p> <p>Please describe reading instruction strategies have you found most effective for ELLs and why you think these strategies are so effective.</p> <p>Please describe teaching methods you find most effective to build literacy in all students and what makes these strategies effective?</p> <p>Please describe your experiences cooperating with ESL co-teachers/CAI instructors in middle school to provide CAI to</p>	<p>Share methods you have used to help ELL students with content area instruction.</p> <p>Describe shortcomings you experience teaching ELLS and reasons you think they exist.</p> <p>Describe successes you have had in teaching ELLs and how these successes came about.</p> <p>Describe your understanding of the ZPD and ways to scaffold ELLs to improve their literacy.</p> <p>Describe methods you use to scaffold ELLs to understand content area texts.</p> <p>Describe the typical academic performance of</p>	<p>Record essential vocabulary to address in each lesson.</p> <p>Modeled Instruction.</p> <p>Collaborative learning</p> <p>Students summarize the learning.</p> <p>Incorporate the use of a collaborative strategy in small groups.</p> <p>Guide students to independent practice by providing an opportunity to work in small groups and practice what was taught during the modeled portion of the lesson.</p> <p>T-Will pull small group of students who are having misconceptions of the subject matter.</p>

	<p>ELLs?</p> <p>What is your view of teaching literacy during content area lessons?</p> <p>What role does CALI play in MS students understanding of discipline specific texts?</p> <p>What role does CALI play beyond elementary school?</p>	<p>ELLs in your classroom and reasons for such performance.</p> <p>Describe methods you use to differentiate instruction and why you prefer these methods.</p> <p>Describe methods you use to assess ELLs on reading and literacy and why you prefer using these methods.</p> <p>Describe your shortcomings.</p> <p>Describe your successes</p>	<p>Small groups – based off SCA- 5 high need from SCA</p> <p>Pull small groups or individuals for more intensive support.</p> <p>Guide students to independent practice by providing an opportunity to work in small groups and practice what was taught.</p> <p>Students will read the text and define the vocabulary.</p> <p>Auditory cues; translated versions; extended time; direct feedback; small group accommodation.</p> <p>Use data to drive instruction.</p>
<p>SQ3: How do content area teachers in charter public schools who have taught ELLs in traditional public schools and currently teach ELLs compare the effectiveness of instruction and its effects on ELL achievement?</p>	<p>Have you taught at traditional public schools before, and how would you describe your experience compared to that of your charter school?</p> <p>How would you describe the attrition rate of your school?</p>	<p>Can you compare teaching at traditional and charter public schools?</p>	<p>Charter schools give more freedom to teachers.</p> <p>Teachers in traditional public schools are pressured to teach to the test.</p> <p>Traditional public schools are more structured.</p> <p>Teachers can include more novels in Charter schools.</p>

Teachers have to document everything they teach in traditional public schools.

Charter schools support greater instructional creativity.

Teachers don't know about the rate of attrition.

Central Research Question

The central research question was “How do middle school content area teachers in public schools in ELL heavy states describe their experiences teaching ELLs?” I used this question was to gather information on scaffolding strategies to support ELLs during CALI, attitudes towards CALI, challenges teachers experience in instructing ELLs, and how teaching charter school instruction compares to public school instruction. In the final analysis of the data, three themes emerged, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Themes and Subthemes from Triangulation of Data

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes from Triangulation of Data

Themes	Subthemes
Strategies Instructors Use to Scaffold ELLs	Embed Vocabulary Instruction Into Lessons Use Visuals Throughout Lessons Model Instruction and Expectations Activate Background Knowledge Small Group Instruction Provide Appropriately Challenging Content Materials
Challenges Experienced Scaffolding ELLs in CALI	Lack of Student Motivation SPED Instructors Support ELLs During CALI
Restrictiveness of Public Schools	Charter and private schools give teachers more freedom

Public school teachers are pressured to teach to the test

Table 4 Theme Development for Research Questions 1 and 2

Table 4

Theme Development for Research Questions 1 and 2

Open-codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Themes	Subthemes
Academic vocabulary	12	Strategies CAIs use to scaffold ELLs in CAI	Embedding vocabulary into instruction
Preteaching vocabulary	9		
Explicit vocabulary instruction	16		
Using visuals or pictures	9		
Giving visual assignments	7		
Word walls	6		
Peer tutoring	8		Using small group instruction
Grouping students by needs	13		
Using stations	5		
Modelling expectations	8		Model instruction
Modelling the use of vocabulary words	8		
Modelling taking notes	5		
Give students information at their Lexile level	6		Use appropriately challenging texts
Give students below grade level text	5		
Activate prior knowledge	8		Activate background knowledge
Develop background knowledge	6		

Lack of motivation	8	Challenges CAIs face teaching ELLs	Lack of motivation in ELLs
Reluctance to use English	6		
Students not in class regularly	5		
During CAI, ELLs have help from SPED support staff	5		SPED teachers support ELLs in CAI
All teachers are ESL certified	3		
ELLs do not get support from ESL teachers during CAI	8		

Strategies for Scaffolding ELLs in CAI

The first theme derived from the data analysis was strategies for scaffolding ELLs during CAI, as shown in Table 4 above. Instructors communicated several strategies they found useful for scaffolding ELLs to understand content, which generated the six subthemes that emerged from this theme: embedding vocabulary instruction into lessons, modelling expectations, activating background knowledge, providing appropriately challenging text, and visualization. All participants discussed the need for providing vocabulary instruction to support ELLs in CAI. Harry explained, “The English language learners, they need the content area vocabulary, because to understand and to learn English [sic].” Stafford communicated, “I like to provide materials to them that is on level with their Lexile and need to scores [sic].”

Embedding Vocabulary Instruction into Lessons

Many teachers described the benefit students, especially ELLs, gain from academic vocabulary instruction. One of the main reasons middle and high school students struggle with texts is their lack of academic vocabulary. Sheldon commented, “I think because a lot of the ELLs in middle school have difficulty with academic vocabulary and in high level vocabulary generally.” The second reason is lack of knowledge of discipline specific reading strategies.

Sarah noted, “they don't understand how to read those texts so you're gonna have to show them how to read it.”

Several participants discussed the need for vocabulary to be taught explicitly in context. When students are given a list of words and definitions, they easily use the vocabulary incorrectly. Demonstrating how vocabulary is used in context with sentences clarifies the proper use of the word as expected by teachers of discipline specific content. As words have different meanings in different contents and contexts, this point is very important for teaching ELLs. Harry offered, “The key thing with English language learners, you have to do things in context.”

Several instructors commented that cognates are very useful in helping ELLs learn new vocabulary words. Providing students with similar words or pointing out similarities among words of an ELLs’ language and English promotes development of vocabulary, which adds to understanding of CATs. Sarah noted, “You can identify or just find similarities as far as when you are reading and decoding – ask, ‘does this word look similar to something else?’ - because a lot of the students notice that.”

Modelling Expectations and Instructions

Many participants described using modeling to support ELLs in understanding CAI. Instructors discussed modelling how to take notes, how to use vocabulary words, and anything they expect students to perform. Reina articulated, “Modeling – it’s vitally important that we're demonstrating the expectation that we want our students to perform.” Modeling includes verbal and visual communication to demonstrate exactly what students must do by watching and observing an expert. In this way, modeling is seen as a way of making instruction clearer and more direct for learners (Gib & Li, 2019). The practice of modeling also supports vocabulary building by helping students understand exactly how words are used in different ways as well as

exposing pupils to their use by the expert. Harry offered, “I introduce the vocabulary and using, like an active word wall - I like to when I give the examples to show them what it's also not” and “I am big on students using the vocabulary, so I use it.” It is clear from participants’ explanations that that modeling supports ELLs by providing visuals of content being discussed or examples to be followed. These visuals and examples clarify misunderstandings that may occur and support learners to build concepts consistent with research findings (Stockard et al., 2018).

Activating Background Knowledge

Several instructors communicated the importance of activating background knowledge to scaffold ELLs in understanding content. Background knowledge is essential for understanding and forming new concepts related to discipline specific subject matter. When teachers activate background knowledge before teaching new topics, they not only prepare pupils to engage in the material but also determine what students know and where their knowledge gaps are (Linares, 2021; Wei, 2021). When describing methods to scaffold ELLs, Stafford explained, “Activating prior knowledge, just seeking out what do they know what experiences, what prior experiences have they had and allowing them to share out the experiences with each other and to communicate.”

Providing Appropriately Challenging Texts

Some teachers in the study described using lower-level texts to scaffold ELLs in understanding the content. George said, “I like to provide materials to them that is on level with their Lexile and need - to scores.” These instructors described using materials at students’ Lexile level to support their comprehension of discipline specific text. Most participants also discussed the importance of maintaining rigor with ELLs and using supports and modifications to help

students understand materials and complete assignments. Patty noted, “We use reading passages and science at different scaffold levels ... so we always challenge them, and we always want them to go further, but we don't want them to ever give up.” This strategy is important for communicating to the students, as it shows teachers are aware of the need for students to have access to the same text and content as their native speaking counterparts so that they can be scaffolded according to their ZPD in developing content area knowledge and reading skills.

Using Visualization

The teachers communicated the aid of visuals in helping ELLs understand content. Pictures or videos of words, realia, or graphic organizers all support clear communication of discipline specific vocabulary to ESL students, limiting the need for teachers to use teacher speech explain concepts or vocabulary words. When discussing his use of visuals in teaching, Mosley noted, “I do use a great deal of visual representation to help them grasp the meaning of words.”

Pictures are great tools for communicating concepts and vocabulary in any language. Most instructors used pictures to help students understand new or difficult words that may appear in discipline specific texts. Latasha quipped, “So for me, I use a lot of pictures and things, pictures for them because I know like on their star it does things like that for them too.”

Many of the teachers used visuals to communicate difficult vocabulary or concepts that come up throughout CAI. Visuals support ELLs in understanding what the teacher is explaining more clearly and effectively, as they are able to both see and hear what is being communicated. Sheldon offered, “So I use visuals, and sometimes I have an extra sheet to show them this is a reminder of vocabulary.”

Challenges CAIs Face Scaffolding ELLs

The second theme derived from the data analysis was challenges CAIs face in teaching ELLs, as shown in Table 4 above. Two sub-themes were developed from this main theme. These sub-themes were ELLs' lack of motivation for learning and SPED instructors supporting ELLs during CAI.

Lack of Motivation for Learning

Some instructors discussed the challenge of motivating ELLs as one of their major struggles in scaffolding the students to improve their reading skills. Teachers explained that these students' families do not have high educational expectations for their children, as the parents and grandparents lack secondary education. Compounding the issue, many Latino ELLs are able to start working trade jobs in middle school, which leads them to undervalue secondary education. Sheldon communicated, "I would say motivation is often a pretty big issue that does tend to impact your ELLs in that a lot of times, like their parents, don't necessarily have high expectations for them."

SPED Instructors Support ELLs in CAI

Communication from teachers was triangulated with data from district websites, which revealed that many ELLs are supported more directly by SPED instructors than their ESL teachers. One FL district had more ESOL paraprofessionals on staff than ESL support staff (Duval County Public Schools, 2023). Sarah offered, "I have a like an aid for the uh kids with IEP's 504s and then that second block I still have the same aid in there for those kids but I also have the ESL teacher and that's only one group. They put all of the IPEs before and ESL kids into one group like and they won't be in the other group of kids." Instructors who experience SPED teachers supporting ELLs explain that these teachers have training in teaching ESL and possess ESL certifications, which include a CELTA or TEFL certification rather than a teaching

credential. Laquisha noted, “They're SPED certified teachers, and they’re ESL certified as well because in Texas everyone has to be ESL certified.” Although the SPED teachers can support students who are struggling with content, the expertise they can provide in supporting ELLs is limited to any training or experience these instructors have had because they are not ESL content area experts with the same qualifications as those who have pursued ESL licensure. Patty pointed out, “I think the experience was amazing, but limited, as in the state of Florida, we don't always get on-site support. It's pretty passive support. And so although we collaborate and plan together”

Table 6

Theme Development for Research Question Three

Open-Codes	Frequency of open-code appearance across data sets	Theme	Subthemes
Greater instructional freedom	5	Restrictiveness of charter vs public schools	Teachers experience greater instructional freedom in charter schools
Having to document everything	3		
Administrator control	3		Public school teachers are compelled to teach to the test
Having to focus more on testing	6		
Greater opportunities for use of novels in charter schools	3		

Restrictiveness of Public Schools as Compared to Charter Schools

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis was the restrictiveness of public schools compared to charter schools, as shown in Table 6 above. Two sub-themes were developed from this theme, which include greater instructional freedom experienced in charter

schools and public-school teachers teaching to the test. The participants described their experiences in charter and private schools as more rewarding, with greater opportunities to respond to student needs and interests, even when doing so requires one to change one's original plan or include creative activities that support the content being learned. Lilly explained, "Here in the US it is very structured in the sense that I have to document everything that I'm teaching in the class, and I have to be in the class and teach exactly what I have documented." Sarah offered, "The book I told you about, where our food comes from ... We had hydroponic plants and they are now in pots all over my classroom, but I didn't get to do that before and I think the kids actually getting to see things happen in front of them again at visualization or experience key point, I feel like it just brings education to life."

Greater Instructional Freedom in Charter Schools

The participants who had experience teaching in both charter or public and public schools described the instructional environment of public schools as more structured and restrictive. The instructors described greater freedom to design creative, more engaging lessons that respond to needs and interests exhibited by students when teaching in charter or public schools. Sarah noted, "I feel like at this charter school I like what I get to do is better, because I do not have to use a set curriculum." Regarding private school instruction, Lilly added, "We had the curriculum, but if we got off topic for some reason, I found a teaching moment, I was free to kind of explore that with the student. Uh, but not so much here in the U.S., you know, it's more, it's much more structured."

Public School Teachers Teach to the Test

The public school teachers described being pushed to achieve a certain standard of testing achievement with their students. This expectation caused many teachers to feel the need to teach

to the test. Sarah noted, “Whereas some other schools are mainly focused on that test score, and when, and I feel like at this charter school, we're focused on the test score I guess, but we don't have teach to a test.” The participants described being given a curriculum specifically designed to support high testing scores and lack of instructional freedom on literature material and texts students are guided to read, when teaching in public school. Sarah explained, “I didn't get to teach them novels or books because we had to read excerpts the whole year, and I feel like the kids really get tired of that.”

Outlier Data and Findings

This section includes a discussion of the unexpected findings from the study, which is lack of preparation for teaching ELLs. The outlier in the study was lack of preparation for teaching ELLs. One teacher said she felt unprepared for teaching her ESL students and one teacher communicated not being required to take courses on teaching ESOL in her undergraduate program and the lack of PD on teaching ESL students in her district.

Lack of Preparation for Teaching ELLs

Most instructors took ESOL classes during certification or masters classes and were provided ESL training by districts. Of the 10 teachers, only two communicated lack of experience teaching ELLs during interviews. When questioned on preparation for teaching ELLs, only one of 10 teachers communicated having no PD training or university instruction for teaching ELL students. Sara explained, “I really didn't get training other than saying like, hey, this is how we teach ELL's. I didn't get a whole lot of training on having ESL students in my classroom.” When asked about struggles CAIs experienced teaching ELLs, Reina said she had no preparation to communicate with them. Although she had PD for instructing ELL students, this teacher felt overwhelmed by her struggle to communicate effectively with her ESL students

and ensure they learn on the level she desires. Reina explained, “And one of the shortcomings is I haven't had the proper training; I wasn't prepared for the students that I am teaching this year, so that I could communicate effectively.”

Lack of Education on ESOL Instruction

When asked about university preparation for teaching ELLs, three of the 10 participants commented that they had no classes on teaching ESOL during their undergraduate program but two of them had PD or training once they started teaching, as explained above. Regarding her university education, Sarah quipped, “I knew I was gonna get English and history certifications. I didn't have to take any extra classes because all my classes centered around teaching English and history.”

Research Question Responses

This transcendental phenomenological study was guided by one central research question and three sub-questions. My goal for the central research question was to explore the lived experiences of CAIs in public middle schools on teaching ELLs. The themes that were developed after the data analysis were: (a) effective strategies for scaffolding ELLs in CAI, (b) challenges CAIs face teaching content material to ELLs, and (c) restrictiveness of public schools. The development of these themes was supported by participants' responses to the research questions and observations in the data collection process.

Central Research Question

The central research question was “How do middle school content area teachers in public schools in ELL heavy states describe their experiences teaching ELLs?” The participants' perspectives were that teaching ELLs is difficult but with appropriate collaboration, support and scaffolding they can find success in improving CA knowledge and literacy of ELLs. Parry

explained, “I’m gonna be honest, to me at times it’s overwhelming and I have to see what do they already know so that I’m not wasting their time and also just get them to open up so that perception.” When questioned on strategies they find successful, all teachers were able to communicate several effective methods of scaffolding ELLs to build CAL.

Sub-Question One

Sub-question one was “What are the experiences of ESL teachers in public schools in ELL heavy states who cooperate with content area teachers to provide content area instruction to ELLs?” The experiences of ESL teachers varied by school district and state, but overall, participants’ perspectives were that working with CAIs to help support ELL students is positive and rewarding. They enjoyed a good working relationship with their CAI co-teachers, and they communicate regularly. Laquisha offered, “She does have access to my lessons, what I’m teaching weekly, monthly, whatever, and we do do a lot of lot of communication too.” The ESL instructors used collaboration and communication skills to develop good relationships with the content area instructors and to support their students. They used their understanding of ESL methodology, the students’ native language, vocabulary and reading strategies to support ELLs during content area lessons.

Sub-Question Two

Sub-question two was “What are the experiences of content area teachers in public schools in ELL heavy states who work with ESL teachers to support the needs of ELL students in their classrooms?” The perceptions of CAIs who collaborated with ESL teachers to support ELLs was that the experience is amazing, and they greatly appreciate the support from their ESL and SPED staff who advise them on how to develop methods to successfully scaffold their ELLs in understanding content material. Laquisha said, “She’ll tell me hey, so I’m at this goal, this is

what we're working on now - to help me keep intact in the classroom. To make sure I'm guiding the students correctly.” Regardless of whether the ESL teacher directly supported ELLs during CAI, the instructors found ways to work as effectively as they could with one another to achieve learning goals and could adequately understand their discipline specific texts. However, some teachers indicated not receiving any support from ESL staff.

The new teachers in FL and CA described having no ESL co-teacher to work with ELLs, and several teachers communicated that SPED instructors support ELLs and students with LD during instruction, while ELLs are pulled out to have lessons with the ESL teacher during other periods. This result means that the ESL teacher does not typically provide direct support to students during instruction. Patty explained, “The experience was amazing, but limited, as in the state of Florida, we don't always get on-site support. It's pretty passive support.” The new teachers explained that they support ELLs through technology apps that can provide text at students' Lexile level and translate text into the students' language. Steven said, “the biggest tool for me has been achieved 3000 as like a kind of warm up um an on-topic article that automatically differentiates based on Lexile level.”

Sub-Question Three

Sub-question three was “How do content area teachers in charter schools in ELL heavy states who have taught ELLs in public schools and currently teach ELLs compare the effectiveness of instruction and its effects on ELL achievement?”” Charter schoolteachers found the instruction and ELL achievement to be more effective in charter schools than public schools, where instruction tends to be more rigid and standardized. Those who taught in both public and charter or private schools experienced greater freedom of instruction and student support strategies in charter or private schools, which have much less government oversight regarding

CAI. Sarah offered, “So I feel like when I get to make it as creative as possible, then the kids get more into it, find more joy in it then.”

Summary

This chapter revealed findings from the transcendental phenomenological study on the lived experience of middle school CAIs teaching ELLs. I gathered the experiences of 10 participants using lesson plans, data from national and state reading tests, and individual and focus group interviews. I analyzed quotes from the semi-formal interviews, lesson plan data, and national and state reading tests to support the themes. Three themes emerged from the findings that addressed the central research question and the three sub-questions. The main themes were effective strategies for scaffolding ELLs in CAI, challenges CAIs face in teaching ELLs, and the restrictiveness of public-school instruction. Although CAIs stated that teaching ELLs was difficult and overwhelming at times, they collaborated with their co-teachers to find effective ways of building ELLs’ vocabulary and scaffolding them to understand discipline specific content. Based on the results of the study, ELLs would greatly improve their CAL if all CAIs were well trained in literacy-building strategies, proactively embedded vocabulary instruction into lessons, model expectations, built background knowledge, used small group instruction, and communicated with ELLs and their families effectively to build relationships and better motivate students.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to determine the lived experiences and perceptions of CAIs on teaching ELLs. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings based on the themes that emerged for the research question and the interpretations of the findings supported by empirical and theoretical sources. I will also discuss the implications for practices, limitations, and recommendations for future research and provide a summary of the entire study.

Summary of Findings

Discussion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of 10 middle school CAIs in ELL-heavy states on teaching ELLs. In this section, I will discuss the findings from the study by highlighting three themes that emerged from the data: effective methods of scaffolding ELLs in CAI; challenges CAIs face in teaching ELLs; and the restrictiveness of public-school instruction. I will also highlight the interpretation of the findings and the implications for policy and practice and then discuss the theoretical and empirical implications and any limitations and delimitations of the study. I will conclude this section with an examination of recommendations for future research.

Lessons Learned and Educational Implications

The results of this study suggest that scaffolding ELLs through their ZPD to build CAI is difficult but with appropriate help, support, and training, CAIs can be successful in doing so. Through a review of the literature, a triangulation of data collection, and data analysis, three main themes and 11 subthemes regarding scaffolding ELLs in CAI were identified. The three

main themes that emerged through this study are (a) effective strategies for scaffolding ELLs in CAI, (b) challenges CAIs face in teaching ELLs, and (c) rigidity of public-school instruction compared to charter school instruction. The experiences perceptions of teachers on giving content area instruction to ELLs were that it is difficult, but with adequate support and communication, they can do it effectively. These findings indicate that teachers believe all students can benefit from CALI, this method is essential for growth and language development of ELLs, and vocabulary instruction, modeling, visuals, and activation of background knowledge, and small group instruction are the most effective methods of supporting and scaffolding ELLs in CAI. In addition, using appropriately challenging content is an essential part of using the ZPD to support ELLs in CAI. Motivation of students is also a major aspect of their academic performance and willingness to develop CAL.

Lessons from Participants' Experiences

The central research question used to guide this transcendental phenomenological study was “How do middle school content area teachers in public schools in ELL heavy states describe their experiences teaching ELLs?” This question was followed by three sub-questions to gather more specific details for answering the general question. These questions are:

SQ1: What are the experiences of ESL teachers in public schools in ELL heavy states who cooperate with content area teachers to provide content area instruction to ELLs?

SQ2: What are the experiences of content area teachers in public schools in ELL heavy states who work with ESL teachers to support the needs of ELL students in their classrooms?

SQ3: How do content area teachers in charter schools in ELL heavy states who have taught ELLs in public schools and currently teach ELLs compare the effectiveness of instruction and its effects on ELL achievement?

These questions served to focus the study to gather information from 10 participants through lesson plans, individual and focus group interviews, and national and state test data. After analyzing the data, three themes emerged: (a) effective strategies for scaffolding ELLs in CAI, (b) challenges CAIs face in teaching ELLs, and (c) rigidity of public vs. charter school instruction. Eleven sub-themes emerged, which include embedding vocabulary instruction into lessons, using modeling, using visualization, activating background knowledge, using texts that are appropriately challenging, lack of motivation in ELLs, SPED instructors supporting ELLs in CAI, greater instructional freedom in charter and private schools, and public-school teachers being compelled to teach to the test. The majority of participants described CALI as an essential component of CAI and indicated using several strategies they found effective in supporting ELLs in CAI, which are the subthemes under the first theme. Each of these strategies were extensively discussed by teachers when describing ways to make content accessible to their ELLs. Other findings were using SPED teachers to support ELLs in content area classes, varying ideas on using the ZPD to scaffold students in CAI, and varying understanding of DI. I will discuss each of these findings below.

Most Effective Strategies to Support ELLs

An evidence-based teaching strategy for ELLs is vocabulary instruction, as it is heavily supported by research and every participant communicated ways they use vocabulary instruction to help ELLs understand CAI texts. The instructors understood that the lack of vocabulary is one of the biggest areas preventing ESL students from accessing their content material. Therefore,

they pre-taught vocabulary, taught word parts, pointed out cognates, showed how words are used, and included vocabulary walls to build their students' knowledge of academic vocabulary and improve reading skills. Sherman noted, "A lot of the ELLs in middle school have difficulty with academic vocabulary and in high level vocabulary generally." The second most discussed strategy for supporting ELLs is including visuals and pictures to help students understand content. Reina commented, "I do use a great deal of visual representation to help them grasp the meaning of words." Research affirms the effectiveness of embedding vocabulary instruction and using visuals to scaffold ELLs (Braaten, 2018).

Many ELLs are labeled as Students with Special Needs

Discussions with participants and triangulation of data revealed that many ELL students have special needs. Lilly commented, "I do have some special teachers that come in with my dyslexic students who are - they they've not only been identified as being an ESL student, but also with some kind of special needs." When ESL students have IEPs or 504s, the participants communicated that SPED instructors are considered fully qualified to support the learners' needs in CAI. Laquisha pointed out, "They are professional certified teachers, whether in special education, or ESL." However, it is a concern that so many ELLs are being classified with IEPs because research on the challenges ELLs face in acquiring academic literacy indicates that this population is overdiagnosed with special needs, which commonly results from struggles with language acquisition that is seen by general education teachers or CAIs as an academic challenge stemming from a disability (Roseberry-McKibbin, 2019). As language deficits can easily be mistaken for reading or learning deficits, there is a concern regarding whether some of the ELLs in these schools are being diagnosed incorrectly.

CAI is Essential for ELLs

Several studies on the achievement gap between ELL and native speaking students show that many CAIs are unprepared for teaching ESOLs or hesitant to take time from lessons to teach discipline specific reading strategies. However, all participants discussed the need for CALI for all students and communicated that while some teachers do not support students in CAL, they disagree with this approach. The instructors are aware of the need for CALI to help students understand and access content material throughout their education. Many teachers noted that as middle and high school textbooks continue to increase in difficulty, students require appropriate reading instruction and guidance to support their comprehension of CAI. George offered, “I believe that literacy is a foundational aspect for all education, and I continue to work to improve the fluency literacy and reading comprehension of my students throughout the year.” Therefore, research should be updated on teachers’ perceptions on teaching CALI.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This section of the study covers the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of policy or practice. Based on the research findings from this phenomenological study, recommendations for stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, administrators, and the district are necessary to improve the experience and success of teaching ELLs in middle school.

Literacy and School Funding Policies

The government should look further into the literacy and funding policies instituted since the no child left behind campaign of Bush’s era to ensure they are not leading teachers to teach to the test. The findings of this study indicate that teaching practices in public schools may be negatively affected by funding policies that provide more money to schools with higher achievement on standardized tests. The instructors communicated that they found greater instructional freedom in charter schools, which allows them to incorporate student interest and

needs into lessons. Therefore, it is clear that public school requirements and policies that have been adopted to ensure adequate funding from the government are influential in teaching practice. Each state should review these policies to ensure that the influence of these policies on student instruction and achievement is positive.

In addition to policies on instructional quality and assessment, the findings of this study indicate that some states may be affected by limited budgets for ESOL support, leading to the reduction of certified ESOL staff in favor of SPED, who support both ELL and SPED students. A few instructors communicated a lack of ESL co-teachers or support staff to assist in supporting ELLs to understand CAI, whereas a few others said they receive support from special education instructors who were CELTA- or TESL-certified in ESL. Furthermore, some Florida districts have an overwhelming number of ESOL paraprofessionals on their staff and few certified ESL teachers, especially for secondary level education (Duval County Public Schools, 2023). Budgets for students who need support services should not be limited in this way because relying on noncertified staff members may decrease the quality of instructional support, leading to a perpetuation of the achievement gap between Latinos and native speakers of English (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Mora, 2022). Therefore, it is essential for states to find better solutions for supporting ELL students, such as requiring all teachers in heavy ELL districts to be dually certified in their content area as well as TESOL, or assigning highly qualified, fully certified ESL staff as ESL teaching directors for the ESOL paraprofessionals. Another suggestion is for SPED teachers to train and support the staff of each school or district in effectively supporting ELL students to understand CAI and discipline-specific texts.

Best Practices to Support ELLs

According to the findings for this study, the most effective practices for supporting and scaffolding ELLs to understand CAI include vocabulary instruction, modeling, activating background knowledge, small group instruction, and visualization. All participants described the importance of building vocabulary and the usefulness of visualization in communicating unknown words or concepts to ELLs. The majority of instructors also discussed their application of modeling, background knowledge, and SGI to support ELLs in understanding concepts or performing activities. The participants noted the usefulness of peer support in scaffolding ELLs when discussing SGI, which allows peers to support one another and collaborate in developing concepts. Reina explained, “They will often teach it to their peers more effectively than you could and their peers will grapple with it even more so.” The effectiveness and popularity of these five strategies suggests the limitations that ELLs face that prevent them from performing academically in secondary education settings.

The main limitation of middle school ELL students have in understanding CAI lies in accessing discipline-specific texts which derives from the lack of academic vocabulary and knowledge of discipline specific reading skills; the students do not know how to read their textbooks and content materials. Research shows that many middle school students, including native speakers, struggle in these areas (Mora, 2022; Weiss, 2020). Thus, providing instruction on academic vocabulary acquisition and discipline specific reading strategies is likely to help improve the performance of all middle school students in content area classes and text scores on national and state reading tests, which tend to focus on informational text reading skills.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This section of this phenomenological study addresses the theoretical and empirical implications. Middle school CAIs described their lived experiences scaffolding ELLs in content area classes. I will describe both theoretical and empirical implications in further detail below.

Theoretical implications

The theoretical framework used to guide this phenomenological study was based on the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1979) and differentiation of instruction (Tomlinson, 2014). The study findings showed that the most effective strategies for scaffolding ELL students in CAI are embedding vocabulary into instruction and visualization, and SGI or peer tutoring are important teaching or reading strategies. The findings also showed that many teachers lack expertise in DI. Many use assignments given at different reading levels, pictures, or visuals to help with vocabulary, and give lower-level reading to differentiate but fail to mention the need for basing this differentiation on daily formative assessments. One teacher also mentioned using students' IEPs to differentiate instruction, which is based on assessments but not necessary on daily assessments that provide current and changing formative assessment data. Only using daily data for DI is an important factor in effectively fine-tuning lessons to meet the needs of students at the time of delivery because their needs, interests, and motivation can fluctuate based on their mood, the topic, the challenge level of the assignment, and the type of assignments. Teachers also failed to mention assignment delivery options such as writing, videos, and PPTs, which are another effective DI strategy. This result suggest, in part, that the chances of using project-based learning or UBD lessons in the teachers' district are lacking, opportunities from the type of curriculum being used are limited, or exposure to UBD and DI philosophies is lacking. Therefore, it may benefit teachers if they receive more training on effective DI for all students.

Empirical Implications

The majority of the review literature gathered in the study confirmed some of the experiences faced by middle school CAIS teaching ELLs. Some of this literature highlighted teaching strategies useful for scaffolding ELLs' comprehension of content area material, the importance of teaching reading during CA lessons, strategies for differentiating instruction, the importance of motivation in learning, the importance of appropriately challenging content for ELLS, and the low rate of Latino attendance in higher education (Marcus, 2021; Paredes, 2019). However, no research has been conducted to explore the lived experiences of middle school CAIS who teach ELLs. It was disheartening to discover that many middle school ELLs have no desire for higher education but interesting to learn of the high rate of teachers prepared to support ELLs in building CAL skills.

All participants confirmed the need for CALI but research indicates that the CAI can be reluctant to use class time for DS reading instruction and often think the reading or ELA lesson should be sufficient for students to learn CA reading strategies. However, the findings of the study showed that this perspective seems to be diminishing through education and professional development of teachers in areas with a sizable ESL population. One teacher said that some instructors have a different background and education, and they hesitate to teach CAL. This statement shows that there is need to ensure that as the ELL population increases, PD and education provided to instructors on supporting ELLs in content areas also increases.

My research did not account for the use of special education teachers to teach ELL students but focused on the reading strategies for middle school ELLs and preparation of instructors teaching them. Had I expected this development, I would have added it to my literature review. Texan teachers noted that all teachers have an ESL certification related to CALTA or TESL, which only require about 180 hours of instruction at the most, and can be

obtained online unlike a full licensure, which requires one to take university-level classes on teaching ELLs and education, conduct student teaching assignments, and pass testing such as praxis and edTPA assessments. Fully licensed ESL instructors are much more qualified to support the needs of ESL students in content areas than other staff members with CELTA or TESL certifications and licensure in another area. This aspect explains why teachers are noting how ESL teachers scaffold students to develop CA concepts during ESL pullouts and why they communicate ways to support these students during lessons to the CAIs.

Research literature includes a discussion on teachers who give ELL students lower grade-level texts or reading at the individual's Lexile level in a negative tone. Authors describe the strategy as a method of supporting students to get assignments done or easily communicating material to them without scaffolding them up to grade reading targets. However, this depiction does not account for the need of students to access text to understand content material and the great difficulty of understanding material 2 or 3 grade levels higher than one's own Lexile level. If ELLs are given frustration level texts, they will quickly give up and lose any motivation they have for learning the material. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to find a balance between giving lower level text and scaffolding students to higher reading levels, which in most cases is likely being done, just behind the scenes in the pull-out classes the ELLs are assigned to or during push-in classes with the aid of the ESL instructors.

I researched little on the effect of motivation of students on academic performance because I was focusing on understanding the reading strategies useful for ELLs. I did not realize the significance of the lack of motivation on many Latino ELLs until I analyzed the data from participants. The communication with CAIs made it clear that motivation is one of the drivers of the achievement gap and the low number of Latino students attending higher education. As

communicated by participants, the parents and grandparents of many of these students were not educated beyond primary school for various reasons, such as the inability of affording further education or the lack of expectation in finding jobs that require a university-level education in their native countries. Many South American students who come to the United States do not have a higher education background or family support to attend collegiate education, especially those who start working in the family trade or business at a young age. Therefore, many Latino students fail to see the importance for academic-level literacy in their lives and until they do, the situation is likely not going to change. It is important for teachers to build relationships with these students, understand their culture and mindset, and communicate the value of education to support the goals they want to pursue in life.

Novel Contributions of the Study

This study has novel contributions of the study to the field of ESL instruction. They include some states ask special education teachers with ESL certifications to support ELL students in content area lessons and one of the biggest contributions to the achievement gap between Latino ELLs and native speaking students is their lack of motivation and/or lack of school attendance. I will discuss these findings in the sections below.

Special Education Teachers Support ELL Students

Some states require special education teachers with ESL certifications to support ELL students in content area classes, which may or may not be the best approach to helping ESL students perform well in content. The teachers are required to have a CELTA or TEFL certification, which is completely different from a teaching license that takes much more preparation and work to obtain. Those considered highly qualified ESL instructors have obtained extensive training and instruction in the field and have passed more difficult, extensive

exams than that that required for a CELTA or TEFL certification. Thus, although special education teachers may be able to use their understanding of struggling students to help ELLs, their qualification to help these students does not compare to that of certified ESL instructors.

Many states require special education instructors to support ELL students for two reasons. The participants in the study confirmed that many, if not most of their ESL students, have been diagnosed with learning disabilities or special needs, such as dyslexia or a reading disability, as explained above. The instructors noted that their district prefers to have one teacher support all students identified as LD ESL or ELL to avoid stigmatizing others. However, it is also important to ensure that all students get the assistance they need to learn at their highest potential. As research indicates, ESL students are easily targeted with LD when they have difficulty acquiring literacy in the language. Therefore, it is vital that those diagnosing students with special needs are careful to identify these students as LD only if they have a reading or math disability (Roseberry-McKibbin, 2019). Many ELLs struggle with academic motivation and unnecessarily labeling one as LD would only heighten this lack of motivation.

Lack of Motivation in Latino ELL Students

Several teachers discussed the problem of lack of motivation among Latino ELLs to learn. These students found secondary education irrelevant to their lives and goals, making it difficult to engage them in academic activities. This lack of motivation is likely one of the leading factors in the achievement gap between Latino ELLs and native speaking students, as it leads to absenteeism, dropout, and failure to attend higher education. The teachers noted that many Latino students have no plans for higher education because they prefer to work in a trade than study books. Laquisha noted, “In the lot of my kids, you know, they don't want to go to a four year university. Some of them even tell me what my mom only has a fifth-grade education

or my parents.” The participants in the study discussed the issue that many Latino ELL students skip classes to play or work elsewhere, a behavior that begins in middle school. Sarah said, “Oh sometimes some of my ELL's don't come to school regularly.” The pupils find secondary education unnecessary because they have no plans for collegiate education or obtaining white-collar jobs. The goal of these learners is to work in a trade like their parents and grandparents, and in their minds, such a life does not need much education beyond primary school. Therefore, it is important that educational institutions work with ESL students from an early age to determine their career goals and support them to see the value of education to improve their both their life and professional opportunities, regardless of their career choice.

Using the ZPD to Scaffold ELLs in CAI

My study supports the use of the ZPD to scaffold students in understanding CAI by revealing teachers who are doing so correctly and pointing out methods they use to do so. Although I can deduce ways instructors use the ZPD to support ELLs, their answers to interview questions showed they could not contribute directly to the question on how to use ZPD to scaffold ELL s in understanding CATs or concepts. This result shows the need for teachers to have more training and development in this area. The study confirmed the need to add to research on ways to scaffold ELLs in CAL to benefit ESL instruction so that teachers can be better trained in the area. When asked how they scaffold ELLs, two of the CAIs explained that the ESL support staff should be allowed to conduct the pull-out lessons whereas others with more experience supporting ELLs or more training can describe strategies they use to help them with the content. If there is more literature on this area of instruction and support, then teachers will be more knowledgeable and better able to discuss how to use the ZPD in scaffolding students.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study has some limitations and delimitations that must be considered. The limitations affected the study, as they included factors outside my control. There were a few limitations in the ratio of teachers with experience in both charter and public schools, those with a large or little amount of teaching experience, and with the location. Few teachers had experience working in charter schools and thus lacked the ability to make a comparison in perceptions. Eight of 10 teachers had 10 or more years of teaching experience. The study included participants from several states instead of one geographic location and each state has different policies regarding ESL instruction.

The delimitations did not have a negative effect on the study, as they were purposeful decisions I made in the research. I selected a transcendental phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of middle school CAI teachers teaching ELLs in ELL-heavy states. The participants had to have experience teaching ELLs and at least three ELLs in one of their classes. Additionally, they had to be a CAI or ESL teacher who supported CAIs. Because participants had to be 18 years or older to be teaching professionals, I needed to obtain consent from each of the participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies are recommended to explore the lived experiences of middle school CAIs teaching ELLs in various states of the United States. Future research should be undertaken for each of the schools of the participants to get a more accurate comprehensive and accurate view of CAIs' lived experiences by including more participants from more diverse settings. Future research should also be undertaken in charter schools of each of the participating districts to obtain a deeper understanding of the experiences of teachers who have taught in both public and

charter school settings. I suggest having a greater population of charter school participants to confirm the findings that public schools are more restrictive in their instruction and the effects of funding on pushing public school instructors to teach to the test.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of middle school CAIs teaching ELLs in ELL-heavy states. The theories used to guide this study were Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and Tomlinson's (2014) theory of differentiation of instruction. The data collection methods were gathering lesson plans from participants, obtaining national and state test data, and conducting individual and focus group interviews. This study revealed that effective methods to scaffold ELLs in CAI include embedding vocabulary instruction into lessons, modeling, small group instruction, visualization, and activating background knowledge. The challenges CAIs experience in teaching ELLs include the lack of motivation from students and receiving support from SPED staff instead of highly qualified ESL teachers. The rigidity of public school instruction was reflected in the lack of instructional freedom experienced by public school teachers and the push these instructors feel towards teaching to the test.

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Appendix A

Appendix Title

Appendix B