A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY FOR ENGLISH LEARNER INSTRUCTION

by

Emilie Louise Jacumin-Simmons

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of special education teachers (SETs) who instruct English learners (ELs) at secondary public schools in the Southeast. In this research, SETs instructing ELs were generally defined as SETs responsible for the instruction of ELs with or without disabilities. The theory guiding this study was Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. The qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of 11 SETs who teach in secondary public school districts in the southeastern United States. Data collection consisted of Teacher Self-Efficacy (TSE) Scale surveys, teacher reflections on their individual TSE results, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups. For analysis, data was listed and grouped, reduced, eliminated, hypothetically identified, applied, and finally identified. Following the analysis of each of the sources, that data was synthesized to derive a concise textural–structural description of the essence of SETs' experiences teaching ELs. The essence of these SETs' experiences revealed two themes consisting of teacher challenges and teacher efficacy for student instruction. The first theme of teacher challenges emerged with subthemes of language barrier and cultural differences, student placement, lack of appropriate resources, lack of stakeholder support, and inadequate preparation. The second theme of teacher efficacy for student instruction was revealed with subthemes of assessment of student needs, strategies for student success, teacher support, and teacher training to instruct ELs. This study highlights the lived experiences of SETs who instruct ELs with or without disabilities and provides implications calling for additional support to bolster their teaching self-efficacy.

Keywords: English learner teachers, professional development, self-efficacy in teaching, special education teachers

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Dedication

To my parents and grandparents, whose lives modeled their faith in Jesus Christ and who taught me the value of education.

To the rest of my family and friends who endured the process along with me, you did well. May you go on to continue your own pursuits of knowledge. I love you all!

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I want to thank Dr. Motte for her guidance and continued prayers along with an extra dose of encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr. Spaulding for her willingness to be a part of my committee and render her expertise in methodology. And to all my peers who listened and supported me during this process, may God richly bless each of you.

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List of Abbreviations

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD)

English Learners or English Language Learners (EL/ELL)

Expediting Comprehension for English Language Learners (ExC-ELL)

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Preservice Teachers (PST)

Professional Development (PD)

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Rethinking Equity in the Teaching of English Language Learners (RETELL)

Special Educational Needs (SENs)

Special Education Teacher (SET)

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2023), English learners (ELs) are the fastest-growing group within the U.S. student population, representing 10.3% in the fall of 2020 or 5 million students. More specifically in the southern and midwestern U.S., new global industries have spurred migration from around the world, resulting in an increase of 135% of the EL population in North Carolina; 44.4% of this population who are over the age of five do not speak English well (Migration Policy Institute, 2022). Consequently, schools have reported an increased enrollment of EL students and documented a rise in the number of students who receive special education services in addition to their English language services (Farnsworth, 2018; Trainor et al., 2023). Although the education of these students is the obligation of their district school systems, federal law mandates that special education teams outline, implement, and oversee the educational plans for these students with dual eligibilities (Kangas, 2018; Mason-Williams et al., 2017). As the central educator of this team, the special education teacher (SET) collaborates with students' parents, school administrators, general education teachers, and EL teachers to establish student learning goals and monitor student progress toward individualized education plan (IEP) objectives (MacLeod et al., 2017; Sanderson, 2023). SETs are vital to the educational process, and their sense of self-efficacy to meet the needs of their students hinges on their belief in their ability to overcome professional and personal challenges (Cruz et al., 2020; Hopman et al., 2018). The following sections examine the historical, social, and theoretical background as it relates to ELs with accompanying disabilities and the SETs who have a primary role in delivering a free appropriate public education (FAPE). After the problem and purpose of this study are exposed, a deeper look into

the study's significance and research questions is presented, followed by the chapter summary.

Background

To better understand the self-efficacy of SETs working with ELs, one needs to know the historical, social, and theoretical contexts pertaining to the situation. Historically, this entails the background of immigrant and special education in America and the resulting problems and subsequent federal legislation that have transpired. The social context relates to how the education system, including students, teachers, parents, and stakeholders as well as the local community and society at large, are affected by the problem. In terms of theoretical context, this study looks at concepts that have developed and are under examination through the lens of self-efficacy and the principles underpinning the research. The following sections address the historical, social, and theoretical aspects that affect the self-efficacy of SETs as they facilitate learning for the EL segment of the population.

Historical Context

Early in U.S. history, educational institutions recognized multiple languages within the school confines. Unlike their European counterparts, teaching students with various home languages was commonplace in America, largely due to the colonization by sects of people of many cultures and religions (Crawford, 1987, 2008). In the beginning, education in Colonial America consisted of a minimally educated housewife teaching a few children in her home while continuing to take care of her household obligations. Eventually, schoolmasters were employed to teach numerous children in designated buildings (Ediger, 2018).

During the early 1800s, populations continued to immigrate from western Europe to escape crop failure, job shortages, rising taxes, famine, and religious or political persecution, as well as the forced migration of people from Africa (Mellom et al., 2018; Orbe & Drummond,

2011). It was also during this time that visionary individuals devised ways to teach those with disabilities. Those individuals included Thomas Gallaudet, who taught hearing-impaired students how to communicate with sign language, and Dr. Samuel Howe, who taught the visually impaired how to read using their fingers (Paterson, 2021). In 1839, Horace Mann and Edmund Dwight founded the first normal school to train teachers. At that time there were only a few people interested in pursuing the art of teaching, but by 1908, there were as many as 100,000 prospective teachers. With an increase in the number of teachers came the potential to diversify teaching to include different subjects, such as biology, physiology, psychology, art, music, history, and industrial arts (Eliot, 1908; Paterson, 2021). Initially, teacher training was comprised of two-year programs, but by the twentieth century, candidates had to complete a four-year degree. Early on, most teachers in the organized school system were men, but as time progressed more and more women went into the teaching profession (Paterson, 2021).

At the turn of the century, economic downturns became an opportunity for government and industry to impose control over workers (Fairchild, 2004). They did this by utilizing congressional restrictions that prevented the immigration of those who could not support themselves as well as those who had mental illness or criminal records. Even with these restrictions, the continuing expansion of the immigrant population created civic concerns; in 1917, the government enacted legislation requiring immigrants to be able to read in any language as a condition of entry.

The Americanization movement of the early 1920s showcased teachers delivering scripted lessons to ELs. The motivation during these early years of teaching ELs was an effort to assimilate immigrants into American culture and make them more economically productive (Crawford, 1987, 2008; Ray, 2013). In the 1930s, normal schools became known as teacher

colleges, and by the 1950s, education was a specific department within universities. Teacher candidates were learning best practices for teaching by utilizing research-based strategies, and their training took place in college learning labs or campus schools (Paterson, 2021). In 1965, the U.S. passed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 or the Hart-Cellar Act. This legislation eliminated the earlier enforced quota system regarding national origins and ended America's exclusionary period that began in the early 1920s (Ray, 2013). Now, educators adhered to an inclusionary model that educated non-English speaking students alongside their monolingual peers (Crawford, 2008; U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2015).

As a result of the political changes related to the civil rights movement and other court cases, the federal government passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Subsequently, Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, which challenged the previously non-supported language acquisition model (Villegas, 2018). To adhere to the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) and provide quality education for all students, teachers in the 1970s and 1980s observed and reflected as they participated in multi-grade classrooms, open classroom learning environments, and many other experimental education settings.

As the American classroom scene evolved, so did the economic and political scenes. The adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1996 precipitated an overwhelming rise in immigration with the largest proportions coming from Latin America and Asia (Fairchild, 2004; Mellom et al., 2018). North American Free Trade Agreement incented the private business sector to recruit laborers to relocate to the South, and apart from Texas and possibly Florida which already had large immigrant populations, the remainder of the South witnessed its greatest increase in Latino immigrants (Mellom et al., 2018).

With this rise in the U.S. immigrant segment of the working population, the expectation of FAPE for their children became a reality to be addressed. The mindset was that all students were to achieve a targeted level of knowledge. These defined academic standards served to determine the success or failure of teachers, administrators, and school districts, and by 1998, student testing became an integral part of education. However, instead of testing for proficiency in a subject, students were tested and their scores were compared to national standards. (Paterson, 2021). Consequently, standardized testing highlighted those students with special needs who failed to make significant learning progress. Acknowledging these gaps in student learning called into question the qualifications of the teachers who oversaw the instruction of these students (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016).

Once again, the educational system experienced pressure to affect policy changes. These policy changes came in the form of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 legislation. Then, on the heels of NCLB came mandates set forth in the IDEA of 2004 assuring that all children have access to a FAPE and preventing discrimination based on disabilities or individual differences. Such legislation spearheaded individualized educational objectives and as a result, complicated the procedures for special education identification. Regarding students of culturally diverse backgrounds, setting placement and disproportionate identification became problematic (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2016). Possessing similar legal directives as NCLB, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) included both students with special educational needs (SENs), but Title III of that legislation expressly required teachers to be highly qualified in teaching English to EL students in addition to utilizing an approved curriculum (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007; Callahan & Shifrer, 2016). As the number of students who speak English as a second language has increased, the resulting dilemma has become a delicate balance between inclusion and segregation, as well

as the equity and compliance of providing services (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016).

The history of education has evolved with inherent needs. Many of the legislation mandates for education stemmed from situational requirements, such as a growing population, immigration of non-English speaking families and their children, or the deficiencies within the educational system to meet the needs of all students with or without disabilities. Through it all, teachers were at the forefront of these historical changes. Their characters were shaped out of necessity, desire, and even their own sense of self as it relates to the education that they provide to all their students.

Social Context

Social forces shape the current needs and future trends of education within a democratic society. Forces, such as an increase in cultural and linguistic diversity in the U.S. or changes in values and morals, realign the educational structure (Parkay et al., 2014). In the fall of 2020, 10.3% of students in the U.S. were ELs as opposed to 9.2% in 2010, representing a jump from 4.5 million ELs to 5 million ELs in just 10 years (NCES, 2023). Out of the 7.3 million students with disabilities (SWD), or approximately 15% of the entire U.S. student population, 86% are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD; Green et al., 2021). Furthermore, CLD students are overrepresented across all racial and ethnic categories with African American students at 20% and Hispanic students at 27% overrepresentation (Green et al., 2021). The increase in the EL population also signals an increase in the SEN population (Bodenhamer, 2023; Farnsworth, 2018).

Accordingly, these students are eligible to receive services from SETs and EL teachers, but the numerous SET vacancies challenge educators’ ability to fulfill their responsibilities (Sutcher et al., 2019). To staff schools, some educational systems have lessened the criteria for

hiring teachers by eliminating required teacher preparation courses in place of passing a standardized test. Research has shown that teacher preparation has a significant bearing on student achievement and that success on a test does not substitute for intense coursework and field experience (Wallington & Johnson, 2022). In the absence of qualified teachers, schools provide curricular resources and grade-level instruction, yet these have proved insufficient to improve low outcomes of CLD SWD (Green et al., 2021; Galiatsos et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2018). Research attests to positive outcomes when SETs use highly effective instruction in conjunction with their classroom structuring and student responsiveness (Garwood et al., 2020; Mathews et al., 2023). Other studies indicate that SETs value researched-based strategies and instruction as well as knowing their students' pedagogical needs. SETs noted that these factors increased their self-efficacy, particularly when instructing ELs (Reyes et al., 2022).

Consistently, educational policy has focused on the teacher as the most important school-based determinant of student outcomes (Nguyen et al., 2020). The percentage of experienced teachers on a faculty is one of the strongest predictors of a school's student success. In turn, school success is an indicator of teacher turnover rates (Blizard, 2021). In a broad sense, school success can be a driving force behind where families decide to live, but ultimately parents are more concerned about whether their children's academic needs will be met.

Several factors contribute to parents' perceptions about education. Socioeconomic status (SES) is a factor in determining a child's pathway. Children with a low SES face more challenges than other children (Buckingham et al., 2014; Rivera & Li, 2019). These children have less access to resources that would develop and enrich their academic skills (Rivera & Li, 2019). A study was conducted of Hispanic parents whose children ranged in age from 8 to 13 (N = 339) to understand more about the perceptions of CLD parents regarding their involvement in

their children's schools. Findings showed that when teachers encouraged parental involvement in their children's academic activities, children's attitudes about learning were positively influenced. Teachers too play a critical role in affecting students' learning attitudes and future educational pathways in the classroom, but they also affect the parents' perceptions about the need to be involved in their children's learning activities. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to involve parents in their children's education and view teacher involvement more positively (Paneque & Bareetta, 2006).

Pointedly, educators acknowledge the need for suitable programs to accommodate the influx of ELs and meet the challenges of a changing and diverse population. Therefore, the implementation of new programs should be multifaceted and recognize that teachers are not simply technicians implementing specific strategies but are social beings whose personal identities contribute resources gleaned from their sociocultural and sociopolitical spheres. As such, their identities shape their practice and affect their sense of self-efficacy as they serve a crucial role in successfully motivating students to realize specific outcomes (Fogle & Moser, 2017; Lee et al., 2017).

Theoretical Context

Demands of a changing social infrastructure have necessitated that teachers adapt their abilities to their current environments. How people adapt to their environment has been the subject of much research. Out of this behavioral research came what are known as social learning theories (Grusec, 1994). One such philosophy was rooted in B.F. Skinner's (1938) operant conditioning which purported that behavior is a response to experiences and the resulting consequences. If a behavior is rewarded or reinforced, then it likely will be repeated, whereas a negative consequence or punishment will occur less frequently (Grusec, 1994; Skinner, 1938).

Bandura (1977) extended this theory to include behavioral learning through observation and modeling as opposed to learning solely from one's actions and subsequent consequences. A corollary to this theory is the principle of self-regulation which is based on one's response to external forces or sources of information. From these responses, one formulates beliefs about one's ability to affect certain outcomes. Known as self-efficacy, this perception of abilities guides what people will attempt and how much effort they will exert to achieve a desired outcome.

Bandura (1993) touted that ability is not fixed but has generative capabilities to organize and execute cognitive, social, motivational, and behavioral skills for a variety of purposes. These generative properties relating to ability are supported in research by Rotter (1966) who theorized that an outcome was somewhat dependent on one's perception as to whether the reward was based on one's behavior or independent of it. Rotter's research also underpinned a subsequent study by Rand researchers who sought to measure the self-efficacy of teachers (N = 356) using a two-item teacher efficacy construct (Armor et al., 1976; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). These Rand researchers determined teachers who expressed confidence in their abilities believed that the outcomes were in their control even if the student was considered difficult or unmotivated. Therefore, teacher capacity, or mastery of skills, supports the relationship between teacher self-efficacy (TSE) and student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). To that end, teachers who believe in their ability to motivate students and promote learning will create environments conducive to positive outcomes (Bandura, 1993). Within this context, SETs who have a high self-efficacy will exert the personal resources of time, perseverance, and motivation to meet and exceed the academic expectations of their EL students with educational needs.

Problem Statement

The problem is SET shortages and a lack of adequate training impede the educational system from complying with the federal law which mandates all students are to receive a FAPE regardless of ability or cultural background (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Hester et al., 2020; Stutzman & Lowenhaupt, 2020). According to June 2021 statistics, the USDOE reported that 49 states and the District of Columbia had a severe shortage of qualified teachers who work with SWD (Hester et al., 2020; USDOE, n.d.). Although this situation has existed in the U.S. since the passage of PL 94-142 (IDEA) the result is that eligible students are not receiving the special education services that they are qualified to receive (Hester et al., 2020; Wiggan et al., 2021). The issue is compounded by approximately 50% of SETs leaving the teaching profession within the first five years of teaching (Billingsley, 2004; Hester et al., 2020). SET attrition rates are 46% higher than elementary teachers and only EL teachers have a higher attrition rate (Billinglsey & Bettini, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019). Research indicates that the major reasons behind SET attrition are a lack of administrative support, workload manageability, inexperience, and lack of training (Hester et al., 2020). Although no specific statistics were available for the attrition rate of SETs who also taught ELs, the research does show that the increased number of ELs who are participating in special education programs and the lack of SET learning opportunities to equip them to meet the instructional needs of ELs has caused low levels of self-efficacy for SETs teaching ELs (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2016; Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017; Villegas, 2018). Although the self-efficacy of SETs instructing ELs has been examined quantitatively (Monteiro et al., 2019), the lived experiences shaping the self-efficacy of these teachers have not yet been explored.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of SETs who instruct ELs at secondary public schools in the Southeast. At this stage in the research, SETs instructing ELs were generally defined as SETs who are responsible for the instruction of ELs with or without disabilities (Obiakor et al., 2002; Reyes et al., 2022). The theory guiding this study was Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy as it relates to how SETs view their ability to overcome challenges associated with instructing ELs.

Significance of the Study

This study holds theoretical, empirical, and practical significance. According to Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, teachers who believe in their abilities to affect change with their students will achieve more positive outcomes. The theoretical significance of this study was to confirm these assertions regarding perceived self-efficacy. It also extended the theory by applying it to a new population, namely, SETs who work with ELs with disabilities at the secondary school level.

Many studies have been conducted on TSE, but only a few have targeted SETs who teach ELs with or without disabilities. Most existing research has been (i.e., Klassen et al., 2014; Monteiro et al., 2019; Zee et al., 2017). One similar study highlighted the self-efficacy of SETs who taught ELs at an elementary level (N = 202). Although this research revealed several key indicators regarding SET self-efficacy for teaching ELs with disabilities, the study was conducted over a decade ago (Paneque & Bareetta, 2006). There is a dearth of literature on the self-efficacy of SETs who teach ELs enrolled at the secondary level. The empirical significance of this study is that it proposes to expand the body of literature as it relates to the self-efficacy of SETs who teach ELs at the secondary school level through their qualitative experiences, rather

than just their quantitative ones.

To make effectual changes within the educational system, additional knowledge is necessary to make the most beneficial decisions. Currently, the U.S. is experiencing an increasing EL population (NCES, 2023). Some of these students have disabilities. SETs who are qualified to teach these students are in short supply for a myriad of reasons (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Bodenhamer, 2023; Hester et al., 2020). Aside from a scarcity of teachers entering the profession, SETs are experiencing burnout associated with unmanageable workloads, lack of applicable training, and inadequate administrative support (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Hester et al., 2020). Quality education for all students is compromised by the shortages, and local school districts that are not in compliance with federal legislation are facing serious repercussions (Mason-Williams et al., 2017). In 2015, there were 384 judicial hearings regarding education and most of the cases pertained to a failure to provide FAPE to students with SEN (Katsiyannis et al., 2016; Mason-Williams et al., 2017). Practically, this study may expose shortcomings in how EL teacher support is determined in urban versus rural areas and arrive at viable solutions (Wallington & Johnson, 2022). Other practical outcomes for this study may include district opportunities to train SETs and increase their self-efficacy in teaching ELs utilizing research-based practices.

Research Questions

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of SETs who teach EL students in a secondary public school environment. As the EL population grows (NCES, 2023) and a significant number of ELs require special education services (Trainor et al., 2023), understanding the experiences of the teachers instructing this population is

important (Reyes et al., 2022). To better understand this phenomenon, one central research question and three sub-questions were developed.

Central Research Question

What are the shared experiences of SETs instructing ELs at secondary schools in the Southeast United States?

SETs are responsible for the instruction of students with special needs, yet a rising number of ELs are qualifying for services based on dual eligibility (Farnsworth, 2018). The central research question was created to canvas the various experiences of SETs who are responsible for students who also have EL eligibility. This helped address the empirical gap that exists in qualitative studies of SETs teaching ELs.

Sub-Question One

What challenges do SETs instructing ELs at secondary schools in the Southeast experience?

The growing number of students requiring special education services has caused a strain on teachers who are responsible for their education including feeling unprepared to instruct a CLD student population (Stutzman & Lowenhaupt, 2020). The purpose of this question is to explore the numerous challenges faced by SETs who are also responsible for the education of a CLD segment of the student population who often have SENs. Looking at teacher challenges can help understand experiences that have positively or negatively influenced self-efficacy, so sub-question one lays a foundation for understanding sub-question two.

Sub-Question Two

What are the self-efficacy perceptions of SETs instructing ELs at secondary schools in the Southeast?

The findings of numerous studies confirm that teachers' attitudes regarding inclusive settings for students with SENs are vital to the implementation of inclusion classrooms (Schwab, 2019). Inclusive classrooms are learning environments created by teachers and derived out of their talents and self-efficacy for the purpose of educating the students for whom they are responsible (Bandura, 1977). However, SETs who are unfamiliar with CLD barriers may struggle in their application of evidence-based practices (EBPs; Stutzman & Lowenhaupt, 2020) especially in rural areas where there is less EL teacher support (Johnson et al., 2018; Wallington & Johnson, 2022). This sub-question seeks to understand how SETs view their ability to instruct ELs in their classroom and the experiences that have shaped their views.

Sub-Question Three

What are the support experiences of SETs instructing ELs at secondary schools in the Southeast?

It is important to know a teacher's background to determine the amount of EL training they have received and where there could be deficits. Education training, life encounters, and professional development (PD) contribute to the knowledge base required for teachers to make informed decisions about their students. The teacher without these experiences is at a disadvantage when assessing and meeting the needs of their EL students (Miranda et al., 2019). The reason behind this question is to uncover any strengths or weaknesses in teaching responsibilities. A teacher who lacks confidence in teaching their EL students will defer teaching responsibilities to their bilingual or English as a second language (ESL) colleagues (Villegas, 2018).

Definitions

1. *English learners* – students who are learning to communicate in English while simultaneously learning academic content appropriate to their grade level of kindergarten through 12th grade (Mellom et al., 2018).
2. *Evidence-based practice* – An evidenced-based practice is one that is supported by studies confirming the attested outcome (Oakes et al., 2014).
3. *Professional development* – can be defined as learning opportunities to promote the capacity of teachers to improve instructional practices that are designed to realize greater student achievement (Zepeda, 2019).
4. *Self-efficacy* – Bandura's (1977, 1993) theory of self-efficacy extends beyond confidence in one's abilities through informational sources that increase a person's capacity to affect change in his or her environment.
5. *Special educational needs* – refer to educational deficits that require instructional supports to allow students to access the curriculum within mainstream classrooms (Schwab, 2019).
6. *Special education teachers* – a teacher who is responsible for diverse learners (Bettini et al., 2027).
7. *Students with disabilities* – a term that is sometimes used interchangeably with students with SENs and refers to students who need additional instructional assistance within an inclusive classroom setting (Burr et al., 2015).
8. *Teacher efficacy* – denotes the two-item construct of student learning and motivation utilized to measure the extent that a teacher believed the consequences of teaching were internally controlled by the teacher (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Summary

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of SETs instructing ELs in secondary public schools in the Southeastern United States. ELs are flooding the educational system, and college and university teaching programs are not graduating enough teachers with the specialized backgrounds necessary to serve the English language learners within the school populations (More et al., 2016). As it relates to special education, these effects are compounded by teacher attrition, particularly in the area of special education (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). The result is that the responsibility is being charged to SETs who have not been adequately trained in providing the necessary instruction to this group of students (Stutzman & Lowenhaupt, 2020). This situation is further complicated by the overrepresentation of ELs who have been qualified as having learning disabilities (Farnsworth, 2018) in addition to the growing number of students for whom the SETs are responsible (Miranda et al., 2019). Understanding the experiences of teachers on the frontlines of this phenomenon may illuminate ways to better support these teachers, and as a result, SWD who are ELs, through stronger teacher preparation programs, PD, educational policy, and administrative support.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to get a clearer understanding of the experiences of SETs who instruct ELs at secondary public schools in the Southeastern United States. Few studies have been conducted to explore the lived experiences of SETs who are also expected to meet the needs of the EL population. Learning more about the experiences of this segment of the teacher population serves to assess special educators' self-efficacy in their instruction of ELs and inform administrators and policymakers of ways to support these teachers. This chapter is divided into four distinct sections which include an overview and theoretical framework, followed by an exhaustive review of related literature, and culminating with a summary accompanied by references. The conclusion of this summary exposes a gap in the research that focuses on the influence of those lived experiences on the self-efficacy of SETs who are responsible for the instruction of ELs.

Theoretical Framework

Every structure or system requires a foundation upon which to build. The educational system is no different (Zuber-Skerritt, 2013). In educational research, the foundation is referred to as the theoretical framework. Due to the demands on SETs to meet the needs of CLD students, it reasons that one would explore how SETs perceive their abilities and preparation for their responsibilities to teach and facilitate student achievement. For this study, Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy is the theoretical framework overlaying the research.

Bandura (1977) studied behavior and subsequent outcomes of psychological functioning, highlighting the self-efficacy of individuals. Self-efficacy is more than confidence in one's abilities. It is an individual's belief in oneself, developed over time through informational

sources, such as performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal, that produces the cognitive, social, and behavioral skills necessary to affect change in one's environment.

Performance Accomplishments

Performance accomplishments represent the source of efficacy information that is derived from mastery experiences (Bandura, 1977). Due to the personal nature of these experiences, one's successes and failures are more influential than the other sources of information. In the case of success, the efficacy levels strengthen. Conversely, failures decrease the efficacy levels. However, if occasional failures follow multiple successful experiences, the degree to which efficacy levels are influenced is lessened. Therefore, it can be said that performance accomplishments are time-sensitive.

Vicarious Experiences

Live modeling and symbolic modeling are two means by which individuals attain certain knowledge concerning behavior and consequences (Bandura, 1977). These are known as vicarious experiences because the individuals are observers as opposed to performance accomplishments where the individuals are participants in the activity. People tend to stand back and observe others who are engaging in what they may deem as threatening activities. If the outcomes are perceived as positive, then the observers' efficacy levels from these vicarious experiences will improve too. Clear outcomes, rather than inclusive ones, are more of a determining factor of the actual level of efficacy generated.

Verbal Persuasion

When people are told what their expectations should be, it is considered verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1977). Since efficacy expectations generated under these conditions are

less influential than one's achievements or observations, conditions facilitating success must be substantiated. If not, then the contrary experiences discredit the efficacy expectations which then become meaningless. Verbal persuasion is best used in conjunction with other information sources to strengthen the level of efficacy expectation.

Emotional Arousal

When a person is subjected to an overwhelming situation, certain emotional responses are evoked (Bandura, 1977). This is known as emotional arousal, and it affects an individual's perceived self-efficacy. The physiological responses indicate the level of arousal, and efficacy expectations are usually higher when the physical stress responses are low. If individuals are highly aroused by stressful circumstances, their performance is usually impeded, and consequently, so is their opportunity for successful accomplishment.

Bandura (1993) expounded on the theory as he examined perceived self-efficacy and how individuals used self-belief to control their situations. To further extend the theory, Bandura identified how these perceptions influenced cognitive development and functioning. Although self-efficacy indeed underpins behavioral change that determines outcomes, this study utilizes perceived self-efficacy to understand the experiences of SETs as they overcome the challenges associated with instructing ELs.

Related Literature

Demographic studies have shown that ELs are the fastest-growing group within the U.S. student population (i.e., Miranda et al., 2019; Spies & Cheatham, 2018; Stairs-Davenport et al., 2021). The last decade documented an increase in CLD students with at least one in five students classified as ELs (Counts et al., 2018; He et al., 2014; Perreira et al., 2006). The Migration Policy Institute (n.d.) stated that this trend is likely to continue throughout the current decade.

More specifically, the rapid globalization of industries in recent decades has attracted workers from around the world to relocate to the southern United States (Fogle & Moser, 2017; Horsford & Sampson, 2013). Currently, the state of North Carolina has an English-language learner (EL) student population that ranks eighth nationally (Diette & Uwaifo Oyelere, 2017; Hofstettler & McHugh, 2021). With this influx of ELs comes an outcry for more teachers who are prepared to successfully meet the needs of this linguistically diverse population. To grasp the full ramifications of this growing challenge, this study delves into the attributes of all levels of teachers, as well as the characteristics of various student populations and the roles of educational stakeholders who are responsible for advocating for CLD students who may also possess SENs. Finally, this research includes sections on strategies for teaching this CLD population and on learning opportunities for special educators in the classroom.

Teachers of Unique Populations

Many teachers embark on their teaching careers with an adequate number of skills in their toolbox. However, the demands on these teachers to instruct unique segments of the student population oftentimes overreach their academic and life experiences (Alliaud & Feeney, 2015; Stairs-Davenport, 2021; Villegas, 2018). In 2001, the U.S. Congress reauthorized the ESEA of 1965 as NCLB (USDOE, 2007). The goal of this legislation was to improve the academic achievement of all students within the public school system. NCLB set objectives for making states' school districts accountable to certain academic standards in return for the Federal funding the school districts received. Most notable of the parameters was an assurance that every student would be taught by highly qualified teachers in core subjects as well as those teachers providing instruction to SWD or limited English proficiency (NCLB, 2001). The term highly qualified teacher is outlined in education policy legislation and refers to the licensure of

specialized teachers, either in the form of content specialists or special needs or EL certifications or licenses (Green et al., 2021). Teacher assignments and the implementation of programs became part of the political agenda, as states adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Expectations for upholding these mandates included pedagogical language in addition to increased content requirements for SWD and ELs (Bunch, 2013; Joseph & Evans, 2018). Aside from the legal facet, the dynamic nature of education requires teachers, administrators, and educational stakeholders to remain open-minded and flexible in the implementation of new research-based programs (Duran et al., 2011; Joseph & Evans, 2018).

Preservice Teachers

Colleges and universities offer educator preparation programs (EPP) for post-secondary students who have chosen teaching as their vocation. Throughout their training, these students, or preservice teachers, learn what it means to become a teacher (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021). They attend mentor teachers' classrooms and have research-based practices modeled for them. Field experiences grounded in research and reflection, such as student teaching opportunities are required and enrich the learning of the teacher-in-training. Preservice teachers represent the segment of the teacher population with the least number of experiences; however, these accumulated experiences shape their belief systems and subsequently affect their teaching practice. Some of these beliefs may or may not be beneficial, particularly if the students in their classrooms are from CLD backgrounds. Therefore, program coordinators need to prioritize the development of social justice in the preservice teacher curriculum and challenge preservice teachers to critically reflect on the influence their beliefs have on their teaching (Castañeda et al., 2018; Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018; Kelly, 2018). Support for these novice teachers in the form of diversity and awareness workshops which employ reflection and feedback on biases techniques

to change teacher attitudes can be beneficial (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018). Teacher education programs should equip preservice teachers with specific research-based instruction for second language teaching (Kelly, 2018). Many factors complicate the classroom paradigm for any teacher, especially at the preservice stage. For instance, students who are bilingual and bicultural often lack the prior knowledge or adequate level of schooling necessary to access various content areas. Program coordinators should model responsive instruction so that teacher candidates learn how to anticipate and assess possible gaps in student learning and prepare or adjust lessons accordingly. Since responsive instruction involves modeling, modeling good assessment practices including appropriate feedback leads to more transparent student outcomes (Barnes & Burchard, 2016; Kelly, 2018).

Processes, such as teacher inquiry, are used to equip preservice teachers hone their skills (Athanases & Wong, 2018). The crux of this procedure targets four objectives consisting of close analysis of student work to establish a baseline, progressive development by leveraging student learning to increase the body of knowledge, examine beliefs for underlying learner perspectives, and determine what to teach based on finding patterns and predicting to challenge learners and deepen their knowledge (Athanases & Wong, 2018; DiCerbo et al., 2014). Successful intervention depends on the preparedness of the classroom teacher in the form of foundational courses, such as the theory behind teaching English as a second language in addition to strong instruction in understanding cultural differences (Barnes & Burchard, 2016; Joseph & Evans, 2018; Kolano & King, 2015). Even though legislation mandates quality instruction of ELs, teacher training has not been a priority. In 2012, only five states required mainstream teachers to take coursework to learn about the needs of ELs (Dellicarpini & Alonso, 2014). A decade later, only 20 states mandate coursework in EL instruction (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018).

In-Service General Education Teachers

Understandably, preservice teachers lack experience and training with ELs. However, the research shows that general education teachers have reported gaps in their preparation for educating ELs as well (Avidov-Ungar, 2016; DiCerbo et al., 2014; Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018). Regardless of whether the setting is an urban or a rural American school, the dynamics of matriculating ELs have left even in-service general education teachers feeling inept at giving these students the quality of education to which they are entitled (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018).

Since ELs spend much of their day in an inclusion setting, it becomes critical for their general education classroom teachers to be knowledgeable in effective EL instruction strategies (Amendum et al., 2019). Teachers need to be effectively prepared with skills and strategies that take into account the cultural and linguistic challenges of students so that they can more readily engage students in English literacy development (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Training for teachers who are teaching out-of-field from their expertise must be purposeful for these teachers to share responsibility for these ELs. Out-of-field refers to teachers delivering instruction outside of familiar content areas, at different grade levels, or to special needs students (Echevarria et al., 2006; Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Kenny et al., 2020).

Even though a teacher may have years of experience, the jump to a new area presents a learning curve that is not unlike that of a first-year teacher. The effects of this lack of training on the in-service teachers and their students who depend on them must be considered. A survey of in-service teachers (N = 126) regarding teaching ELs in the five overarching domains of language, culture, instruction, assessment, and professionalism revealed a lack of teacher preparedness and the need for intentional training (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018). Of note was the

domain of professionalism that referred to the current legislation concerning ELs, EL-related field research, and a personal sense of shared responsibility for educating ELs, advocating for ELs and their families, and priorities for PD surrounding the topic of ELs. In this context, teachers' perceptions of their lack of preparedness to teach ELs negatively affected their sense of self-efficacy as professional educators (Avidov-Ungar, 2016; Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Kenny et al., 2020). Addressing these deficiencies is a complicated situation. ELs come to the U.S. with varying languages, English proficiencies, cultural differences, previous schooling, SES, and home and immigration life experiences (Von Esch & Kavanagh, 2018). Although a body of literature addresses the need for preparing general education teachers to teach ELs, the research on how this is to occur is still developing.

Certified EL Teachers

EL teachers are central to the educational process of the EL population. Students learn because their interests are awakened. Although some EL teachers speak one or more languages, proficiency in the English language is the only true language criterion. However, guiding students to acquire English as a second language does require a broad range of competencies, some of which have yet to be fully identified and explored (Al-Seghayer, 2017). Teachers of ELs have specific skills that they have acquired through both routine and adaptive practice. Some teachers are considered predominately routine experts while others, including EL teachers, are deemed adaptive experts. Routine experts are teachers who can apply methods and execute strategies with automaticity until a new problem with different parameters occurs (Von Esch & Kavanagh, 2018). Then, the routine expert struggles to find a solution due to a limited toolbox or lack of flexibility. On the other hand, the adaptive expert utilizes a technique from their repertoire, and lacking the desired results will adapt the strategy until the product is satisfactory.

Teachers who serve the EL population must have mastery of certain methods and strategies, but they must also know how to creatively integrate academic content knowledge while simultaneously facilitating English language instruction.

Education is dynamic as the students and the teachers represent multiple variables. Research has shown that mainstream teachers with inadequate training who instruct ELs tend to realize less than favorable academic results. As compared to their monolingual peers, EL students make lower grades, participate less, lack teacher feedback, and miss out on peer interaction and meaningful language opportunities (Dellicarpini & Alonso, 2014). Trends in EL teacher education have sought to understand how teachers of ELs achieve successful student outcomes (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016; Coady et al., 2020). Since these students spend much of their day in mainstream classrooms, researchers sought to observe and document the practices of teachers who instructed ELs in an inclusion setting ($N = 22$) by focusing on the three areas of emotional support, class organization, and instructional support (Coady et al., 2020). Research findings that validated the EL-Modified Framework for Teaching Observation Protocol based on a teacher effectiveness model by the Danielson Group highlighted differentiated practices that were utilized successfully with ELs. These consisted of culturally applicable class management, first language instructional materials, varied teaching depending on English language proficiency, and assessment utilizing multiple modalities.

Even with their skills and contributions to the inclusion and sheltered classrooms, there are very few circumstances where EL teachers also possess the 30- to 36-credit hours necessary to be considered a content area teacher (Dellicarpini & Alonso, 2014). More recently, EL teachers were faced with policy changes in states such as Arizona which switched from bilingual education to structured English immersion (SEI). This meant that ELs would be pulled from

inclusive settings to receive four hours of skill-based instruction in English that focused on vocabulary, grammar, conversation, reading, and writing. Additionally, in 2000, policymakers required all Arizona teachers to take 90 hours of training as defined by the Arizona Department of Education which gave them an SEI certification. Either holding a bilingual, ESL, or SEI endorsement certified Arizona teachers to teach ELs, although evidence indicated that teachers with a SEI endorsement lacked the skills to effectively work with ELs utilizing research-based skills and knowledge (Jiménez-Castellanos & García, 2017). After being placed in English Language Development (ELD) classrooms, teachers left the teaching profession citing their lack of preparedness as the cause for their attrition from the ELD setting (Heineke, 2018).

Located in the Southeast, the state of North Carolina requires that an individual who desires to become an ESL teacher needs to earn a degree in ESL or qualify to become an ESL teacher by passing a proficiency exam (ESL Teacher Edu, n.d.). North Carolina offers either a primary or K–12 add-on ESL license. A potential candidate may enroll in a university program that includes at least 19 hours of ESL certification coursework. An alternative to this traditional pathway is to add-on an ESL certification to an existing teaching license by completing 15 hours of ESL courses. However, if candidates hold bachelor’s degrees in fields other than education, they might matriculate into a Master of Arts in Teaching program with a concentration in ESL. The NC Department of Public Instruction requires all teaching candidates to pass state examinations that assess both basic skills and those in specific content areas. For ESL, teacher candidates are expected to pass the Praxis II: English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Once a candidate has completed the licensure and application processes, the professional must maintain and upgrade the North Carolina Teaching License after the first three years from an Initial Professional License (IPL) to a Continuing Professional License which is renewable

every five years and requires proof of admissible Continuing Education Units (CEUs) through the NCDPI Online Licensure System (ESL Teacher Edu, n.d.). Considering increased teacher expectations for the instruction of ELs, research shows teacher candidates (*n* = 288) who participated in multi-level EL-focused teacher preparedness programs adequately delivered EL instruction making way for ELs to achieve linguistically and content-wise (Lavery et al., 2019). In light of such findings, the 32 states that do not require teacher training to instruct ELs should reconsider their policies to close the achievement gap between ELs and native English-speaking students (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018; Lavery et al., 2019).

Certified SETs

Scholars and policymakers concede that teachers equipped with their experiences and qualifications make a difference in the outcomes of their students (Feng & Sass, 2013: Mason-Williams et al., 2017; Theobald et al., 2022). However, few studies focusing on SETs have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of their experiences and educational qualifications (Mason-Williams et al., 2017). SWD perform better in mathematics and reading when they were taught by a teacher who is certified in special education (*n* = 392,000 for math and *n* = 308,000 for reading). Implications of this study justified SWD to receive services from qualified SET, even considering the difficulties schools have had hiring qualified staff (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Feng & Sass, 2013; Kangas, 2018).

Qualifications for special education licensure were published state-by-state as early as 1972 and before the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 which would later be called the IDEA (Green et al., 2021). Although inconsistent from one state to another, all U.S. states had requirements according to the various categories of disabilities and focused research on teacher quality. For the first time, teachers who worked with these special

populations of learners targeted learning goals and behaviors instead of traditional academic content and learning approaches. In 42 states, no general education licensure was required to obtain a SET certificate. Currently, scholarly arguments pertaining to SETs preparation range from instruction in good teaching practices with research guiding the licensure process to the need for university teaching preparation that is heavily content-based knowledge with best teaching practices and supplemented with practicum training. The subsequent passage of federal legislation, such as the ESEA of 1965 and NCLB of 2001, outlined performance systems by establishing goals, evaluations, as well as rewards for teachers and school administration (Green et al., 2021; Mayger, 2023). This legislation also classified teachers based on their qualifications. Up until the 2015–2016 school year, schools had to report to parents if their children's teachers were or were not Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT) (Green et al., 2021). The state of North Carolina requires all SETs to have a four-year degree with either an undergraduate teaching certification or an add-on certificate or a Master of Arts in Teaching. Prior to becoming a SET, the teacher candidate takes competency exams based on a wide range of knowledge pertaining to various categories of students with SENs (ESL Teacher Edu, n.d.).

Effective SETs are characterized as diverse and flexible in teaching students with a wide variety of learning challenges (Hester et al., 2020; Cavazos et al., 2018). Successful teachers are expected to have exceptional planning, communication, and interpersonal skills. In addition to these expectations, the SET is taxed with time-sensitive and highly bureaucratic paperwork (Bettini et al., 2017; Conley & You, 2017; Hester et al., 2020). A growing shortage of SETs as well as a smaller number of teacher candidates threatens the quality that students with SENs receive (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

Efforts to support SETs revolve around the sustainment of EBP. The perspective of SETs was that they had positive feedback towards the interventions but lacked the opportunities to participate in PD (Daniel & Lemons , 2018). Other EBP programs were specifically designed to prepare SETs to adequately instruct ELs with learning disabilities. SET preparation programs seek to teach special needs educators how to utilize evidence-based instructional strategies to address language acquisition and cultural backgrounds of students for whom they are responsible. The idea is to integrate courses that provide teachers with the tools that they will need once they are in the classroom (More et al., 2016).

The cadre of teachers employed by school systems to educate students are as distinctive as the individuals they teach (Stair-Davenport, 2021). Whether they are preservice, in-service general education, certified EL, or certified SETs, their commonality lies in their responsibility to instruct students. To fulfill their roles, they must prepare themselves through coursework, observation, and experiences. NCES (2022a) reported that out of the total degrees conferred in 2021, 4.3% were in education demonstrating a decrease from the 5.9% in 2012. Therefore, colleges and universities are not graduating enough teachers with the specialized backgrounds necessary to serve the English language learners within the school populations.

Unique Student Populations

Introducing the diversified student population is the most effective way to inform readers of the challenges facing the teachers of today. It also gives insight into the gray areas of needs identification as well as the dilemma of resource distribution (Horsford & Sampson, 2013). In the upcoming section, ELs and ELs with disabilities will be explored to give further insight into the challenges faced by SETs who instruct these unique populations of learners.

ELs

ELs represent a rapidly growing segment of the student population (Amendum et al., 2018; Bunch, 2013). During the 2016 World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA, 2020) conference, the consortium reported that North Carolina tested a total of 97,684 EL students in grades K–12. Research statistics from WIDA show that it takes newcomers three to five years to attain conversational language proficiency in English and an additional four to seven years to become proficient in the academic English language (Collier & Thomas, 2017; WIDA, 2020).

Unique student populations, like ELs require specialized teaching strategies that focus on language acquisition. Language is considered central to learning, yet before academic language can be ascertained across the curriculum, students need to begin with basic oral language learning (DiCerbo et al., 2014). Those who teach ELs assert that oral narrative is a powerful way to glean information about students' lives and ideologies as well as giving ELs familiar topics to practice replicating language patterns. The link between culture and instruction is a theme that pervades the research on educating ELs (DiCerbo et al., 2014; Griswold, 2010; Orosco & O'Connor, 2014).

Oral language, or speaking, represents only one component of language. The other components are writing, listening, and reading. Speaking and writing are expressive pieces of language which means that the student conveys or expresses their thoughts, whereas, listening and reading are receptive components (Calderón et al., 2011; Wei, 2019). Reading poses the greatest challenge for ELs because of the amount of information that they are receiving at a higher academic level of language (Amendum et al., 2018). For instance, the adoption of the new Common Core and other standards extends beyond basic reading skills as a common thread

through all academic content areas. Previously, mathematics was considered a subject apart from reading aside from the occasional word problem, but the new academic standards target building true language skills. Even the mathematics standards emphasize the development of language practices with phrases such as, “explaining,” “justifying,” “communicating,” “respond to,” “listen or read,” and “ask questions clarifying or improving the argument.” As such, reading is the foundation for all content and therefore entails a greater portion of instructional time (Amendum et al., 2018; Bunch, 2013) Approximately, 80% of second-generation Americans have not attained English proficiency. To clarify, these ELs who have been in U.S. schools since kindergarten are still classified as long-term ELs, concluding that they are not receiving adequate English instruction in kindergarten and the early school years (Calderón et al., 2011). Since reading is the foundation for all secondary education content and requires a greater portion of instructional time, the implementation of early intervention reading programs in the first years of school stands to have the most impact (Amendum et al., 2018).

Aside from lacking explicit language and other academic skills, ELs are often hindered by their social diversity which may not have prepared them for implicit socialization in the U.S. classroom (Perreira et al., 2006). Expectations, such as raising a hand to answer questions, taking turns, or establishing class routines, may contribute to less-than-successful student outcomes. ELs would benefit from explicit instruction regarding cultural classroom behaviors and appropriate social interactions (Echeverria et al., 2006).

EL Learners With SENs

Not only do ELs face the challenge of acquiring English concurrently with mastering academic content, but in the 2008–2009 school year, 11% of the kindergarten through 12th grade student population were classified as ELs and 7% of those ELs qualified for special education

services apart from their English learning eligibilities (Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017). Several misconceptions regarding students with SENs who also have EL eligibility need to be addressed before appropriate accommodations can be made. These misunderstandings, according to Cheatham and Hart Barnett are: (a) SWD cannot be bilingual; (b) SWD should not be bilingual; (c) English should be the only instruction language; (d) Pull-out services are the best for students with SENs who are also ELs; and (e) Families value bilingualism. Scholars thwart these misconceptions and instead tout that bilingualism is an asset and effective teachers of students with SENs will adapt curriculum and lesson delivery to meet the needs of these students who have dual eligibilities of special needs and English learning acquisition. Acknowledgment of these students with dual eligibilities requires that the teaching staff address the individualized students' educational needs as well as respond to their social and cultural diversity (Chu & Garcia, 2014; Park & Thomas, 2012). To accomplish this, educators must clearly understand all aspects of these unique learners. Initially, these students must be identified.

Since ELs struggle with language two (L2) or English language acquisition, special needs are more difficult to recognize (Burr et al., 2015; Van Mensel & Deconinck, 2019). Research shows that policies and procedures for evaluating and tracking these ELs with possible learning disabilities need to be clarified as educational professionals are uncertain of how to identify these subgroups (Barrio, 2017; Burr et al., 2015). In more rural areas, CLD students are disproportionately represented in SEN categories (Burr et al., 2015). The lack of proper identification of EL students who may or may not require special services and accommodations is cited for the disproportionality. Scholars suggest reasons for misidentification including a lack of evidence-based identification protocols and the need to have access to PD opportunities (Barrio, 2017). Additionally, multiple forms of data should be collected ranging from the

student's proficiency in their first language (L1), interviews with parents and teachers, as well as observations of the students in various school group settings including small-group and regular classroom instruction. The more data that is collected, the more accurately student needs can be determined (Burr et al., 2015).

One means of identifying students with SENs within the EL population is a RTI. RTI is a three-tiered system that incorporates a progress monitoring protocol with more frequent and intensive teaching interventions depending on the tier where the student is placed (Park & Thomas, 2012). This allows ELs to learn in the general education system until it becomes apparent that they need additional support. Once the level of support is increased, the EL is monitored until the proper balance of support and independent learning is achieved. RTI also makes it easier to determine whether a student is struggling because of language acquisition or learning disability or both categories.

Also, teachers of ELs with special needs should know what the students' challenges are so that learning strategies and measurable goals and objectives can be monitored (Park & Thomas, 2012). These students with dual eligibilities have an educational plan for language acquisition and a separate plan pertaining to their disabilities. Frequently, state-mandated and monitored plans fail to give guidelines as to how these students who fall into both EL and SEN categories are to be served (Burr et al., 2015). The previous mindset of EL and SETs has been to divide and conquer (Kangas, 2018). Regarding teaching EL students who are also eligible for special education services, this philosophy is not sufficient to give these students the services they need or by law are supposed to receive.

The Stakeholders

Educational stakeholders are those people who have a vested interest in the education of students in their districts. Their job is to make policy and monitor the effects of that policy on the local community schools (Liton, 2016). They include community leaders in education, parents, teachers, and administrators. Among their responsibilities, stakeholders should stay informed of current EBP relating to linguistic development and meaningful instruction for all students including those with SENs and ELs. Staying apprised of EBP helps stakeholders make better decisions regarding the appropriation of funding for SETs (Daniel & Lemons, 2018; Heineke et al., 2019). Involving the stakeholders in the reform processes as equal partners affects their attitudes as investors. If stakeholders share in creating and implementing the educational goals, the chances of the reforms' successful implementations increase significantly (Avidov-Ungar, 2016; Burr et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2017). Some of these reforms contain stipulations for teacher PD that targets an increasing understanding of their roles in the educational process thereby promoting professional identity objectives inclusive of high-quality teaching and learning (Avidov-Ungar, 2016; Egert et al., 2018).

Stakeholders also play a tremendous role in partnering with policymakers to initiate and implement programs designed to rigorously train school principals and other school leaders. Such programs are necessary to build stronger school administrators who will nurture healthy learning environments for both students and teachers (Sutcher et al., 2019). Other initiatives supported by stakeholders target continuing education for preservice and in-service teachers to professionalize early childhood education and care (ECEC) and increase the learning outcomes of these young students (Egert et al., 2018). Policymakers in states like North Carolina have established specific models containing expectations for any bilingual school program design, but the final decisions and logistics are left to the district and local schools (USDOE, 2015). Another

function of local stakeholders is to leverage social networking, or social capital, within the community to welcome and integrate these newcomers into the community. Relationship-building while maintaining respect for home cultures increases the likelihood that these immigrant families will sense their value in the community and acknowledge their responsibilities as a part of the schools where their children are enrolled (Thomas et al., 2016).

Parents

While parents are stakeholders in their child's education, this study focuses on the parents of ELs, who are most often immigrants as well. At least 59 % of North Carolina's immigrant parents were classified as low-income (Hofstettler & McHugh, 2021). Research shows that poverty adversely affects a child's physical and emotional development as well as their levels of school readiness and ultimately, their educational success (Hofstettler & McHugh, 2021; Perreira et al., 2006). Children need the support of their parents to help them grow into independent individuals. This is particularly important as it relates to ELs (Calderón et al., 2011; Hofstettler & McHugh, 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2014). With the dramatic rise in the EL population come the challenges of insufficient resources and too few qualified teachers. The problem is exacerbated by a lack of parental engagement (Johnson et al., 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2014).

Delving deeper into the lack of parental involvement, research shows that CLD families believe the teachers and administrators to be the experts and therefore defer to them in judging what is best for their child (Rodriguez et al., 2014). In many cases, CLD families are not sure whether their involvement would be welcomed, nor do they feel confident in their abilities to contribute to a well-suited educational plan. Other factors informing this mindset include a lack of knowledge about laws regarding their child's eligibility for special needs or English language services or the economic wherewithal to advocate for their child's benefit. In some cultures,

parents view their child's special needs as a spiritual phenomenon, and their lack of involvement is due to their belief that a deficit does not exist.

Whether the student is an EL with or without disabilities, engaging parents as part of their child's education is the socially just thing to do. Purposeful experiences designed to extend learning and nurture development in students have long been parental obligations regardless of whether their children have disabilities or other barriers (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Legally, parent involvement for these unique learners is explicitly written into law. Educationally, evidence correlates parent involvement with positive student outcomes (Hofstettler & McHugh, 2021; Plata-Potter de Guzman, 2012; Rodriguez et al., 2014).

Since parental participation is vital to the child's educational growth, certain school-based strategies have proven effective in engaging EL parents. It is the school's responsibility to encourage parents in the decision-making, and the primary way to address this is by clear and frequent communication (Rodriguez et al., 2014).

Community and Businesses

Social forces play an integral part in education because the instruction that students receive should be relevant to their communities and their future employment opportunities (Parkay et al., 2014). Regions that employ large non-English speaking populations have benefitted from the labor pool. However, most of these jobs fail to provide economic stability for the workers and their children (Calderón et al., 2011). At present, the schools that are educating young ELs offer these students the best chance at securing their future (Calderón et al., 2011; Hofstettler & McHugh, 2021). Addressing the poverty issue among immigrant families would give additional support to these children and improve their learning outcomes (Blizard, 2021). When a population grows, so do the needs of community residents. Supplying varied and skilled

labor increases not only challenges but also opportunities. Community initiatives that partner with local businesses need to be established to train non-English-speaking residents (Thomas et al., 2016). Certain factors, such as existing employment and parenting of children, should be considered in setting up training programs for these immigrant parents. Due to these responsibilities, intensive vocational opportunities would not be feasible, but apprenticeships and employer partnership programs that consider childcare and transportation costs would be a beneficial solution for immigrant families, area businesses, and the community at large (Hofstettler & McHugh, 2021).

Policymakers

Advocates for the full inclusion classroom purport that all children, need notwithstanding, have a moral and legal right to attend general education classes in their home school and receive all necessary support of SETs within those classes (Jiménez-Castellanos & García, 2017). The inclusion classroom setting requires that students with exceptionalities are supported by teachers who have been trained to meet the special needs of the students on their caseloads (Hester et al., 2020). In addition to the identification of the learner's individual needs, a plan for equipping these teachers to respond and fulfill the students' learning objectives must be established. Particularly, as more ELs enroll in U.S. schools, K–12 teachers are recognizing the need to equip themselves to teach these students (Calderón et al., 2011). Professional learning programs for teachers were found to be effective in increasing the quality of instruction of ELs. However, closing the achievement gap means closing similar gaps in teacher preparation as well as continuing education programs (Calderón et al., 2011; Murphy & Torff, 2019). Policymakers and educators have argued the benefits of English immersion versus bilingual

programs and concluded until an agreement can be made, the most successful path is to improve overall classroom instruction (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016).

Admittedly, various state and district policymakers determined teacher training to be the best solution, but it was also the greatest challenge given the limited amount of teacher training time (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016; Bunch, 2013; Calderón et al., 2011). After their initial certifications, educators are required to renew their teaching licenses every five years. During the five-year interim, teachers are expected to take workshops or classes that they receive in continuing education units (CEUs) which are credited to their upcoming renewal requirements. Although different states may have different requirements, the state of North Carolina requires that after teachers' initial three years in their classrooms, they renew their licenses every five years. Part of the process requires teachers to submit proof of 7.5 continuing education credits (ESL Teacher Edu, n.d.). North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) breaks these credits down into one credit for literacy, one credit for teacher content area, and 5.5 general credits. Teachers can use college or university classes or other district- and state-approved courses to meet the CEU requirement. Frequently, PD offerings are eligible as licensure renewal credits (ESL Teacher Edu, n.d.). Although assisting teachers in maintaining their licensure is an important aspect of PD, PD serves as a support to the educational system and exists for several reasons and in many formats. A closer look at the various types of PD reveals its importance to teacher preparedness.

Teacher PD

Research on teacher PD highlights four learning strands that produce desirable results. These general, yet essential, aspects of PD consist of actions or attitudes towards specified goals or work, reflections or self-criticism on those actions, autonomy or self-initiating behaviors,

networking or productive communicating, and collaboration abilities (Zehetmeier et al, 2015). In general, PD can appear in many forms, benefit numerous groups or individuals, and serve several purposes.

For educators, PD sometimes looks like a group of teachers working together cooperatively to problem-solve and improve learning environments for their students (Brody & Davidson, 1998). Not only are these teachers working collaboratively, but they will then take what they are learning and demonstrate the model to their students as an effective way to acquire successful learning outcomes. Sometimes PD looks like combined training programs for foreign language teaching and ESL where both groups are allowed to share experiences with their multicultural and multilingual populations and these benefits are documented (Fogle & Moser, 2017). Occasionally, PD will look like a traditional classroom set-up with an expert discussing pedagogies, that have shown success in shifting teachers' attitudes toward their CLD students, such as The Instructional Conversation (Mellom et al., 2018). Frequently, PD takes the form of the numerous nationwide initiatives, programs, or strategies, such as Language Matters that have been implemented and garnered attention based on positive outcomes, and as a result should be renamed professional learning and development (PLD) to express more accurately the dynamic nature of learning as opposed to PD that tends to imply a more summative meaning (Heineke et al., 2019; Sapsworth, 2013). Sometimes PD looks like a web-based technology that is designed as an intervention strategy for teachers to use to improve English skills within the participating treatment group (Amendum et al., 2018). There are even instances when PD is job-embedded to give teachers learning opportunities at their individual knowledge and skill levels while simultaneously making the instruction practical in addressing the low reading levels of ELs

(Cavazos et al., 2018). The mere existence of PD is not sufficient. The application of the PD and ensuing benefits to teachers and students is what is important.

What is taught in the classroom is an outgrowth of a teacher's identity and is considered a pedagogical resource (Fogle & Moser, 2017). PD solidifies the identities of teachers as they move from having implicit to explicit knowledge of their position along their journeys of personal and professional empowerment within their various areas of expertise (Avidov-Ungar, 2016). Research suggests that PD focusing on cooperative learning environments is reported to have the most potential in helping teachers close the achievement gap between the EL and special education subgroup and their general education peers (Babinski et al., 2018). This is achieved by utilizing programs and action-based strategies to teach English and the purposeful integration of core and academic standards (Babinski et al., 2018; Echevarria et al., 2017; Joseph & Evana, 2018). Some scholars argue that if teachers are expected to collaborate, then they need to work cooperatively in classrooms and professional learning environments without isolation according to specializations, such as general, special, and bilingual educators (Golloher et al., 2018). Others maintain that teacher research on the competencies necessary to teach ELs successfully should be gleaned from those who have experience in the field. These areas of expertise range from PD that demonstrate skillsets to less experienced teachers through teacher partnering and teacher research (Cavazos et al., 2018).

Due to ever-changing educational expectations for student success, administrators have relied on PD to not only improve teacher knowledge but also to increase teacher confidence in areas where they may have felt lacking in skills needed to meet student needs (Burr et al., 2015). Administrators have also used PD to demonstrate support for those teachers who work with students with SENs (Hester et al., 2020). Even at-risk administrators have benefitted greatly from

an adult learning theory PD designed to increase job fulfillment and alleviate job vacancies (Zepeda et al., 2014). Research shows that teachers perceived meaningful PD as a positive intervention against attrition associated with stress and burnout in dealing with special education student needs and service mandates (Hester et al., 2020). Through the acquisition of knowledge and reflection on experiences in their practices, teaching professionals have continued to evolve into empowered experts (Avidov-Ungar, 2016; Gibbs, 2014).

Teaching Strategies, Models, and Programs

The acquisition of knowledge and reflection by teaching professionals is a large contributor to the evolution of teaching professionals. However, the impetus for the transformation can be attributed to teachers adapting to the requirements of their students who come to the classroom with CLD backgrounds compounded by any existing learning challenges. Some students entering the classroom have suffered traumatic experiences that may adversely affect their learning (Zadina, 2014). Emphasizing the importance of individual experiences is paramount for ELs. Because of the way the brain learns, teachers need to recognize the effects of anxiety, stress, and trauma, as well as positive emotions in students. The potential post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can incite responses of freezing, fighting, or flight (Unruh & McKellar, 2017; Zadina, 2014). Strategies such as giving students additional wait time to answer questions or respond to tasks as well as inquiring why they might be refusing to participate can help decrease the EL's stress and increase their participation and subsequent performance in the learning process (Zadina, 2014). Strategies for teaching ELs serve to accelerate student learning, particularly for those students who struggle with language barriers. Communicative approach methods, such as digital storytelling can be effective alternative ways for ELs to show mastery and simultaneously teach the class about their culture (Castañeda et al., 2018). Implementing a

high-quality EBP instruction is the most likely determinant in advancing ELs and former ELs to full academic English proficiency, so educators seek out programs that can be applied to mainstream classrooms with the greatest results (Haas et al., 2018; Oakes et al., 2014).

ExC-ELL Model. School reforms of the 1980s and 1990s were dedicated to implementing quality curriculums for all students. Known as Success for All, these programs revamped the instruction and assessment for the entire school (Calderón et al., 2011). This approach included PD for teachers and allowed policymakers and educators alike to address issues surrounding struggling students while also improving outcomes for ELs.

Response to countless testimonies of overwhelmed teachers and administrators of struggling students sparked researchers to acquire funding to test a PD model for the purpose of accelerating language acquisition among the EL student population (Calderón, 2011). This model, known as Expediting Comprehension for English Language Learners (ExC-ELL), was a joint project of language specialists, literacy coaches, content specialists, and administrators. All were part of the observation protocol where they observed and coached teachers in their lesson delivery of integrating language development with specific academic content

Curriculums that utilize explicit instruction give students, particularly ELs, the opportunity to induct meaning from what the teacher says and what is withheld. This differs from direct instruction which does not allow for critical thinking (Piazza et al., 2015; 2020). Curriculums like Benchmark RIGOR (Calderón, n.d.) were borne out of such reforms as Success for All. This is in keeping with the constructivist viewpoint that argues that individuals create their own knowledge by building on what they have previously learned. The most significant postulate of this viewpoint says that the greatest achievements are to be made if students are actively involved in their learning (Schunk, 1985). However, not all students enter the

educational setting with the same experiences, so providing experiences that force them to critically think when they are struggling with varying English language and academic proficiency levels can be a daunting task. Nevertheless, the curriculum utilized to teach the EL population should contain the same rigorous curriculum and teaching instruction as that of general education populations if the achievement gap is ever to be narrowed or closed (Murphy & Torff, 2019).

Multiple Pathways Model. Research shows that the brain is plastic and changes because of an individual's experiences. The richness of those experiences directly correlates to the amount of change in the brain's anatomy, chemistry, and behavior (Harackiewicz & Linnenbrink, 2005; Olson et al., 2020; Zadina, 2014). Behavior, or learning, is relegated to various neurological pathways in the brain. Sensory motor, emotion, reward, attention and memory, language and math, frontal lobe executive function, and social are all pathways labeled according to certain attributes (Zadina, 2014). For example, the sensory–motor pathway represents what is commonly known as the learning styles model of auditory, kinesthetic, and visual learning (Echevarria et al., 2017; Zadina, 2014). If this is only one pathway, then imagine the synergy created from the arousal of multiple pathways. This intersection of multiple pathways would create learning outcomes that are leveraged to produce overall results greater than the sum of the individual parts (Zadina, 2014). There are three components to the multiple pathways concept which are: (a) the multiple pathways in the brain that are examined to determine the brain processes involved in learning; (b) multiple pathways of teaching that focus on ways instruction is disseminated and the various means of assessment allowed for diverse students; and (c) multiple pathways of knowledge and about learning that combine the aspects as related to education, medicine, neuroscience, and psychology.

SIOP. Discoveries, such as those pertaining to multiple pathways are monumental in establishing strategies that help students reach their full potential. In the case of ELs, this process needs to occur expediently. The steep learning curve that these youths face puts them at risk of becoming high school dropouts (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Echevarria et al., 2017; Zadina, 2014). Programs such as the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) take academic content and provide efficient ways for students to learn the material (Echevarria et al., 2017; He et al., 2014). Teachers activate prior knowledge using social and cultural connections, as well as scaffolding or chunking lessons. Explicit instruction regarding appropriate classroom behavior expectations is also a part of the sheltered instruction (SI) approach. The SI model applies modified teaching methods to academic content, thereby making it more accessible to ELs (Echevarria et al., 2006, 2017). Teaching strategies, such as speaking slowly, enunciating clearly, scaffolding instruction, targeting vocabulary, and demonstrating with visual aids work together to support ELs in their English language acquisition. Also, the use of adaptive and supplemental materials strengthens the ELs' learning experiences. The SIOP model contains many features of high-quality instruction with the added inclusion of background building and language objectives in every academic content lesson. Many preservice teacher training programs have begun to incorporate frameworks, such as SIOP in preparing teachers to meet the needs of CLD students (Von Esch et al., 2018).

Self-Efficacy of Teachers

Bandura (1977, 1993) stressed that self-efficacy is not only important because one's belief in their abilities to affect a specific outcome, but also because it affects an individual's motivations. Teachers' beliefs are central to who they are as individuals. As a part of their identity, teacher beliefs affect their expectations of themselves, their colleagues, their

administrators, and their students (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018; Mellom et al., 2018). Even though some teachers opt not to voice their beliefs, their beliefs still affect how they conduct themselves in their classrooms (Lee et al., 2017; Mellom et al., 2018; Yeşilçınar & Çakır, 2018). Consequently, how they conduct themselves in their classrooms is based on their belief in their ability to encourage student learning in a particular domain (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018; Cruz et al., 2020). In essence, teachers may have the self-efficacy to affect student learning in certain areas in which they are trained and simultaneously, lack self-efficacy in subjects outside of their realm (Cruz et al., 2020).

Research indicates that teachers' beliefs in their ability to positively affect student learning have been associated with improved student learning outcomes (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018; Cruz et al., 2020; Van Eycken et al., 2024). A strengthened sense of self-efficacy in teachers has produced positive outcomes in both students and teachers and is one of the most significant indicators of whether teachers understand their students (Cruz et al., 2020). Effectively understanding and responding to student needs influences the quality of curriculum, instructional support, and student learning, especially for ELs. Teachers with strong self-efficacy have been shown to be more resilient and exert greater effort in their teaching behaviors (Cruz et al., 2020). On the contrary, teachers with a negative perceived sense of self-efficacy have demonstrated decreased teaching activities and as a result have denied greater learning opportunities for their students (Billingsley, 2004; Pit-tin Cate et al., 2018). Even though teachers may value inclusive classroom settings, their feelings of ineptness due to lack of preparation may adversely affect how they respond or accommodate students with SENs, which makes it imperative for teacher preparation programs to address the need for positive attitudes

toward students with SENs (Pit-tin Cate et al., 2018). Not only does this hold true for students with SENs, but also for students who are CLD (Barrio, 2021).

The self-efficacy of teachers is strongly affected by their perceived worth as a vital part of the educational process (Lee et al., 2017). Policymakers and local district stakeholders play a critical role in affirming teachers by appropriating funds to pay salaries and extending rewards to the teachers (Johnson et al., 2018). With the many reforms in education, such as the switch from teacher-centered to learner-centered pedagogy, teachers need encouragement to persevere (Lee et al., 2017). Bandura (1977) referred to this as verbal persuasion and although it is not the strongest of information sources that affect TSE, this manner of encouragement helps affirms teachers in their current roles. The main reason teachers leave a school is due to a perceived lack of administrative support (Hester et al., 2020; Sutcher et al., 2019). Research shows that annual teacher workplace condition surveys are the most reliable indicators of teacher turnover. The workplace condition contains a category pertaining to administrative support. Teachers are asked to rate the ability of their in-house administrator to encourage and acknowledge faculty, clearly communicate ideas for the school, and execute a smooth school operation (Sutcher et al., 2019). It is predicted that teachers are twice as likely to transfer to a different school or leave the teaching profession altogether when they give an administrator a significantly poor rating (e.g., Strongly disagree on a Likert-style scale). In terms of self-efficacy expectations, teachers who rated an administrator severely low were confirming the absence of verbal persuasion, and more specifically, exhortation. Additionally, if the administrator fails to facilitate effective teacher accomplishments thereby leading to probable failure, any future attempt at persuading teachers to participate will be for naught (Bandura, 1977).

In some states, principals are still considered autonomous leaders of their individual schools (DeMatthews et al, 2014). They influence the program initiatives in their school buildings which provide teacher support, specifically for those teachers who are responsible for ELs and SWD. It is vital for them to have a thorough understanding of district and state policy so that they make informed decisions for special education and EL subgroups.

When researching the self-efficacy of teaching professionals, one must examine the multi-faceted environments and factors that they must overcome to educate students, as well as participate in opportunities that foster teachers' perceptions of their teaching capabilities (Chong & Kong, 2012; Cruz et al., 2020). For instance, the transition to inclusive classroom settings would not be possible without the extensive efforts of teachers for students with SENs (Monteiro et al., 2019). Other paradigms of learning environments involve teachers leveraging their self-efficacy by sharing a belief with other teachers to collectively promote student achievement (Donohoo, 2018).

Research indicates that self-efficacious teachers tend to be more positive towards students with special needs or language and cultural diversities than inefficacious teachers (Zee et al., 2021). Teachers with resilient self-efficacy exhibit less anxious behaviors and are less likely to perceive children as having problems and refer them for special education service placements. Scholars also have concluded that student achievement increases can be linked to teachers having more teacher training (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018; Chu & Garcia, 2014). Other factors affecting the self-efficacy of special educators who taught CLD students included holding a specialized certification in ESL, having an advanced degree in education, attending PD to instruct CLD students, and having experience in teaching students from diverse backgrounds (Chu & Gargia, 2014). Scholars' review of research conducted over the last three decades has

solidified the correlation between teachers' perceptions of their efficacy and students' learning outcomes.

Summary

The inability to hire highly qualified SETs and the attrition of current SETs negatively impacts students and school districts (Bettini et al., 2017; Hester et al., 2020; Nguyen & Northrop, 2021). Scholars contend that all teachers are products of the educational system with which they are affiliated (Cavazos et al., 2018). Therefore, if the school system does not emphasize programs to instruct teachers on the nuances of teaching ELs, then this weakness will affect the overall success of the entire system. When looking at the literature as it pertains to ELs within the U.S. educational system, one recognizes the need to bridge the gap by better understanding the perceived self-efficacy of SETs who are responsible for the instruction of these ELs. Narrowing the gap in this literature is necessary to reveal possible solutions to the challenges faced by SETs while teaching ELs with disabilities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to obtain a clearer understanding of the experiences of SETs who instruct ELs at secondary public schools in the Southeast. As it relates to ELs, the role of teachers in increasing student achievement is thought by researchers to rely heavily on developing expertise in educating the EL population with its specific needs (Heineke at al., 2010). Developing expertise through learning experiences was found to significantly affect TSE (Pan & Cheng, 2023). Findings from this study will help researchers better understand the challenges and hopes for future solutions. Following the overview, the methods chapter contains a section on study design, research questions, setting and participant information, researcher positionality, research procedures, data collection plan, trustworthiness section, and chapter summary.

Research Design

In a qualitative study design, the researcher seeks to reveal and understand what people think, how they act, and why. While quantitative methods focus on discrete features, qualitative methods focus on the intersection between social and educational occurrences in people's lives (Check & Schutt, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Quantitative research assumes a social reality is objective, while qualitative research reasons that participants create the social reality since it is based on their perceptions (Gall et al., 2007). Qualitative studies rely on data collection such as participant observation, intensive interviewing, and focus groups to better understand their subjects and the situation. Due to human subjectivity, qualitative researchers are considered an integral part of the study and are therefore obligated to track their actions and reactions, relating to the study. Since the purpose of the study is to understand the perceptions of SET, a qualitative

design was chosen to ascertain what SETs think regarding their experiences teaching ELs at secondary public schools in the southeast.

Even though a qualitative method was selected, there are several types of qualitative designs from which to choose. The key is to utilize a design that facilitates the researcher's goal of ascertaining meaningful data. For this study, a transcendental phenomenological design was selected. Moustakas (1994) describes transcendental phenomenology as how researchers position or orient themselves to the occurrences. The transcendental component of the study requires researchers to suspend any prior knowledge and experience so that they avail themselves to explore new facets of the phenomenon instead of the common observations. Accordingly, a phenomenology study focuses on group meaning born out of individuals' experiences documented in their own language and wording. The aim is to derive the underlying structural nature of these essential ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). For instance, a phenomenological study would seek to understand the reality of lived experiences as interpreted by the involved individuals (Gall et al., 2007). Once researchers establish the qualitative and phenomenological nature of their study, they can narrow that focus down further. After careful review of the different types of phenomenology, I selected a transcendental approach. In transcendental phenomenology, the inquirer uses systematic methods to analyze the experiences, while the researcher sets aside any prejudices pertaining to the investigated phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transcendental phenomenology is appropriate for this study of SETs instructing ELs because each of the participants will have been in a situation governed by the same set of circumstances yet with the possibility of varying experiences, differing feelings, and degrees of perceived self-efficacy.

Research Questions

Colaizzi (1978) purported that phenomenological research questions must delve deep into the lived experiences of participants. This approach is necessary to successfully describe the natural essence apart from the theoretical explanations (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following is a list of the research questions for this study.

Central Research Question

What are the shared experiences of SETs instructing ELs at secondary schools in the Southeast?

Sub-Question One

What challenges have SETs instructing ELs at secondary schools in the Southeast experienced?

Sub-Question Two

What are the self-efficacy perceptions of SETs instructing ELs at secondary schools in the Southeastern region of the United States?

Sub-Question Three

What are the support experiences of SETs instructing ELs at secondary schools in the Southeastern United States?

Setting and Participants

In choosing participants and sites, the objective is to select settings that are potentially rich in information for the study (Patton, 2002). When selecting a school setting for this study, I sought a site that had similar demographics to surrounding school districts. In this way, the research could benefit more than one school district. Additionally, the existence of similar school districts increases the likelihood that the study could be replicated.

Site

Initially, this study was to be conducted in a school district in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. This district was selected based on several criteria. First, the demographics of the district are representative of the surrounding region, so results could be shared and applied within the neighboring school systems. However, it became necessary for me to expand the sample pool for me to garner sufficient research data, and so I increased the area to encompass the Southeastern region of the United States.

Participants

Creswell and Poth (2018) stress that in phenomenological research, the objective is to have participants who meet a certain set of criteria. Oftentimes, secondary schools in the Southeast include Grades 6 through 12, but for this study, the parameters included Grades 7 through 12. This study required that participants be certified SETs with at least one year of teaching experience and be knowledgeable about the situation or experiences being researched. Additional criteria were those participants be willing to discuss their experiences and are representative of the range of viewpoints (Check & Schutt, 2012; Gall et al., 2007). In keeping with phenomenological methods criteria, the researcher recruited 11 SETs to engage in the study. After a week of acquiring a steady flow of candidates for the study, interest trailed off, and I ceased the sampling process. Once participants consented, demographic information was expounded upon in tabular form. This information included pseudonym, number of years teaching, highest earned degree, teacher service delivery, and grade level. Since participants were from several secondary schools ranging from grades 7 through 12, each with their own on-site leadership, the opportunity to acquire maximum variation increases, as does the transferability, or generalization, measure (Check & Schutt, 2012). Participants were assigned

realistic pseudonyms to maintain a level of confidentiality.

Researcher Positionality

Positionality refers to an individual's stance concerning his or her surrounding worldview (Darwin Holmes, 2020). When applied to studies, the researcher positionality section is the author's attempt to inform the audience about personal values and beliefs that might influence the research. Values and beliefs are shaped by religious faith, political affiliation, SES, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, geographical location, historical era, and abilities or disabilities. Due to the subjective nature of qualitative studies and collaborative traits of phenomenology, it is particularly important for researchers to be forthcoming about their viewpoint as it pertains to the study. Researcher positionality is comprised of the interpretive framework, philosophical assumption, ontological assumption, epistemological assumption, and axiological assumption (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through the following paragraphs, I clarified my adopted position for this research study.

Interpretive Framework

As a constructivist, I believe the most powerful voice in research emanates from the study participants who are the storytellers. In the interpretative framework of phenomenology, the constructivist worldview is communicated when individuals describe their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In keeping with the phenomenological genre, I am an active part of the research and collaborated with the participants to derive new meaning. Since constructivism is a theory based on observation and the scientific method, it tries to formulate a scientific means to teach and learn. Some of the most influential theorists of constructivism have been Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky, and a host of others. Vygotsky (1930) wrote, "Children solve problems with the help of speech, as well as their eyes and hands" (p. 9). From this short passage, one can

easily perceive that constructivism is well-implanted in today's educational systems and should be well-examined.

Furthermore, social constructivism is a philosophy to define learning nature instead of a scientific theory (Schunk, 1985). Individual constructivism emphasizes personal experiences for gaining knowledge. When applied to society, constructivism, or social constructivism, extends to focus on the collaborative nature of learning. When these individuals' experiences are gathered and sorted, any consensus of responses among participants is viewed as a truth and thus added to the body of knowledge (Adams, 2006).

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions are based on the researcher's beliefs which give direction for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the Bible, Romans 12:2 notes, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (*New American Standard Bible*, 1971/2020). I view my biblical faith as a God-given practical and ordered framework to inform my judgments and reform my life. Informing our judgments and reforming our hearts and lives is the mission statement of education, and it parallels the plans that God has for us. The secular worldview may take issue with this perspective as it relies heavily on existentialist theories, but the Biblical worldview testifies to a realization of the heart of God. From the vantage of the researcher, it must be decided how much of these beliefs of his or her worldview are incorporated into the study, either by induction or deduction (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Ontological Assumption

An ontological assumption can be defined as the researcher's view of reality (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). My ontological assumptions are an outgrowth of my personal experiences as both a SET and an EL teacher. To say something is ontological is to say it exists and can be grouped into categories, and in this case, the categories are the various experiences of SETs who instruct ELs. The existence of SETs struggling in their profession to meet all the needs of overwhelming caseloads was my motivation for conducting this study. As a former special education and EL teacher, I have always thought there had to be a more efficient way to help my students access the curriculum and become successful academically. While this may sound lofty, it is my sincere prayer that this study may in some way help relieve the feelings of hopelessness that some of my colleagues must face.

Epistemological Assumption

If ontology is the researcher's view of reality, then epistemological assumptions give credence to how the researcher has come to know this reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From an epistemological vantage, social constructivism encourages the researcher to not only find out what the tenets represented by the experiences are but how to go about finding out these truths. Some research experts have expressed doubts as to whether social sciences can be studied using the same principles as the natural sciences (Bryman, 1984; 2001). In this study, I worked with participants to cocreate a reality formed by compiling their individual lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on my epistemological assumptions, I ensured that reality was founded in the lived experiences of SETs who instruct ELs.

Axiological Assumption

The role that the researcher's values play in the study is known as axiology (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These values create a subjective nature to the research and as such, the researcher must understand that the participants' individual values must be respected (Denzin & Lincoln,

2011). Although I have not worked at this site or with any of the potential participants, my prior work experience includes teaching in the fields of special education and English as a second language. As the researcher, I realize that all biases cannot be eliminated, but I will attempt to bracket out any personal experiences when analyzing the data and drawing conclusions. Bracketing, the first step in the process of phenomenological data analysis, is when the researcher disregards any prejudices to understand the study participants' experiences. To collect and interpret data with fidelity, a researcher's journal was utilized to consistently ward against any possible biases by the human instrument in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The flexible nature of qualitative research allows the researcher, or human instrument in the study, to progressively focus. Progressive focusing is the process of fine-tuning the focus as the researcher is collecting and interacting with the data (Check & Schutt, 2012).

Researcher's Role

As the human instrument in this study, my duties were to acquire the thoughts and feelings of my study participants while safeguarding and protecting their data. As an integral part of a phenomenological study, I carefully observed, took notes fastidiously, interviewed thoroughly, and walked alongside participants throughout the research process (Check & Schutt, 2012). The choice was made to conduct this study in a county other than the one in which I resided in or worked. This allowed for increased confidentiality and minimized personal bias. As the researcher, I realized that all biases cannot be eliminated and attempted to bracket out any personal experiences when analyzing the data and drawing conclusions. Bracketing was used as a filter to help me disregard any prejudices or biases that I had regarding the participants' experiences. To collect and interpret data with fidelity, the use of a researcher's journal was utilized to consistently ward against any possible biases by the human instrument in the study

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, the researcher acknowledges the existence of relationships between study participants and researchers and therefore has a responsibility to address these social world connections (Finlay, 2011). It is also important to note that when using interpretive frameworks, the researcher respectfully recognizes that study participants are co-constructors in the process of adding to the body of knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although I did not permanently work at any sites or long-term with any of the participants, my prior work experience includes teaching in the fields of special education and English as a second language.

Procedures

The initial challenge of transcendental phenomenological research was to devise a protocol for understanding the deeper meaning behind the occurrences or situations (Moustakas, 1994). No longer was objectively observing a phenomenon and describing it sufficient to understand the deeper meaning or the essence, particularly within the abstract realm. Transcendental phenomenology functions as a scientific study of how things appear in human consciousness. It is purely subjective and whether the object or situation exists is irrelevant because the perception of the phenomena is what is paramount. Even though the nature of the study suggests a more relaxed and informal inquiry to help participants feel more at ease, there are still procedures that need to be followed for structure to make replication possible. These procedures are made up of the permissions section, recruitment plan, and data collection plan for individual interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts.

Permissions

Before any research began, I obtained the necessary permissions to ensure that I followed the ethical standards required in conducting research studies. The first step was to obtain an IRB

approval letter from Liberty University (see Appendix A). Additionally, before data collection occurred, participant permission was obtained through an informed consent document given during the initial contact with all prospective participants (see Appendix B).

Recruitment Plan

To recruit participants, I directly contacted potential candidates and requested that they notify any eligible prospects to contact me directly. A consent waiver explaining that any safety concerns were minimal was given in person or via email to each potential candidate. Once signed, candidates were sent an email confirmation letter and a survey link or QR code (see Appendix C). This link took participants to a questionnaire via Survey Monkey containing eight demographic questions to confirm they satisfied the study criteria along with Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) 24-item TSE Scale (see Appendix D). Upon receipt of the survey results, I tallied the responses according to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's directions and notified each participant of their results and a description of the scoring outcomes. With these results, the participant, or co-researcher, was given a reflective prompt in which to respond with a minimum of 150 words. In keeping with phenomenological methods criteria, I recruited 10 to 15 SETs to engage in the study (Check & Schutt, 2012).

Once a participant completed the demographic and TSE Scale surveys, I contacted them in person to set up their individual interview and informed them that I was forwarding their results and the 150-word reflective prompt to them. Before their interview date, I contacted the participant to confirm our meeting.

Data Collection Plan

Data collection methods for phenomenology originated in the empirical and reflective methods associated with the social sciences (van Manen, 2014). Empirical methods refer to the

different activities that provide a researcher with material pertaining to the phenomenon being studied while reflective methods describe the form of analysis in the approach. Unlike other approaches, phenomenology requires the material to be gathered prior to the occurrence of the reflective process, and it is important that the researcher adhere to a reductive stance (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2014). Experiential materials for phenomenology include personal descriptions of experiences, written accounts from others, observing experiences, written anecdotes, and interviewing individuals or groups to ascertain their experiences. New possibilities for phenomenological data sources and approaches are continually emerging, and the researcher needs to feel the freedom to use techniques found in life as well as other research approaches to garner these experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dahlberg & Dahlberg., 2020; Vagle, 2018). For this study, there were four methods of data collection: a 24-item TSE Scale accompanied by an 8-item demographic survey, followed by a reflective prompt by participants of 150 words, individual interviews, and focus groups. Data collection obtained by multiple methods creates a corroboration within the study when the researcher substantiates a theme from three different data sources, also known as triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

TSE Survey and Reflective Prompt

The first data source for my study was a 24-item self-efficacy scale with eight additional demographic questions and a reflective prompt. After receiving participants' TSE Scale Surveys and demographic responses from their Survey Monkey questionnaires, I determined whether they met the criteria of being a certified SET with at least a year of teaching experience. Once I established the participants' eligibility, I followed Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) directions for scoring the TSE scales and submitted those scores to the participants with a reflective prompt. Prompts are a means of gathering experiential material, and therefore align

with the criteria for phenomenological data sources. Prompts are compatible with both individual interview and focus group sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2014). Due to the independent nature of these prompts, participants can draft their responses and take time to reflect and revise before submission. The opportunity for participants to reflect and revise increases the richness of the data source. Since a prompt requires approximately 15 to 30 minutes to complete and I wanted to be respectful or my participants' time, I included a single reflective prompt to be no less than 150 words (see Appendix F).

TSE Survey and Reflective Prompt

Please reference the following and respond to the reflective prompt with a minimum of 150 words.

1. As I reflect on the results of my TSE Survey, I feel that teaching ELs contributes to my teaching success or my challenges. Please explain your answer in at least 150 words as it relates to each of the three categories of efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional strategies, and efficacy in classroom management. (SQ1, SQ2, SQ3)

TSE Scale Survey and Reflective Prompt Data Analysis Plan

Once I received the journal prompt responses from my co-researchers, I employed the same coding procedures that I used for one-on-one interviews and my focus groups. With the additional time for reflection and revision of responses, I was mindful of additional input that could be used to extend my emergent concepts and key assertions (Saldaña, 2013). Then, I finalized the individual textural and structural descriptions to be utilized in my data synthesis.

Individual Interviews

Moustakas (1994) describes the phenomenological process of interviewing as informal and interactive. In this process, the researcher is responsible for making the interviewee

comfortable and resultantly engaged in open-ended questions and extended comments. The interview protocol is of particular importance because the consistency in procedures lends to replication among participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the human instrument, I conducted the interviews one-on-one either in-person at the interviewee's school or virtually via videoconferencing using Zoom meetings. Here the goal was to make the interviewee/participant feel comfortable. Answering interview questions on their own school campus prevented them from meeting at another site and saved the interviewee's time. I used the same open-ended interview guide for each of the participating interviewees (see Appendix E).

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another. CRQ
2. Can you tell me about your educational background and what led you to your current position? CRQ
3. What are your initial responses or concerns when you identify an English learner (EL) with or without disabilities on your class roster? SQ1
4. What challenges have you faced when working with EL students with or without disabilities in your classes? SQ1
5. Describe successful practices you use when working with EL students in your classes. SQ2
6. Describe how you came to know about these practices (e.g., a result of educational training, modeling by a mentor or colleague, or as an outcome of personal trial and error experiences). SQ2
7. Describe your feelings when EL students demonstrate mastery resulting from your instruction of a specific concept? SQ2

8. Describe practices you have used when working with EL students in your classes that, in your opinion, were less than successful. SQ2
9. Describe your feelings when your teaching did not meet your own expectations. SQ2
10. What professional development experiences have you had that prepared you to work with EL students as a teacher? SQ3
11. What kinds of support have you received during your teaching tenure? SQ3
12. Who did you receive this support from (e.g., colleagues, administration, outside learning initiatives, etc.)? SQ3
13. Describe your feelings that developed towards this source when you received this support. SQ3
14. What personal feelings towards yourself transpired from this specific experience? SQ3
15. Describe how you applied what you learned from this support experience to your instruction practices with ELs. SQ3
16. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with EL students that we have not discussed? SQ2/SQ3

The above-referenced one-on-one interview questions were designed to elicit as much detail as possible from each of the participants. Questions one and two revolved around the central research questions to establish a feeling of comradery, as I sought to learn more about the individual teachers as people and what their backgrounds were. Questions three and four corresponded to sub-question one. The rationale for these questions was to uncover the various challenges and the details surrounding SET experiences. After revealing the challenges, questions five through seven delved into the SET teaching practices when working with ELs. Of these, question six specifically addressed SET self-efficacy from the standpoint of Bandura's

(1977) tenets of personal accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. These three questions served as a launchpad for question eight and nine which focused on the feelings of SETs when their teaching practices did not meet their expectations. Therefore, questions five through nine and part of sixteen targeted sub-question two pertaining to the self-efficacy perceptions of SETs who instruct ELs with or without disabilities. Questions ten through sixteen focused on the support experiences of these SETs which is the crux of sub-question three. As the study evolved, I added, clarified, and elaborated probes to garner every thread of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Initially, I transcribed each individual interview enabling the rich text features for preliminary coding (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Then, I analyzed the transcribed interviews using the prescribed phenomenological methods and procedures which entailed listening repeatedly to interviewees' descriptions of experiences for thorough understanding, converting those interviews into textual data, recognizing lexicons pertinent to the scope of the study, reorganizing those lexicons, and then summarizing the descriptions regarding the commonalities of the interviewees' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Throughout these procedures, I utilized techniques for getting the most out of the data that I collected. One such technique that I employed was bracketing. To focus on the experience of the participant, the researcher must pause, or bracket, any feelings or interpretations, and openly become part of the participants' experience (Hycner, 1985).

As the human instrument, I continued to bracket and listen to the interviews with periods of intermittent reflection. As a tool to keep the human instrument accountable, I used a journal, or audit trail, to note reflections on the research process and any questions or revelations

encountered through the process (see Appendix H; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Another research strategy I used is known as horizonalization, which means siphoning every thread of information from the data and treating each newly derived meaning as a fresh perception (Moustakas, 1994). This required me, as the researcher, to continually reflect on any potential meanings in the collected data that I had yet to expose.

After the horizonalization stage, I recorded the meanings or meaning units. These were then categorized into common strands of text but with the removal of any repetitive statements. This process is known as coding, and a label or tag is assigned for persons, places, or events (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There are numerous methods for tagging this data, and some methods work better with certain qualitative study types. As such, coding is analysis, but it is also a link between units of information. The researcher takes the transcribed data and seeks to identify patterns that can be characterized according to similarity, difference, frequency, sequence, correspondence to other activities, and causation (Hatch, 2002; Saldaña, 2013).

For my phenomenological study, I considered utilizing one of the affective methods of coding, but given the interpretive and flexible nature of phenomenology, I settled on the *Theming the Data* method for my first cycle coding method (Saldaña, 2013). Within the qualitative study context, theme refers to the outcome of coding, categorizing, or analytical reflection, therefore there is no theme coding. However, phenomenological studies are organic, and this specific method of coding provided the needed versatility. I grouped the excerpts into various themes and meanings and use these to construct the descriptions of the experiences and repeat the coding process. Based on Creswell and Poth's (2018) model, the phases of qualitative data analysis and interpretation are "iterative, meaning that you cycle back and forth between data collection and analysis" (p. 237). After the first cycle, I began the second coding process by reorganizing and

reanalyzing my first-cycle codes (see Appendix H). Using pattern coding for this second cycle, I looked for new links between data. At this juncture, I began to see the development of categorical, conceptual, thematic, and an organizational trend (Saldaña, 2013). Following the second cycle of coding, I noted a decrease in the number of codes and not more. Out of this process, two or three concepts and a key assertion or theory emerged for documentation. These steps accomplished the heart of Moustakas' (1994) modification of van Kaam's (1966) analysis steps, namely listing, grouping, reduction, and clustering.

Any unrelated descriptions were eliminated at this time. The remaining accounts were refined into individual textural (what was experienced) and structural (how the phenomenon was experienced) explanations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; van Kaam, 1966). These descriptions evolved with the subsequent data collected through journal prompts and focus groups. At this juncture, I implemented member checking by the participants (see Appendix H). Member checking is the validation of the data by study participants to verify the accuracy and completeness of their recorded accounts. Had there been any errors, I would have corrected them and reconciled discrepancies (Gall et al., 2007).

Focus Groups

To leverage the experiences of groups of teachers, focus groups were employed to delve deeper into the philosophies of the teachers who were a part of this study. Focus groups for the social sciences originated in the early 1940s with the work of Merton and Lazarsfeld (Merton, 1987). Although initially utilized by communication researchers to gauge the sentiments of people who had been exposed to specific pamphlets and other propaganda, focus groups provided a vehicle to interpret the effects of mass communication (Merton & Kendall, 1946). Phenomenology is based on questions that give direction and focus to meaning (Moustakas,

1994). Focus groups, either as in-person interactions or web-based interactions, are acknowledged as acceptable data collection formats (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018). In keeping with other phenomenological practices, the interviewer must be flexible and able to evaluate the interview while it is in process. Parameters for a productive interview include minimal guidance and direction, concentration on the participants' specific impressions, range of responses from participants, and determination of the depth of those responses for either central or peripheral significance (Merton & Kendall, 1946). Focus groups generally consist of between four to six member participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions posed to the focus group should consist of varying levels of structured, semi structured, and unstructured components. The interviewer should resist the urge to lead the discussion and remain as a sympathetic listener (Merton & Kendall, 1946). As stated, one of the drawbacks of the focus group is that the researcher has difficulty taking all the notes because so many things are happening. It is for this reason that I utilized a video recording device for my focus groups. This alleviated any confusion about who was speaking and allowed me to be more involved in the group dynamics. My rationale for conducting the focus groups following the data collection and analysis of my one-on-one interviews and journal prompts allowed the focus groups to serve as an opportunity for member checking. Member checking is a strategy for substantiating the credibility of the study and will be explained later in more detail under the credibility section.

Focus Group Questions

Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions:

1. What do you do when you struggle with feeling ill-equipped? (SQ1, SQ2)
2. Can you share a strategy you have used for overcoming those feelings? (SQ1, SQ2)

3. Based on your individual interviews, several of you discussed the importance of the support you received from your school's EL teacher. How did their support strengthen your belief in your ability to successfully instruct ELs in your classroom? (SQ3)
4. Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion? (SQ1, SQ2, SQ3)

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Although there is no single approach for analyzing qualitative data, I read over transcripts or watched my focus group videos several times and made separate notes for each cycle in the same manner as the one-on-one interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I repeated the analysis steps I used for my interviews to code, reduce, and cluster the data. From the material gathered during the focus group, I added to the individual textural and structural descriptions using excerpts from the transcripts (Moustakas, 1994). Since the organization of the data is critical, I created a table of sources, as well as organizing them by type. It was important for me to keep duplicates of all forms of data. I accomplished this by scanning paper documents and notes onto a data storage drive, so I have it digitally for future access if necessary. This process gave me opportunity for capturing the essence of the SETs' lived experiences in instructing ELs. A list of the focus group questions that I used can be found in the Appendix (see Appendix G). After completing these textural and structural descriptions for the focus groups, I proceeded to the data synthesis stage where I integrated these strands along with those for the one-on-one interviews and journal prompts to derive my composite descriptions.

Data Synthesis

Data synthesis is the interweaving of the analyses from my three data sources which consisted of materials from interviews, focus groups, and journal prompt responses (Moustakas, 1994). These three data sources serve to meet the criteria required for triangulation in qualitative

research which is to use multiple data sources taken from different perspectives at different times to ensure the deepest possible understanding of the phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln et al., 1985; Patton, 2002). Data synthesis represents the final stage in Moustakas's phenomenological model. This stage utilizes the textural and structural descriptions from the individuals to establish the composite descriptions and capture the essence of the phenomenon. A composite of these textural descriptions emerges from the individual ones creating an overarching theme or themes. The next task is to synthesize the individual descriptions into a composite structural description using imaginative variation. The imaginative variation takes the composite textural description and imaginatively or temporarily alters certain aspects of how the phenomenon was experienced to increase the number of possible meanings as well as multiple perspectives. The composite structural description helps the researcher understand how the group of participants experienced the phenomenon. For the final step of this stage, I intuitively and reflectively integrated both the composite textural and composite structural descriptions to develop a textural–structural synthesis of the essences and meanings of the experience. Throughout the phenomenological approach, the researcher's systematic reflection becomes a tool for gathering the richness of the described experiences. The results of this process provided me with a solid understanding of the self-efficacy of SETs who instruct ELs.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a study is founded on concepts that ensure the integrity of the research (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Any research relies on the audience's acceptance, as well as the participants' beliefs, in the honesty of those conducting the study (Finlay, 2011). Similarly, it is important for the researchers to attempt to understand how each participant makes sense of the personal and social environment of which they are a part (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To establish trustworthiness, researchers must ask themselves questions regarding the truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality of the study. The terms derived from each of these inquiries are known as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln et al., 1985).

Credibility

Credibility is the qualitative study version of internal validity, and it refers to the confidence in the truth of a study (Lincoln et al., 1985). Qualitative researchers use certain strategies to solidify the credibility of a study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). One such strategy is triangulation. In this context, triangulation confirms and strengthens the findings of a study using multiple investigators, several different methods of data collection, and varying sources of data (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Patton, 2002). Another strategy is member checking which occurs when the researcher submits data and preliminary interpretations to the participants and asks them to confirm the plausibility of the materials (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). In addition to triangulation and member checking, other techniques include prolonged engagement, persistent observations, negative case analysis, and referential adequacy (Lincoln et al., 1985). I used triangulation by obtaining information from three different and separate data collection methods and member checking to increase the internal validity of my study.

Transferability

Just as credibility is the qualitative counterpart of internal validity, so is transferability the qualitative counterpart to external validity. Transferability is how a given set of research can be generalized and applied to another context or setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transferability is the condition where research findings may be applied to other studies (Lincoln et al., 1985). Although transferability cannot be assured, I took measures to create conditions that allow for

maximum variation and generalization, such as my sampling of various secondary schools within the studied school district and the differing middle and high school grades within those separate schools. I aimed to include a diverse group of participants who represented a variety of genders, ages, ethnicities, and years of teaching experience. Also, the use of thick descriptions of research findings was utilized to facilitate transferability (Geertz, 2008).

Dependability

Dependability is the qualitative, or naturalistic paradigm, version of the quantitative method's reliability. Dependability is the reliability based on the ability of the study to be replicated (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). If a study is repeated and discrepancies exist between the two repetitions, then the deviation represents an unreliability error (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). To ensure dependability, overlapping data collection methods were used in the form of interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups. An audit trail documenting the researcher's steps from the beginning of the research stage through the findings stage and including any field notes accompanies this project (see Appendix H).

Confirmability

Confirmability in research refers to the degree of neutrality and manner that a study and its findings can be corroborated by separate and distinct studies. It is not that the researcher is certifiable but rather the focus is on the confirmability of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). In qualitative research, the researcher uses multiple techniques within the same study to increase objectivity. These include confirmability audits, audit trails, triangulation, and reflexivity. For my study, I utilized three methods to establish confirmability of this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). First, I created a detailed audit trail journal entailing my procedures, raw data, analyzed data, and my final report. These are available should it be

necessary to track my research. As discussed in the credibility section, my second method for solidifying confirmability was the triangulation technique I used to validate my research study. Lastly, I practiced reflexivity in my research process. Reflexivity is the attitude of critical self-reflection adopted by the researcher regarding any biases, assumptions, worldviews, or theoretical orientations that could affect the investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Reflexivity is also known as the researcher's position, and I practice reflexivity by memoing throughout the entirety of the process. As a former SET and EL teacher, it was particularly important to record my thoughts for my self-awareness and transparency (see Appendix H).

Ethical Considerations

After IRB permission was acquired, I used snowball sampling to identify potential candidates. Direct recruiting methods using teacher professional networking were employed to contact the initial candidates and those candidates in turn notified the researcher of additional prospects. Once a teacher acknowledged my contact and exhibited interest, I either emailed or directly delivered the waiver contract. These teacher candidates were asked to read over and sign a written consent form before participating in any interviews, focus groups, or journaling activities. Participation is completely voluntary, and they were allowed to withdraw at any time during the study. Confidentiality could have been a potential issue and was addressed using pseudonyms for the site, all participants, and identifiable names. Upon gaining their signed consent, I gave potential candidates a QR code to a Survey Monkey questionnaire containing 8 demographic questions and the 24-item TSE Scale. Records and files were either with me or secured in my home office in a locked file cabinet. Any computer or electronic files have been

password protected. If the research is not to be added to within three years of the initial research period, I will destroy the research files per Liberty University's IRB regulations.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of SETs who instruct ELs in secondary school. Due to the nature of the study, a qualitative design specifically that of phenomenology was selected to capture the richness of SET experiences. A transcendental phenomenological study lends to exhaustive detail for a true understanding of the experiences where a quantitative research design would fall short. After IRB approval was obtained, the researcher directly recruited potential candidates, who in turn referred additional candidates, to participate in the study. Once contact was made, a consent waiver was either emailed or hand-delivered to the candidate to be signed and returned. After the consent waiver was received, a QR code or link was given or emailed to the candidate to respond to a survey questionnaire containing 32 questions. Upon initial canvassing of the questionnaires, potential candidates were notified that they had been selected to participate. The next phase of the research process required participants to respond in 150 words to a journal prompt reflecting on their survey scores. At this juncture, interview times were arranged, and the interviews were conducted. Following the interview stage, any progressive focusing took place and the human instrument made any adjustments based on the data collected. The next step in the data collection plan enlisted focus groups for SETs to collaborate on their experiences. After data were gathered, the coding process began. The researcher hand-coded the data from each of these sources, synthesized the data, and followed through on necessary tasks pertaining to trustworthiness and accompanying documentation.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to garner a clearer understanding of the experiences of SETs who instruct ELs at secondary public schools in the southeastern United States. In Chapter Four, the research data and analysis as findings are presented. This chapter includes participant descriptions, the data, in the form of narratives presented by theme and subtheme, any outlier data, and research question responses.

Participants

The criteria for participating in this study included certification as a SET either by college coursework or scoring satisfactory marks on a special education proficiency exam and teaching tenure of a minimum of one year working with students who have special needs. Of the initial fourteen applicants, one candidate taught at the elementary level and was therefore disqualified. Another withdrew due to time constraints relating to the completion of her National Board certification. Both candidates did not reach the interview process; however, an additional candidate withdrew after completing the survey and initial interview due to health reasons. This candidate's file was destroyed, and any preliminary information obtained digitally was deleted. The remaining eleven candidates made up the final sample and completed all the designated research tasks.

Among the 11 SETs, nine were female and two were male. The race of all participants was white even though the study was open to all certified SETs with at least one year of teaching experience with ELs. Although each of the participants had various teaching experiences at different grade levels, two were currently teaching in middle schools and the remaining nine were in a high school setting. In keeping with the recruitment parameters, each participant was

certified to teach students with special needs and had been teaching in that capacity for a minimum of a year. Experience of SETs ranged from two years to 33 years. Primarily, recruitment of participants was direct contact, and then others volunteered because of snowball sampling from those initial recruits. All participants were from North Carolina with the exception of one gentleman, Grant, from Georgia.

Data were collected from February 2024 to April 2024, in the form of surveys, reflective prompt responses, individual interviews, and focus groups. Table 1 lists each participant by pseudonym, the number of years taught, the highest degree earned, service delivery, and grade level taught. Subsequently, Table 2 relays each participant's TSE scores for each of the categories of TSE-Student Engagement, TSE Instructional Strategies, and TSE-Classroom Management. Participant introductions and relevant discussion follow Table 2.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

EC Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Service Delivery	Grade Level
Grant	25	Master	EC Inclusion	7th – 8th
Jessica	24	Bachelor	EC Inclusion	9th – 12th
Kaitlyn	5	Bachelor	EC Inclusion	7th
Karen	8	Master	EC Inclusion	9th – 12th
Katherine	33	Bachelor	EC Self-contained	9th – 12th
Pamela	26	Bachelor	EC Self-contained	9th – 12th
Patrick	30	Education Specialist	EC Inclusion	9th – 12th
Rachel	12	Bachelor	EC Inclusion	9th – 12th
Samantha	9	Bachelor	EC Inclusion	9th – 12th
Suzanne	25	Bachelor	EC Inclusion	9th – 12th
Whitley	30	Education Specialist	EC Inclusion	9th – 12th

Table 2

Teacher Self-Efficacy Survey Results and Teaching Experience

EC Teacher Participant	Years Taught	TSE-Student Engagement	TSE-Instructional Strategies	TSE-Classroom Management
Grant	25	7	7	7
Jessica	24	5.75	6.25	7
Kaitlyn	5	6.625	6.75	8.375
Karen	2	6.25	7.125	7.5
Katherine	33	9	9	9
Pamela	26	6.75	8.25	8.625
Patrick	30	5.125	6.375	5.75
Rachel	12	6	6.5	6.75
Samantha	9	4.625	5.625	5.875
Suzanne	25	5.75	5.875	6.25
Whitley	30	7.75	8.25	8.75

Note. The table shows the average self-efficacy of teachers based on their responses to the Teacher Self-Efficacy Survey (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The survey is divided into the three categories of efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional strategies, and efficacy in classroom management. The efficacy scale in the survey ranges from 1 meaning nothing, 3 meaning very little, 5 meaning some influence, 7 meaning quite a bit, and 9 meaning a great deal.

Grant

Grant is a SET for Grades 7 and 8 in a suburban middle school in Georgia. Grant began his post-collegiate career in the corporate world. After a few years, he decided to go back and get his Master of Education, specifically in special education. Since Grant has special needs, he has a great deal of empathy with his students. He has been passionately advocating for his students for over 25 years. Grant's TSE average score across the three TSE categories was 7, demonstrating

he believes he has quite a bit of influence in bringing about desired student outcomes of engagement and learning.

Jessica

Jessica is currently an inclusion teacher at the high school level in a rural school district in North Carolina. Her background is an undergraduate degree in early childhood special education, and she worked with children from birth to five years in residential settings. As her children grew, she moved to special needs settings at the schools her children attended. She continued to move with them through high school. Once Jessica's own children graduated, she remained as a high school inclusion teacher. She has now been teaching for 24 years. Jessica's average TSE score was a 6.33. Her lowest category was a 5.75 in TSE-Student Engagement. Upon reflection of her TSE scores, she attributed her lower score in student engagement to factors outside of her control, such as required content (Math 3 or higher-level mathematics), outside distractions, and student learning gaps. Jessica believes that these factors create an atmosphere that feeds both general education and EL student disengagement.

Kaitlyn

Kaitlyn graduated from college as a recreation management exercise science major with plans to continue her education in the field of occupational therapy. Kaitlyn's internship for her recreation major halted her plans for further education, and she became a teacher through a lateral entry program. Since becoming a teacher, Kaitlyn added special education general curriculum K–12 and adaptive learning curriculum K–12 to her teaching license. She has now been teaching at the secondary level in special education for five years. When reviewing Kaitlyn's TSE scores, she averaged 7.25 with a high score in classroom management of 8.375. Kaitlyn expressed that her current student population challenged her, but she felt that through

repetitive experiences, she had finally learned how to achieve a productive working environment for all her students.

Karen

Karen received a Bachelor of Arts in History and pursued a graduate certificate in teaching. After teaching history for six years, she developed a heart for SWD. Karen obtained her special education certification and has worked as a high school inclusion English teacher at a rural North Carolina school. She has been in her current position for just over two years. Regarding her TSE results, Karen noted that her classroom management was her highest category (7.5), while student engagement was her lowest (6.25) with instructional strategies in the middle with a TSE score of 7.125). As she reflected, she realized that her years as a general education teacher had pushed her to engage students with instructional strategies while classroom management was her weak point. As a SET working with many academic and emotional needs, Karen has been forced to reprioritize and focus on what a managed classroom looks like. She said this growth has made her a better educator and having ELs in her classroom has added another layer to that dynamic. Karen says she looks forward to gaining more knowledge about how to best serve her students.

Katherine

Katherine graduated from college with a bachelor’s degree as a SET. When she began her career over 33 years ago, inclusion was a new idea. Katherine taught for 11 years at a rural middle school, and part of her job was to go around the county and educate teachers on the importance of inclusion classes. After her tenure at middle school, Katherine became a high school mathematics inclusion teacher. Subsequently, she moved into the occupational course of study program where she worked with high school students who were on a certificate program.

Katherine says that when the Extend One teaching position was offered to her that she felt like her life-long dream was coming true. She has been teaching Extend One for over seven years now. Katherine scored a 9 in each of the TSE categories. A score of 9 signifies her belief that she affects a great deal of change with her students. Katherine reflects that one of the most important things she has learned is to develop relationships with her students as well as their families.

Pamela

Pamela graduated with a 2-year degree in marketing. Pamela said that when she got interested in going back to college, someone recommended that she apply for a scholarship to become a SET. Pamela received a full scholarship through the North Carolina prospective teacher program. She said her motivation for teaching special needs students was that when she was in school, she would cry because she could not understand her math homework and there was no one around to help her. Pamela said she can really relate to students who need extra help. She has been teaching in a self-contained setting at a rural high school in North Carolina for 26 years now. Pamela's TSE average is a 7.875. Both her instructional strategies and classroom management scores were 8.25 and 8.625, respectively. Pamela explained her lower score in student engagement (6.75), particularly with ELs, to her inability to readily form relationships with ELs due to their hesitation to trust outsiders.

Patrick

Patrick graduated from college as an educator and has had several positions during his tenure. He started as a teacher in rural North Carolina and then got his Educational Specialist designation and went into administration in that same school system. After several years, he realized how much he missed teaching students and decided to go back into the classroom. The need for SETs in the community where his wife was teaching prompted him to get certified in

special education and begin helping that segment of the school population. Patrick taught students with SENs at the middle school level but moved to a rural high school. He has been teaching in special education departments for about half of his 30 years of educational service. Patrick scored a 5.125 in TSE-student engagement. He reflected that his limited communication skills with his ELs stunted his ability to form relationships and get the necessary student buy-in. Patrick, who scored a 6.375 on instructional strategies believes that teachers have more influence over instructional strategies, largely due to the abundance of online resources. His response to his classroom management score of 5.75 was that he felt the large class sizes and varying ability levels which are characteristic of EL classroom settings contributes a good deal to a teacher's ability to manage a classroom.

Rachel

Rachel began her career in education as a cafeteria worker, so she could have a job with a kid-friendly schedule. After three and a half years in the lunchroom, she was not being challenged. At the suggestion of an administrator at her rural high school, Rachel became a teacher assistant and a bus driver. In the meantime, Rachel continued her college education and graduated with a degree in teaching special education. She has been teaching as a high school inclusion teacher for 12 years. Rachel scored and average of 6.417 on her TSE survey. All categories rendered a similar score revealing that she believes she has the ability to facilitate more than just some influence over the student learning outcomes.

Samantha

Samantha graduated from college as a middle school math teacher. She taught for six years at middle school. Samantha says she loved her middle school students, so she decided to move to high school with them. When a SET position came available at the high school,

Samantha took it and went through the special education certification process. She has been teaching at a rural high school in North Carolina as an inclusion math teacher for 3 years. As a relatively new SET, Samantha recognizes that she is affecting change in her students' achievements. Her scores from each of the categories averaged 5.375. Samantha recognizes that building positive relationships is important to student engagement.

Suzanne

Suzanne has a Bachelor of Science in Health Education as well as a Bachelor of Science in Special Education K–12. She has always worked in inclusion classrooms since she graduated from college. Most of her assignments are to help students who have difficulty accessing the math curriculum. She has been teaching at the high school level for 25 years. Suzanne averaged 5.958 overall on the TSE survey with each category receiving similar scores. She believes that helping struggling students achieve academically is the key to perpetuating their engagement in learning.

Whitley

Whitley graduated from a 4-year college with a degree in education that concentrated on special education strategies. Later, she acquired her Education Specialist's Degree. Whitley has taught or been an administrator at elementary, middle, and high school levels for 30 years. Currently, she is involved at the secondary level in inclusion classrooms. Most of Whitley's teaching career has been spent working with students who either have had special needs or came from culturally diverse backgrounds. Her first teaching experience was in an inner-city school system. Whitley says every assignment has forged growth in her as an educator. Her TSE survey scores which averaged 8.25 are representative of her ability to have more that quite a bit of influence in student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management.

Results

Data were collected from participants using the TSE scale survey and demographic questions, as well as writing a 150-word reflection on their scaled scores in the self-efficacy areas of student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. In addition to the surveys and reflective prompt responses, these SETs participated in an individual interview and focus group questioning that was either conducted by the researcher in person or via videoconferencing. After each interview or focus group session, I documented the time, place, and setting, as well as journaling an audit trail entry exposing any of my personal feelings or biases (see Appendix H). Once the data was collected, it was necessary to organize and code these pieces of information into meaningful text. Due to the organic nature of phenomenological research, Saldaña's (2013) method for *Theming the Data* was selected. This allowed for flexibility in adding or modifying themes and subthemes throughout the analytical processes of coding, categorizing, and analytical reflection. This coding process aligns with Moustakas' (1994) modification of van Kaam's (1966) analysis steps which included listing, grouping, reduction, and clustering. These multiple forms of data provided triangulation to substantiate the themes and subthemes that emerged during the analysis process. The results of the data analysis organized by themes, subthemes, and codes are in Table 3 and are followed by a discussion.

Table 3

Themes & Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	Codes
Teacher challenges	Language barrier and cultural differences	student knowing social cues
		student academic tasks
		parent communication

Theme	Subthemes	Codes
	Student placement	larger class sizes
		unknown academic level
		no English baseline
	Lack of appropriate resources	inferior translations
		lack specific language texts
		human resources
	Lack of stakeholder support	minimal community awareness
		limited funding
	Inadequate preparation	little to no EL training
Teacher efficacy for student instruction	Assessment of student needs	determining learning levels
	Strategies for student success	chunking instruction
		cultural engagement
	Teacher support	colleagues district/local
		EL specialists
		parent educator facilitators
		social media support groups
		self-care and reflection
	Teacher training to instruct ELs	recount of previous training
		workshops
		webinars

Teacher Challenges

The initial theme emerging from the data consisted of various challenges confronting SET. Although the central theme of this study is understanding the self-efficacy of SETs who instruct ELs, I first needed to scrutinize the struggles that inhibit SETs from attaining their perceived optimum sense of teaching performance. Based on data accumulated from SETs through surveys, teacher participant self-reflections, individual interviews, and focus groups,

several challenges emerged regarding the instruction of ELs. Whitley expressed her concerns like this: “If they [ELs] come to the country, as a middle schooler, we have time to catch them up, but as a high school student, we have a very limited amount of time to get them through school and graduated.” Teacher challenges are further decoded into the subthemes of language barrier, student placement, lack of appropriate resources, lack of stakeholder support, and inadequate teacher preparation.

Language Barrier and Cultural Differences

As the first subtheme of teacher challenges, the greatest challenge voiced by SETs who instructed ELs regarded the language barrier and cultural differences. Out of the eleven participants, none of whom were bilingual, all but one ranked the language barrier and cultural differences as the most difficult obstacle. Katherine, the SET who did not acknowledge that as the greatest challenge, instructs self-contained ELs. Language barrier discussions during interviews and focus groups cited SETs struggles communicating with ELs and their parents. Kaitlyn admitted her concerns:

> Are they going to be able to understand what I say, and what about their home life? How is it going to be different, and what needs do I need to meet at home to make sure we’re all on the same team?

Other concerns related to the language barrier stemmed from issues with ELs’ backgrounds and their abilities to understand social cues without having effective language translations. Several of the high school SETs who had ninth-grade newcomers relayed that English was a third language for students. In these situations, their second language which SETs were using for translation often fell short of conveying a true meaning.

Student Placement

A second subtheme revealed SETs' frustration at their inability to make quality decisions for student placement. This subtheme surfaced and pervaded SET interviews, self-reflections, and focus groups. During interviews, several SETs mentioned the challenges of proper student placement. This input focused on large class sizes which hindered SETs from meeting their personal expectations of individualizing instruction for their students. Jessica said, "I think class size is a huge challenge because I cannot give the kind of attention that I need to those students who are on so many different levels, and then you add the language part." In the focus groups, SETs pointed out that the EL teachers often had trouble tracking down a student's ACCESS scores from other WIDA states. Also, high school students were being placed in math foundations of Algebra classes who had several grade level gaps in their math skills and were not ready to tackle the rigor of high school math classes.

Lack of Appropriate Resources

This third subtheme surfaced during individual interviews with two SETs who are responsible for supporting ELs in English inclusion settings. Due to the large number of ELs from numerous countries speaking different languages and dialects, it is a real obstacle to try to obtain the appropriate materials to instruct students. This is further complicated by the varying English proficiencies and cultural backgrounds. Karen pointed out, "I might not necessarily have access to a translation that's in their specific language, and I want them to feel comfortable [in my classroom]." For example, SETs pointed out that the literary devices in English, such as puns and other cultural nuances in Shakespearean writing, fail to convey the desired effect in other languages. SETs also mentioned the advantages of using manipulatives in math to convey concepts in visual and kinesthetic modes of instruction. These multimodal teaching tools are research-based and proven successful in teaching diverse populations. Due to the increase in the

number of ELs in their classrooms, there just are not enough supplies to go around. This lack of teaching tools extends to the need for a picture-laden curriculum which SETs use to teach and reinforce subject matter.

The same holds true for the lack of human resources. With such large EL populations, students are grouped together, so that SETs and EL teachers can deliver mandated services. However, the groups are so large that SETs referred to their time with students as checking the box rather than effectively teaching. When these SETs were describing the situation, their frustration over not having the correct material or enough time for their students was apparent. These scenarios portrayed the ebbing self-efficacy of these SETs who were expected to positively affect student achievement and outcome without having what they felt they needed to succeed on behalf of their students and subsequently for their own self-actualization.

Lack of Stakeholder Support

In an individual interview, a fourth subtheme regarding extended community came to light. One SET pointed out that the community lacks awareness when it comes to the prevalence of ELs in the local school system. Samantha described the situation as:

> We understand what the EL population is, but if people walked in from the outside, they would be shell-shocked. Having that community support, where we all work together to make sure ELs get what they need, would be really good.

In the focus groups, this idea was expounded upon with SETs agreeing that their contact with people outside of the school facility bubble, resulted in reactions of disbelief. Several added that communities need to understand that these populations will most likely remain local following graduation, as their economic situations will prevent them from moving out of the

area. SETs all agreed that failing to properly educate these ELs with or without disabilities will result in a less-than-qualified workforce.

Inadequate Teacher Preparation

Study participants were all certified SET, but their educational backgrounds and teaching pathways varied a good deal. Of the eleven, five began their teaching careers with the intention of instructing students with special needs. The remaining participants entered the special education field through lateral entry which required passing a Praxis or GACE in special education to prove proficiency for teaching students with SENs. In individual interviews and focus groups, SETs expressed their feelings of being underprepared to instruct ELs, citing a lack of coursework in their collegiate degree programs. When asked how they learned certain teaching strategies to instruct ELs, Karen, who began her teaching career as a general education history teacher, responded, “I would definitely say that it was not as a result of educational training. Unfortunately, I feel like that’s one of the areas that they [educational institutions] really let us down.”

Additionally, SETs agreed that their school districts did not do enough to supplement their training to work with EL populations. One SET, who transitioned from middle grades to high school, said that she was given more PD opportunities during her middle school tenure. She believed this was due to the need for high school teachers to spend their PLC time focusing on academic content. Two of the 11 SETs, each from different school districts, described their first years of teaching as providing a lot more practical training in understanding how to overcome cultural and language barriers. These extra trainings, such as SIOP and Framework of Poverty, were among the continuing education opportunities that SETs believed gave them the confidence to try different methods of instruction with their ELs.

Teacher Efficacy for Student Instruction

As a second major theme, TSE for student instruction highlighted SETs making a positive difference in their lives as well as the lives of the students through a "sheer force of will." Even with challenges disrupting their instruction, SETs are determined to engage students, implement strategies, and manage classrooms. To fully appreciate the plight of SETs and get better insight into their self-efficacy, we explored underlying challenges that influence their perceived abilities in instructing the secondary EL student population. Exposing these challenges led to a deeper and richer meaning of SET self-efficacy. Discussion through focus groups brought to light that efficacious teachers recognize the need for improvement, both in their craft as well as for the attainment of their students' academic achievements. Katherine summed it up this way, "Well, it's always disappointing, but we all have flops. Of course, you're disappointed, but you just go back and reflect and try to figure out what went wrong and what you need to do differently." Subthemes of assessing student needs, strategies for student success, teacher support, and teacher training in instructing ELs represent the ways and to what level SETs demonstrate self-efficacy as teachers.

Assessment of Student Needs

As the first subtheme of TSE for student instruction, SET individual interviews relayed their determination for figuring out what each student needed to be successful in the classroom. Grant stated, "When I identify an English learner on my class roster, I make sure I have the correct paperwork on that student so that I'm able to give them the accommodations they deserve to make them successful." Grant voiced his concern about having proper documentation of what students needed to access the curriculum.

However, most teachers were not supplied with ACCESS scores denoting an individual student's level of English or any baseline levels in any academic subject. This lack of knowledge and established assessment protocol was overwhelming, and adversely affected their TSE. These SETs felt that proper placement training and an action plan would empower them to improve their students' performance.

Strategies for Student Success

A second subtheme for TSEs for student instruction, examined the state of the EL student in terms of emotional balance and academic adaptation. This is particularly important when an EL student has not been in the country long enough to have baseline ACCESS scores, much less a determination of any other kind of special learning needs. Whitley observed:

> As a newcomer to the country, they need a lot of one-on-one attention, and to have lessons broken down for them. I've found it to be successful showing it written in whatever they language they use to make the connection

SETs working with ELs defaulted to the tools that they use with their students with special needs. These tools come in the form of teaching strategies, such as building background with pictures, breaking down tasks into smaller chunks, utilizing manipulatives in mathematics, and repeating various words and phrases. One SET asserted that these strategies were considered best practices for effectively teaching across all segments of the student population but were notably successful with ELs.

Teacher Support

A third subtheme arose primarily from focus groups revealing that all participants relied on other teachers as a means of affirming themselves. Some of these connections were at the local level, such as mentors or colleagues in their school's special education department. Karen

said, “I feel that the majority of what I have learned has been from my colleagues.” Other contacts were a part of the SET’s school system as a resource teacher. For instance, an EL teacher may not be housed at a particular school, but the SETs had access to teachers who could suggest ways of reaching the EL student population. Oftentimes, SETs who had large non-English speaking populations from the same language regions had an on-site parent educator facilitator. Since these facilitators were fluent in the students’ first language, they bridged the gap between students and their parents with the SET who was responsible for student instruction. Another support for SETs was the multitude of social media groups that provided a lifeline to SETs who were puzzled by how to effectively reach their ELs. All participating SETs agreed that this building of relationships within the overarching teaching community relieved anxiety and afforded them more confidence in their instruction.

Teacher Training to Instruct ELs

A fourth subtheme dealt with how prepared teachers were when faced with the added responsibility of teaching ELs with or without disabilities. In such cases where SETs do not have any baseline data on a student, they resort to strategies that they have acquired from their experiences working with their SENs population. Three of the SETs who delivered services in inclusion math said that they worked with their co-teacher to create applicable assessments to gauge student learning gaps to be remediated. Other SETs explained that they would try different ways of reaching students, and then evaluate the results to determine what strategies were most successful with their EL population. Jessica summarized her teaching tenure:

> Back when I began teaching, there was modeling and instruction of just what good teaching practices looked like. I think over time, it’s just been me figuring out what

> works, what doesn't work, and taking things that I've used with my students with disabilities and applying them in different kinds of ways with EL students.

All SETs demonstrated above-average self-efficacy in instructional strategies, ranging from 5.625 for Samantha who has taught for nine years to a 9 for Katherine, a veteran teacher of 33 years.

Outlier Data and Findings

When asked about initial concerns when an EL with or without disabilities was identified on their class roster, only one teacher confessed to having no specific response. Katherine said, "I don't have a response. I treat them like I treat everybody else, and I always treat everybody individually. So, I look more at what their learning styles and needs are."

Research Question Responses

The central research question for this study centered around SETs and their shared experiences in their instruction of ELs at the secondary school population. Three sub-questions focused on the challenges these SETs faced, their perceived self-efficacy, and their support experiences when teaching ELs at secondary school levels in the southeastern United States. Responses from surveys, individual interviews, reflective writing prompts, and focus groups resulted in research findings.

Central Research Question

What are the shared experiences of SETs instructing ELs at secondary schools in the Southeast?

The SETs who participated in this research study all had experiences instructing ELs in the public secondary schools in the Southeast. Although SETs evolved into their current positions by different means, all but two followed the traditional teacher college curriculum. The

two exceptions were Grant who began in the corporate world and returned to college to obtain a master's degree in teaching, and Kaitlyn who began on an occupational therapy track and became a SET through a lateral entry program. Karen and Samantha left positions in the general education departments of their secondary schools to dedicate their teaching gifts to bettering instruction for students with special needs. Regardless of their educational pathways, the commonality was that each SET expressed a heartfelt desire to teach in such a way that their EL students with or without disabilities could reach their fullest potential.

In her 150-word response to the results of her TSE survey results, Katherine reflected:

> I think EL teachers and special education teachers have very similar goals. We want to ensure that all students, whether they are students with disabilities or students who are English learners, have access to the curriculum and lessons whether it be through accommodations, modifying lessons, changing/adapting how we teach, or teaching based on the student's learning styles.

Sub-Question One

What challenges have SETs instructing ELs at secondary schools in the Southeast experienced?

The experiences of SETs who instruct ELs at secondary schools in the southeastern United States are that they face many struggles in delivering instruction that meets their expectations and produces successful student outcomes. The theme used to answer this question was Teacher Challenges with the subthemes of Language Barrier and Cultural Differences, Lack of Appropriate Resources, and Inadequate Preparation. For Rachel, the individual students and their grade levels are key factors. She said, "When I worked with middle school ELs, the

curriculum I delivered could be used to help teach English to them, but this isn't the case when the students reach high school and have classes with such a demanding rigor."

In the absence of standardized test scores outlining a student's proficiency in understanding English or mastery of specific subjects, all SETs found themselves formally and informally assessing students for placement. Suzanne admitted that knowing where to begin was her biggest challenge, and that the discovery process was time consuming and diminished the amount of time she would have applied to teaching new curriculum. It also depended on how motivated the student was to learn regardless of their command of English. Other SET, like Karen, had similar concerns:

> The language barrier is real, but determining a student's level of understanding in a specific subject matter is the toughest, so I seek out resources in their own language if I can find them so that I can eliminate the English comprehension variable.

Sub-Question Two

What are the self-efficacy perceptions of SETs instructing ELs at secondary schools in the Southeast?

The results of the TSE survey showed a mean score of 6.42 in the self-efficacy category of student engagement, 7 in instructional strategies, and 7.35 in classroom management. The rating scale shows the SETs who participated in this study scored in the range of having quite a bit of influence. The maximum possible score in each category is a 9. In addition to the self-efficacy survey results, the theme used to answer this question was Teacher Efficacy for Student Instruction with subthemes of Assessment of Student Needs and Strategies for Student Success. Rachel said, "As an EC teacher who works with ELs, I find that I am pretty good at finding resources, and when I use them and see my students become successful, I gain confidence to do

more."

In reflecting on her perceived self-efficacy for student engagement, Suzanne conveyed her goal for her students:

> I try my best in the classroom to make sure the students who struggle can gain some self-esteem and motivation. With good healthy esteem and motivation, they tend to be more engaged. I help them understand that not knowing is okay and that we can learn what we don't know.

During their individual interviews, each SET described the methods that were most successful. Pamela, who works with ELs who are in the occupational course of study track, relies on lots of repetition, breaking down the meanings, doing multiple activities with vocabulary associated with job sites and work situations. Suzanne has found having students read aloud informs her who needs more one-on-one attention and what modifications she should make to help them access the curriculum. Other SET, like Katherine, have discovered that hearing a student's personal stories creates a connection with her students and motivates them to work harder to overcome learning gaps and language and cultural barriers.

During the focus group sessions, SETs voiced how encouraged they were when they discovered a new strategy that worked well with their EL students, particularly those who really struggled with a lesson. Overall, the participant data from self-reflection, individual interviews, and focus groups on SETs' perceptions of self-efficacy in EL instruction aligned with the results from their TSE surveys. Across all three categories represented in the TSE, these SETs scored a mean score of 6.92, indicating they believed themselves capable of affecting "quite a bit of influence" in the learning outcomes of EL students with or without disabilities.

Sub-Question Three

What are the support experiences of SETs instructing ELs at secondary schools in the Southeast?

The support experiences of SETs who instruct ELs play a role in their perceived self-efficacy for affecting positive student outcomes. The theme Teacher Efficacy for Student Instruction with subthemes of Teacher Support and Teacher Training to Instruct ELs was used to answer this research question. Pamela observed, “Sometimes our EL students are not so quick to open up and it means making the connection much more difficult which can result in less student engagement with those students.” Several SETs spoke of training they had more than six years previously, and all agreed that more training in the EL area would benefit teachers who work with ELs to allow them to learn new instructional strategies to better engage their non-English speaking students. For the SETs, such as Samantha, who had access to an English learning teacher (ELT), the EL teacher would come into Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, and she would give us things to improve the quality of time we spent with EL students, especially the year-one students who were struggling. Samantha reflected, “I think having the EL teacher support was probably the best professional development because she could come in my room and say what we could work on together to help kids. She could see the gap.”

When asked what they did when they struggled with feeling ill equipped, SETs agreed that self-care and reflection on their teaching practices were paramount to dealing with negative feelings in a healthy manner. Some SETs temporarily stepped away from the challenging situation by taking walks or engaging in an unrelated hobby to ease the pressure of self-doubt and help them gain a new prospective. Self-care and reflection varied with individual SET, but

the result consistently pulled them back into a positive attitude focusing on a different tack for teaching and evaluation.

Summary

Data for this study in the form of surveys, self-reflective prompts, individual interviews, and focus groups were collected from 11 SETs who shared their experiences of teaching ELs with or without disabilities. The central research question and sub-questions were answered eliciting themes of Teacher Challenges and Teacher Efficacy for Student Instruction. The data revealed SETs face many challenges in their instruction of ELs and view these challenges as a part of the teaching vocation. These challenges encompass a myriad of variables ranging from the different academic abilities and cultural backgrounds of the students to the level of supplemental resources and professional skillsets of the teachers. Once faced with these challenges, SETs made choices about how to overcome these obstacles thereby empowering them to become efficacious teachers who provide quality instruction for their students, including ELs with or without disabilities. More insight into how SETs prevailed and further implications are discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study sought to understand the self-efficacy of SETs who are responsible for the instruction of ELs with or without disabilities at secondary public schools in the southeastern United States. The problem was that amidst SET shortages due to attrition and increasing EL populations, the perceived self-efficacy of SETs to affect positive academic outcomes for non-English speaking students was being challenged (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Bodenhamer, 2023; Hester et al., 2020). Data were collected from 11 SETs in various service delivery settings between Grade 7 and Grade 12. Data were collected through surveys, self-reflective prompts, individual interviews, and focus groups. Moustakas' (1994) modification of van Kaam's (1966) analysis steps which included listing, grouping, reduction, and clustering was applied.

Discussion

At the conclusion of the data analysis, findings revealed that the 11 participants believed their abilities to affect change in the academic outcomes of their EL students with or without disabilities relied on their capability to overcome professional challenges and to teach from a place of positivity. Discussion of five major subsections include a) Critical Discussion; b) Implications for Policy or Practice; c) Theoretical and Empirical Implications; d) Limitations and Delimitations; and e) Recommendations for Future Research.

Interpretation of Findings

In exploring the perceived self-efficacy of SETs who instruct ELs, the participating SETs shared their experiences. The analysis of data derived from these SETs produced the main themes of teacher challenges and teacher efficacy for student instruction which were essential in

understanding their teaching self-efficacy. The first theme of teacher challenges enumerated obstacles that prevented SETs from meeting their personal teaching goals that they outlined for their students. These obstacles were presented as subthemes. The first subtheme of language barrier and cultural differences further describes how SET's inability to accurately relay instruction to ELs makes the teacher–student paradigm more complex. For example, classroom talk consists mainly of triadic dialogue where the teacher initiates instruction, the student responds, and the teacher gives feedback (Salloum & BouJaoude, 2019). In a multilingual classroom, additional supports like code-switching, substituting a word in the student's known language for a word in the targeted language, are used to confirm and clarify word meaning (El Mouhayer, 2022). Since SETs pointed to communication as key in the teacher–student paradigm, inaccurate verbal or social cue communication could create an atmosphere of potential misunderstanding and less than favorable academic and social outcomes. When asked about times when her teaching did not meet her own expectations, Jessica said, "The most frustrating thing is the waste of critical instruction time because my efforts to communicate concepts didn't end in successful student learning."

A second subtheme of teacher challenges referred to the difficulty of correctly placing students based on language proficiency, content mastery, and innate ability. Kaitlyn stated. "Knowing I have a team that can help me with student placement is huge and takes away some of the stress." SETs in this study agreed the insufficient communication skills compounded with ELs from different country and academic backgrounds, made placement of these students within a least restrictive environment another hurdle to overcome. Additionally, assessments used for student placement tend to be standardized and in English which puts multilingual students at a disadvantage for determining true skill levels (Hsieh et al., 2023; Nordmeyer, 2023). Research

shows more accurate determinations can be made of a student's knowledge of English by utilizing language-in-use methods, such as learning activities instead of standardized tests (Hsieh et al., 2023).

A third subtheme related to teacher challenges addressed a lack of appropriate resources. Participants discussed how they utilized resources on hand and created their own benchmarks to determine where to begin with teaching their ELs and how to do so. The lack of ready-made assessments and engaging resources further hindered SETs from doing their job. Katilyn commented, "The pre-scripted lessons don't work for me. On a couple of occasions, I gave lessons written in Spanish to one of my Hispanic students, but she was unable to self-regulate enough to engage and complete the lesson." Another SET, Jessica, said, "These students are working on such different levels, and then you add the English part, and then you add the insufficient number of resources."

A fourth subtheme pertaining to the lack of stakeholder support outlined the challenges that teachers face. Some SETs cited a lack of community awareness as a roadblock to acquiring what they needed to help their EL students. Samantha mused, "It would be nice if people in the community understood the situation, and then maybe we could all work together." Conversely, the non-English speaking community presented its own obstacles, such as trust issues. Karen shared, "It's not always the case, but I was lucky enough to work with an EL teacher who was immersed in the Hmong culture and helped me gain credibility within the community." Then, there was Patrick who stated, "I know it would cost money, but with so many immigrants we need to have supports in place, such as a newcomer center, to help teach some survival English." As a result of these circumstances, all SETs believed that school funding should be designated for teaching diverse populations and include tangible supplies, as well as training for all teachers

who work with ELs. This belief aligns with the national debate for school funding which argues that since ELs represent approximately 10% of the student population, the U.S. is missing an opportunity by not directing monies to educate this significant portion of the future workforce (Martínez & Spikes, 2022).

The second theme of teacher efficacy for student instruction was broken down into four subthemes. The first two consisted of the assessment of student needs and strategies for student success relate directly to what SETs are doing to conquer specific student deficits. SETs have overcome the dilemma of determining individual EL student needs and remediating these students using effective research-based assessment tools and strategies and tailoring them to accomplish targeted student outcomes.

The third and fourth subthemes of teacher efficacy for student instruction correlate SETs and their personal journeys to achieve a strong sense of teaching self-efficacy. SETs agreed that the support they received from colleagues and specialized school staff was what rallied them on to continue teaching and seeking solutions for student learning challenges. The fourth subtheme spoke to the SET avenue of learning during their undergraduate studies and professional teaching tenure. In addition to giving SETs useful strategies for teaching, these learning experiences affirmed them as necessary and positive contributors to the instruction of ELs with or without disabilities. In light of these thematic findings, the following critical discussion renders a summary of overarching themes and reflections.

Critical Discussion

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the experiences of SETs along with the struggles they face and the ways they overcame those challenges to determine their perceived self-efficacy in EL instruction. After themes and research question responses were

constructed, I reflected on the findings of this study along with relevant empirical and theoretical literature resulting in three points that I pose for critical discussion. Within the context of previously discussed themes and subthemes, the first point revealed that SET self-efficacy was affected by the academic outcomes of their student populations regardless of whether the student was an EL with or without special needs. A second point in determining SET self-efficacy was their reliance on their colleagues for personal affirmation as well as learning support. A third point for gauging SET self-efficacy was a result of their desire to acquire knowledge resulting from personal experiences, colleague interaction, and learning opportunities which they applied in their teaching vocation. A closer look at these three factors follows and gives more insight into the perceived self-efficacy of SETs as they serve ELs.

Effects of Student Academic Outcomes

SETs who participated in this study disclosed that their EL students' learning successes fueled their desire to continue teaching and generate better ways to meet their students' academic goals. Samantha said, "I love those 'aha moments' in teaching when the student lights up and you can tell that they got it. I love it. It's why we teach!" Research shows that the academic achievement of students is closely connected to the perceived self-efficacy of SETs (Nguyen & Northrop, 2021; Zee & Koomen, 2016; Zee et al., 2021). Teachers who have high self-efficacy in their profession believe they can engage students using instructional strategies while effectively managing their classroom of students. This perception positions teachers to favorably influence student development which results in personal job satisfaction (Jentsch et al., 2023). As they recounted their teaching experiences, it was apparent that the SETs in this study possessed a deep-seated drive to seek out the resources they needed to make all students feel successful regardless of students' levels when they joined the SET's classroom. SETs proved their

willingness to go to great lengths including spending their own funds to purchase materials to increase student learning. Jessica noted, "I've seen teachers spend a lot of their own money on materials for the ELs in their classroom. They'll do anything to help their students become successful." Additional resources were particularly beneficial when SETs had a classroom of ELs and were trying to teach English language and content-area skills simultaneously.

Other SETs found success by determining how an individual student learns best and presenting multimodal lessons. Samantha shared, "Well, I'm going to tell you that I don't think lecturing gets it done. It's got to be a lot of hands-on tasks and visual cues, or the students will struggle. You have to use multiple approaches." Using multimodalities, such as manipulatives for math practice or song lyrics and "idiomemes" for English learning, increases the chances for ELs to make the connections necessary for comprehension (Robertson & Graven, 2022; Smith, 2023). The research shows that the integration of visuals and manipulatives increases the EL's ability to make connections to solidify learning (More et al., 2016; Reyes et al., 2022). Implementation of varied teaching methods is a research-based strategy used in different teaching models to improve student learning of language and content-specific academics (Kelly, 2018; Piazza et al., 2020; Zadina, 2014).

Furthermore, these SETs possessed an understanding that students do their best when they believe someone cares about them as a person regardless of their abilities or backgrounds; therefore, SETs strive to build relationships with their students. Some ELs have endured adverse experiences in coming to the U.S., and one of the strongest resilience factors, or abilities to adapt and become successful, is having a nurturing relationship with at least one caring adult (Keane & Evans, 2022). Patrick claimed, "I've learned that building a relationship with students goes a long way. They realize you're going to advocate for them and that makes it a little easier."

Historically, educational institutions have promoted human capital development through the mentoring relationships of teachers, counselors, and coaches (Kraft et al., 2023). In keeping with this mindset, SETs focus on a student's self-esteem and celebrate his or her small victories so that building on those successes produces a confident, well-rounded student. Several SETs reflected on their experiences working with frustrated students and utilizing EL strategies which resulted in student successes and an increase in student self-esteem and their professional self-efficacy. Grant said it like this:

> I have one student in my mind right now who had the attitude that he couldn't do the work. And now, it's like he's a different person. He's very positive, he's outgoing, and he's being successful. I'm glad I was a part of his positive change.

Although Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory was utilized primarily in this study to understand the perceived self-efficacy of SET, it is of note that students who have a low sense of self-efficacy for learning may avoid tasks while efficacious students are more willing to participate (Schunk, 1985). More importantly, SETs play an important role as a source of information for establishing this agency within each learner through their instructional practices.

Reliance on Colleague Support

Strong support is imperative for SET self-efficacy. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the one thread that pervaded all sources was that these SETs depended on their fellow teachers for support. Grant expressed, "I've been very fortunate to have good administrators who support me in any situation, but my colleagues are like my family, and we discuss everything about school and home." Various studies indicate that teachers' optimistic perceptions of their working environment increase job satisfaction, decrease burnout, and boost TSE (Bettini et al., 2017; Cumming et al., 2021; Jentsch et al., 2023). In this situation, working

environment refers to the quality of personal relationships teachers experience in their schools and entails factors, such as autonomy to make decisions about teaching practices and materials, encouragement to establish solid working relationships, and positively delivered feedback to affirm their self-worth as an educator (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018; Jentsch et al., 2023; Mellom et al., 2018). Sometimes this support was in the form of contributed lesson plans, PD with strategies to use with their ELs, but most often it was in the reassurance that their colleagues and administrators believed in them and had their back. During a focus group session, one participant, Samantha, emphasized, “My colleagues are the people I trust, and I go to them to ask for help or suggestions.” In her response to the self-reflection prompt, Karen regarded:

> I believe my deficits in student engagement self-efficacy are a result of transitioning from general to special education and dealing with such a wide range of abilities. I’m glad to have experienced special needs teachers to bounce things off of.

These SETs forged these professional relationships through experiences with their colleagues who they spent more time with than their own families. Furthermore, the extended benefit of these working relationships is the collective efficacy that results from the leverage of the individual SET’s self-efficacy added to that of their colleagues to promote even greater student outcomes (Bandura, 1993; Donohoo, 2018; Locke & Johnston, 2016).

Acquisition of Knowledge

A SET’s self-efficacy is significantly influenced by the belief that they are as prepared as possible to instruct their students for academic success (Andersson et al., 2022; Blitz & Blitz, 2023; Polin, 2023). Participants were forthright about not having all the answers. Karen confessed, “I learned that it’s okay not to have all of the answers and that makes me a lot more comfortable when I approach a student who doesn’t speak English.” Even though some SETs felt

their pre-service training was not thorough enough to effectively teach ELs, they were willing to gain competency by engaging in additional learning opportunities. Teachers feel the need for PD to facilitate their discovery of how to adapt their lessons and teaching practices to meet the learning needs of their ELs (Andersson et al., 2022). Pamela said, “Just reflecting on these questions makes me realize I haven’t had a lot of training to work with ELs.” Research-based models and programs, such as Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and Multiple Pathways, were presented in this study and are designed to be incorporated into PD or professional learning communities (PLCs; Reyes et al., 2022; Riley & Babino, 2021; Zadina, 2014). A significant revelation of this study was that SETs recognized their need for continued improvement of their teaching skills and expressed the need for more professional enrichment experiences. Researchers agree that PD has a positive impact on a teacher’s self-efficacy, and subsequently, TSE has been found to contribute to student motivation (Mathews et al., 2023; Polin, 2023). In acknowledgement of their shortcomings, SETs exhibited traits, such as self-advocacy and confidence which are characteristics of self-efficacious teachers.

Implications for Policy or Practice

This study identified certain implications for policy and practice pertinent to the advancement of SETs who work with ELs with or without disabilities. Recommendations to public school special education departments and school administrators stand to remind these stakeholders of their responsibility to all students and their in-service teachers. The following is a discussion of these implications for policy and practice.

Implications for Policy

The findings of this study have two policy implications. First, FAPE mandates that every student have an appropriate education and receive the necessary accommodations which allow

them to access the academic curriculum. Participants in this study were acutely aware of the required accommodations and accompanying paperwork for students on their caseloads. Grant said, "When I identify an English Learner with or without disabilities on my class roster, I make sure I have the correct paperwork so they can get the accommodations they deserve to help them be successful." Since SETs and EL teachers are required to deliver certain services, the overlap in eligible student segments can create tension between the two distinct specializations (Adams & Hord, 2023). Increased collaborative efforts in the formation of student IEPs have been proposed to allay the stress and consequently, give the student a more comprehensive education (Adams & Hord, 2023; Kangas, 2018).

A second policy implication addresses the need for training teachers to work specifically with ELs. Earlier discussion highlighted lower EL achievement when the instruction was disseminated by teachers who merely passed a test to acquire their credentials for EL instruction (Thorne Wallington & Johnson, 2022; Wallington & Johnson , 2022). Although the SETs who participated in this study are certified to teach students who are eligible for special education services, these credentials do not qualify SETs to meet mandated requirements specific to English learning. Unlike other U.S. regions, the southeastern United States does not require SETs to hold a certification that is specific to instructing students from CLD populations. Present research uncovered only a few special education training programs that included training SETs in how to support students who qualified as both an EL and having SENs (Adams & Hord, 2023). More significantly were the numbers of preservice and in-service teachers who classified themselves as not proficient in their ability to instruct ELs. The increasing immigrant population warrants a change in the policies surrounding the certification of SET. Currently, several states with large immigrant populations have passed legislation requiring a sheltered English

immersion endorsement as a part of preservice teacher licensure (Blitz & Blitz, 2023). There are also several other models for supporting ELs in U.S. schools; however, the transitional bilingual education and dual-language education programs are arguably responsible for low English literacy scores and being replaced with English-only programs, like sheltered English immersion (SEI).

Implications for Practice

Several practical implications arose from this research study. Research evidence highlights that within the shared experiences of SETs who instruct ELs with or without disabilities, an increased responsibility for teaching these students is not being offset by the resources needed to meet the standards. Jessica voiced it like this:

> Teaching ELs is not something I resent or shy away from, but the result is a frustration with the system not the students. The more we can drill down and think about what it is that we're doing to meet the needs of EL and EC students, the better it is for everybody.

Adhering to best practices serves to provide a quality education and promote a hopeful future for ELs who will graduate from public-school and become part of their local community. Additionally, the SETs who participated in this study described their class sizes as "huge" with 80% of students qualifying for English language services. This meant that 25 out of 30 students in a classroom lacked English proficiency, and the SETs felt hindered from being able to meet student needs as well as their own expectations for instruction. Patrick reflected that he believed his lower self-efficacy score in classroom management was directly related to the increased number of students he is responsible for teaching. Overall, the strain of these classroom dynamics and inability to teach to their own personal standards adversely affects SET self-

efficacy as they struggle with maintaining student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management.

Providing opportunities enabling SETs to overcome these challenges that diminish their self-efficacy should be the primary objective both at the administrative and policymaker levels. Repeatedly, SETs who participated in this study spoke of their colleagues as being their biggest advocates. Although administration and EL teachers provided solid support, SETs consistently sought out their more experienced coworkers for advice on working with their EL students. Study participants touted that the positive relationships built with their colleagues provided them with the confidence to ask for assistance when faced with a challenging situation. SETs frequently noted that their comfort level with their colleagues was based on the knowledge that they would receive sound advice without being criticized. However, SETs recognized that their colleagues did not always have the answers regarding EL instruction and pertinent training would give them more tools to utilize in their teaching practice.

The research shows that achieving a higher level of TSE and job satisfaction has been tied to positive PD opportunities (Cheng et al., 2024; Pan & Cheng, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024). These PD opportunities are presented to teachers in many ways, such as online learning modules or face-to-face workshops. One of the most effective settings for PD takes place in professional learning communities (PLCs) where teachers work together within the local school meeting structure (Pan & Cheng, 2023). Since SETs in this study agreed that more training for teaching ELs was necessary to increase their self-efficacy for EL instruction, the quandary is what training and how it should be implemented. After reviewing several models for PD implemented in PLCs, I recommend a two-step process for updating teacher training for EL instruction. The first step would be to bridge the gap with an evidence-based PD program. Research shows that in

a Midwest region where teacher to EL ratio was one teacher to 168 ELs, SIOP teachers relayed positive feedback on the program and showed increased scores of up to 12% in the eight areas of instruction consisting of lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, and review and assessment (Piazza et al., 2020). This model incorporates instruction utilizing English instruction as it is applied to content-specific teaching. This is particularly enticing since SETs at the secondary level are expected to keep students on an academic track to graduate in a certain timeframe and simultaneously increase English proficiency.

Since it is anticipated that ELs will comprise 25% of the U.S. Student population by 2025 (McFarland et al., 2018; Piazza et al., 2020) preparation incorporating a two-step process becomes the most viable option. The second step would be to incorporate a more permanent ongoing teacher training program of Expediting Comprehension for English Language Learners (ExC-ELL) requiring 45 hours of PD that would render a sheltered English immersion (SEI) endorsement for the SETs or other participating teachers (Bruhn et al., 2023; Calderón, 2018). The state of Massachusetts implemented ExC-ELL as a PD through its Rethinking Equity in the Teaching of English Language Learners (RETELL) project (Bruhn et al., 2023). Adoption of this initiative required teachers and administrators who did not already possess an EL teaching certification a learning opportunity to attain the necessary training and credentials. In light of these recommendations, consideration should be that preservice teachers either show EL certification prior to hire or sign a contract stating that they will complete the PD within a designated period of time. It is the responsibility of administrators and policymakers to schedule and provide the PD necessary for teacher and resulting student success. These recommendations serve to limit any future legal liability for employing teachers who lack EL instruction

qualifications and increase the skills necessary for more self-efficacious SETs who instruct ELs with or without disabilities.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The essence of the shared experiences of SETs who instruct ELs produced themes that help us better understand the perceived self-efficacy of SETs who instruct ELs. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy established the framework for the study and served as the lens through which to analyze the collected data. Theoretical implications consisted of SETs pursuing EL instruction with confidence based on reflecting on their teaching and recognizing their effectiveness as educators of ELs with or without disabilities. Empirical implications comprise the account of SET experiences as they relate to the instruction of ELs.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework that directed this study was the theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Pursuant to this theory is that behavioral learning occurs through observation and modeling. When coupled with the principle of self-regulation, one's responses to certain external forces or sources of information serve as a catalyst to the formulation of beliefs about one's ability to affect outcomes. Participant surveys, self-reflections, and individual interviews highlighted and confirmed Bandura's (1977, 1993) research findings that multiple sources of information that were conveyed via different means contribute to the growth of SETs and their perceived self-efficacy. Related to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, SETs demonstrated that when faced with a different or varied scenario, the SETs felt competent to apply strategies resulting in positive student outcomes. Aligning with this thought process is the significant difference between attempting new strategies amidst an encouraging team of colleagues and operating in a vacuum. Evidence of this was demonstrated when SETs expressed their gratitude

for their colleagues and mentors who came alongside them and encouraged them in their instruction methods or gave them suggestions of what might work. Reflecting on the responses to interview questions and reflections on their teaching practices, it became apparent that the more years teachers spent teaching ELs, the more willing and empowered SETs felt to try new strategies. In Katherine's TSE survey reflections, she stated, "I have been teaching a long time (over 30 years), and my efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management is higher because I have learned from my mistakes and continually reflect and try to improve." Salient research shows that efficacious teaching evolves with continued experiences, feedback, and reflection on practice (Lauermann & ten Hagen, 2021; Mathews et al., 2023; Osman & Warner, 2020; Riley & Babino, 2021).

Empirical Implications

The findings of this study supported and added to the body of related empirical literature. Although research shows no direct causal effect between the TSE of SETs and the quality of instruction, the measurement of indirect factors, such as the amount of training and teaching experiences is associated with SETs having a higher self-efficacy (Mathews et al., 2023). Many participants discerned that when they were faced with a challenge, they were able to access memories of similar situations or remember advice from a colleague or mentor to arrive at effective solutions or strategies in their teaching practice. In some cases, these scaffolding experiences commenced during PST education preparation programs. For example, PSTs observe their mentor teachers modeling best teaching practices in a classroom setting. This experience helps them learn how to become a teacher (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021). However, if their preparation program lacked scenarios involving the instruction of ELs, then the PSTs, who are the least experienced teaching professionals, begin their teaching career at a deficit.

Likewise, general education teachers might have been exposed to teaching strategies for ELs but do not get the learning opportunities and coaching support to implement these strategies for their students of CLD backgrounds. This scenario leaves a void in the general education teacher's toolbox and results in a lower self-efficacy (DeLozier, 2022). Since ELs spend most of their school day in inclusion settings, this void can contribute to the teacher feeling less than adequate (DeLozier, 2022; Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018). Even though EL teachers are trained in teaching the English language, they still require supplemental training in the varied cultural backgrounds of their students (Coady et al., 2020). Subsequently, SETs are either trained or establish mastery of teaching students with SENs but lack the skills to feel proficient in the instruction of ELs (Daniel & Lemons, 2018).

Limitations and Delimitations

Unfortunately, this present study is not without limitations, and both limitations and delimitations are discussed in this section. Regarding limitations there are two that are addressed in this study. First, in the initial proposal, the targeted population was a specific school system in the piedmont region of North Carolina. After submission and approval of the study by both the intended school district and Liberty University's IRBs, the school district's gatekeeper disseminated the request for participation to all secondary SET. After three weeks, it became evident that no candidates were going to materialize, so it became necessary to increase the research study parameters. I decided to make initial contacts and then rely on snowball sampling to acquire the 10 to 15 SETs needed to create a robust study. The result was 14 potential candidates who all taught at secondary schools in the southeastern United States. Of those 14 potential candidates, 11 completed the entire research process. The other three potential candidates dropped out of the study due to reasons explained earlier. Although this development

negated the focus on a single school district, it served to broaden the scope and make it more applicable to a larger range of school systems. A second limitation was the small number of candidates who volunteered to participate in the study which could limit the transferability of the study. Investigation into research study methodology substantiated that generalizability or transferability is judged by the readers who with their own experiences of the phenomenon determine whether the thick descriptions apply to other settings (Hays & McKibben, 2021; Lincoln et al., 1985). Adhering to the criteria of phenomenological research methodology which states that there should be no less than 10 participants to gain the essence of the experiences, the remaining 11 candidates were selected by default (Check & Schutt, 2012). Considering the candidates met the study criteria of being certified SETs and having at least one year of teaching experience, the research was also conducted at multiple sites which increases generalizability and offsets the small sample size. The breakdown of the sample pool consisted of nine white females and two white males. This lack of diversity among the participants represents a limitation in this study. Although this factor decreases variation, it provides an opportunity for future research studies.

Delimitations within the study were decisions made by the researcher based on the subject matter of the phenomenological research (Lincoln et al., 1985). This study, being based on the perceived self-efficacy of SETs who instruct ELs, prescribed that all participants need to meet requirements by being certified special needs teachers with at least one year of teaching experience and have students in the EL population. All candidates qualified as SETs and the researcher chose a minimum of one year teaching experience as a parameter. Although the experience of one participating SETs was right at two years, she previously had instructed for six years as a general education content teacher at the secondary level. Another delimitation was the

choice to conduct the research in the southeastern United States. Initially, the study was to target the piedmont region of North Carolina, but the lack of interested candidates forced the researcher to cast a wider net by encompassing the Southeast.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study reveals four recommendations for future research based on the limitations of the study. First of all, while all qualifying SETs were invited to participate, all 11 candidates were white females and males from more rural or suburban school districts. Even though the. underrepresentation of SETs from other races or ethnicities was by no means a negative factor, future research might add the dynamic of SETs who teach ELs with or without disabilities in urban school districts and increase chances for a more diverse sample pool. This aspect would add experiences from a different perspective and increase the richness of the research. Secondly, the SETs in this study had multiple years of teaching experience and scored above-average in all categories of the TSE survey, the study should be expanded to extrude more of the experiences of less efficacious teachers. This would be more feasible if qualified participants were at the beginning of their teaching career with fewer than seven years of overall teaching experience. A third potential topic for research would be to address class sizes that the SETs are responsible for instructing. It merited mention in this study as part of the shared experiences of SETs; however, it is an issue across all schools and should be addressed in a separate study regarding policy and practice. A final suggestion for future research would be to study the outcome of PD that extends beyond just the presentation of a program for facilitating teacher instruction of ELs. Mentoring, coaching, and reflection have proven to positively affect the TSE of all teachers, including SET. This would increase the fidelity of the program implementation and serve to educate

stakeholders regarding necessary funding multiple phases of integration, such as program presentation, follow-up coaching, and teacher reflection and feedback (Riley & Babino, 2021).

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the shared experiences of SETs who are responsible for the instruction of ELs with or without disabilities and how those experiences affected their sense of self-efficacy. A transcendental phenomenological research design was chosen to ascertain the essence of the lived experiences of SETs. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy served as the theoretical framework of this study. Data were collected from 11 SETs in the southeastern United States. This data consisted of surveys, self-reflection responses, individual interviews, and focus groups. These data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) modification of van Kaam's (1966) steps of listing, grouping, reduction, and clustering. Several takeaways from the lived experiences of SETs who instruct ELs were highlighted and could be instrumental in developing future policies and practices. The data validated the theoretical framework. The most significant outcome of this study was that although SETs perceive themselves as efficacious in EL instruction, they voiced a frustration and need for additional education and support to meet their teaching expectations and affect greater academic achievement in their EL student population.

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Appendix A

Final IRB Study Initial and Modification Letters

February 15, 2024

Emilie Jacumin-Simmons
Kristy Motte

Re: Modification - IRB-FY23-24-184 A Phenomenological Study of Special Education Teacher Self-Efficacy for English Learner Instruction

Dear Emilie Jacumin-Simmons, Kristy Motte,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY23-24-184 A Phenomenological Study of Special Education Teacher Self-Efficacy for English Learner Instruction.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Your request to make the following changes has been approved:

1. Utilize email and social media to recruit participants,
2. No longer compensate participants, and
3. Expand your study area from “Hickory, North Carolina, and surrounding schools within the Catawba County Schools District” to “the Southeastern United States via online/virtual when in-person interviews are not feasible.”

Thank you for submitting your revised study documents for our review and documentation. **For a PDF of your modification letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Modification under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. If your modification required you to submit revised documents, they can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for complying with the IRB’s requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 19, 2023

Emilie Jacumin-Simmons
Kristy Motte

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-184 A Phenomenological Study of Special Education Teacher Self-Efficacy for English Learner Instruction

Dear Emilie Jacumin-Simmons, Kristy Motte,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Participant Informed Consent

Title of the Project: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY FOR ENGLISH LEARNER INSTRUCTION
Principal Investigator: Emilie L. Jacumin-Simmons, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must hold a teaching license as a certified special education teacher and currently teach at the middle or high school levels (grades 6–12) in the proposed school district site. Potential participants must have at least one year of experience teaching students with special needs who are also classified as English learners. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand the feelings of special education teachers who are responsible for the instruction of English learner students.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Complete and submit to the researcher a 24-item Teacher Self-efficacy (TSE) Form accompanied by an 8-item Demographic Questionnaire that will take no more than 15 minutes.
2. Researcher will send participant their TSE results along with a reflective prompt of 150 words which will take participant no more than 20 minutes to compose.
3. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 45 minutes.
4. Participate in focus group to be held virtually and recorded to aid in accurate transcription to take no more than 60 minutes.
5. As a part of the focus group, participants will be asked to review their interview transcripts for accuracy, also known as member checking, that will take no more than 10 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include literature to support potential solutions for the challenges they face in the instruction of English learner students with or without disabilities.

Benefits to education as a discipline include the addition of literature that could benefit special education teachers who are responsible of the instruction of English learner students.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Digital data will be stored on a password-locked computer. Hardcopy data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in researcher's home office. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

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

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Emilie L. Jacumin-Simmons. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Kristy Motte at [redacted].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record as well as video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

____

Printed Subject Name

____

Signature & Date

Appendix C

Participant Confirmation Letter and Survey Link

Dear Special Education Teacher:

This correspondence is to advise you that I am in receipt of your signed Participant Informed Consent form. Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research to better understand the challenges and feelings of self-efficacy in special education teachers who instruct English learner students.

As a reminder, names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, click here.

If any questions arise, feel free to contact me at [redacted].

Sincerely,

Emilie Jacumin-Simmons
Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University
[redacted]
[redacted]

SURVEY LINK

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/G9L5YKX

Appendix D

Prospective Participant Questionnaire

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale[1] (long form)

Teacher Beliefs

How much can you do?

Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.

		Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite A Bit		A Great Deal
1.	How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
2.	How much can you do to help your students think critically?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
3.	How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
4.	How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
5.	To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
6.	How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
7.	How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students ?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
8.	How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
9.	How much can you do to help your students value learning?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
10.	How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
11.	To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
12.	How much can you do to foster student creativity?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
13.	How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
14.	How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
15.	How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
16.	How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
17.	How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
18.	How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
19.	How well can you keep a few problem students form ruining an entire lesson?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
20.	To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
21.	How well can you respond to defiant students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
22.	How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
23.	How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
24.	How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)

Teacher Demographic Information

25. What is your gender? ______________________________

26. What is your racial identity? ____________________________

27. What grade level(s) do you teach? ______________________

28. How many years have you taught? ______________________

29. What level do you teach? __________________________________
    - Elementary
    - Middle
    - High

30. What is the context of your school?
    - Urban
    - Suburban
    - Rural

31. What is the approximate proportion of students who receive free and reduced lunches at your school?
    - 0–20%
    - 21–40%
    - 41–60%
    - 61–80%
    - 81–100%

32. What is your name and a good contact number to schedule an interview?

First Name ______________________

Last Name _______________________

Good Contact Number (to schedule interview) _______________________________

Email Address _________________________________

Appendix E

Individual Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Project: SETs Who Teach ELs

Date: Time of Interview:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of professional development on the self-efficacy of special education teachers who instruct English learners (ELs) in the ABC public school system located in the central Piedmont area of North Carolina. Interviews of EC teachers who also teach ELs are being conducted to understand the various forms of professional training and determine what these teachers deem to be the most beneficial way to equip them to teach ELs. Inform the interviewee of the duration of the interview. Explain what will be done to protect the confidentiality of the data. Interviewee signed the consent form on the prospective participant questionnaire form. Turn on the recording device and test it (Creswell, 2015, p. 225).

Questions:

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another. CRQ
2. Can you tell me about your educational background and what led you to your current position? CRQ

3. What are your initial responses or concerns when you identify an English learner (EL) with or without disabilities on your class roster? SQ1
4. What challenges have you faced when working with EL students with or without disabilities in your classes? SQ1
5. Describe successful practices you use when working with EL students in your classes. SQ2
6. Describe how you came to know about these practices (e.g., a result of educational training, modeling by a mentor or colleague, or as an outcome of personal trial and error experiences). SQ2
7. Describe your feelings when EL students demonstrate mastery resulting from your instruction of a specific concept? SQ2
8. Describe practices you have used when working with EL students in your classes that, in your opinion, were less than successful. SQ2
9. Describe your feelings when your teaching did not meet your own expectations. SQ2
10. What professional development experiences have you had that prepared you to work with EL students as a teacher? SQ3
11. What kinds of support have you received during your teaching tenure? SQ3
12. Who did you receive this support from (e.g., colleagues, administration, outside learning initiatives, etc.)? SQ3
13. Describe your feelings that developed towards this source when you received this support. SQ3
14. What personal feelings towards yourself transpired from this specific experience? SQ3

15. Describe how you applied what you learned from this support experience to your instruction practices with ELs. SQ3
16. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with EL students that we haven't discussed? SQ2/SQ3

(Thank you for your cooperation and participation in this interview. Assure them of the confidentiality of the responses and the potential for future interviews.)

Appendix F

Teacher Self-Efficacy (TSE) Survey and Reflective Prompt

Please reference the following and respond to the reflective prompt with a minimum of 150 words.

1. As I reflect on the results of my TSE Survey, I feel that teaching ELs contributes to my teaching success or my challenges. Please explain your answer in at least 150 words as it relates to each of the three categories of efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional strategies, and efficacy in classroom management. (SQ1, SQ2, SQ3)

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions:

1. What do you do when you struggle with feeling ill-equipped?
2. Can you share a strategy you have used for overcoming those feelings?
3. Based on your individual interviews, several of you discussed the importance of the support you received from your school's EL teacher. How did their support strengthen your belief in your ability to successfully instruct ELs in your classroom?

Appendix H

Audit Trail Journal

The following is an account documenting my data collection process and analysis:

12/19/2023 – Received LU IRB approval as well as site approval just before winter break.

1/8/2024 – Sent recruitment letters to site IRB chair and gatekeeper.

1/17/2024 – No participants at the site, so the gatekeeper sent a follow–up request for participants.

2/12/2024 – After speaking with my LU Chair, I changed the parameters of my study which I submitted and then submitted those proposed changes to LU IRB for approval. Additionally, I informed my site's IRB chair that I was broadening my scope.

2/13/2024 – The site IRB chair thanked me for updating him on my progress. I advised him that I would share my finished research results with him.

2/15/2024 am – Received permission from LU IRB to proceed with research per my requested changes.

2/15/2024 pm – Reached out to my contacts to acquire study participants. Identified 3 potential participants at different schools who reached out to some of their colleagues who were deemed eligible.

2/19/2024 – Got 3 consent waivers signed today and received my first survey results. Hand tallied the scales according to Tschannen-Morin's directions and forwarded individual results to each participant along with the key and the prompt for each participant to reflectively respond in no less than 150 words.

2/26/2024 – Potential candidate interest diminished, so I ceased sampling with 14 potential participants. Three candidates dropped from study; one was dropped due to not meeting secondary level criteria; one dropped due to a health reason; and one dropped due to a professional commitment. This left me with 11 participants. Conducted first interview and have received more survey results.

2/28/2024 – Conducted another interview.

3/1/2024 – Conducted another interview.

3/11/2024 – All interviews conducted and transcribed. During the transcription process, I realized I needed to fine-tune the focus group questions to probe further into SETs' feelings of self-efficacy regarding ELs. Some teachers felt the presence of ELs in the classroom was more of a challenge than others. I had a couple participants that said teaching ELs made them feel more

successful as teachers. It was pointed out that many ELs are not truly EC, so they tend to flourish quickly once they understand English.

3/20/2024 to 3/22/2024 – Held multiple focus groups. Primarily, this was necessary due to teacher schedules, but I think the small sessions gave teachers more of an opportunity to voice their thoughts; whereas a large focus group tends to intimidate some teachers or allow them to feel less of a need to speak. It was during these focus group sessions that I utilized member checking to confirm that I had represented their input with fidelity.

3/25/2024 – Finished transcribing Focus Group sessions and began going through the listening process of both interviews and then focus groups.

3/26/2024 – Read through all the reflection prompts as a group. The transcription and read-throughs were easy. Then, I found myself getting anxious over what do I do next. What is the right way to do this? Just like anything else with qualitative research, it depends. I decided to go to Saldaña. He is an expert at coding, so I consulted *Using the Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Saldaña, 2013).

4/1/2024 – Settled on Theming the Data for my first pass through for coding all data. First pass through all interviews listing each of the questions and listing a summary of the responses from each participant (which I color-coded by the participant). Immediately, I was able to look at the question/response and know the background and perspective of the participant. Adding notes to the transcript pages was a rather eclectic process as I marked anything that stood out to me. After several pass-throughs of assigning codes to the bits of data from the participating SET, the repetition of codes to the texts were corroborated. Themes emerged from these labeled pieces of information. The first theme of Teacher Challenges emerged with subthemes of language barrier and cultural differences, student placement, lack of appropriate resources, lack of stakeholder support, and inadequate preparation. The second theme of Teacher Efficacy for Student Instruction was revealed with subthemes of assessment of student needs, strategies for student success, teacher support, and teacher training to instruct ELs.

Example of color coding of participant responses:

2. Can you tell me about your educational background and what led you to your current position?

CRQ

2-YEAR MARKETING FOLLOWED BY PERSPECTIVE TEACHER SCHOLARSHIP AND EC TEACHING DEGREE BECAUSE SHE COULD RELATE TO EC STUDENTS DUE TO HER EXPERIENCES OF BEING UNABLE TO DO HER MATH HOMEWORK AND NOBODY THERE TO HELP HER. SELF-CONTAINED

BS IN HEALTH EDUCATION AND BS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION K-12 INCLUSION MATH

Excerpts of code evolution:

Student knowing social cues, understanding English for academic tasks, parent communication > Language Barrier and Cultural Differences > Teacher Challenges Theme
Recount of previous training workshops, webinars > Teacher Training to Instruct ELs > Teacher Efficacy for Student Instruction Theme

4/6/2024 – As a former SET and English learner teacher, I felt a strong sense of obligation to reflect on my personal participation during one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and even the analysis of the data I collected. Based on my reflection, I determined that the data which was collected from multiple participants in different settings and various school districts was tenable based on its own merit; therefore, any personal biases I may have inadvertently contributed were of no consequence.