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## The Pedagogical Impact of Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of English Language Learners: A Phenomenological Study

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Rachael L. Hoffert

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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The Pedagogical Impact of Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of English Language Learners:  
A Phenomenological Study

Rachael Lynn Hoffert  
Concordia University–Portland  
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in  
Teacher Leadership

Christopher Maddox, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee  
Judy Shoemaker, Ed.D., Content Specialist  
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Concordia University–Portland

2017

## **Abstract**

The population of English language learners (ELLs) continues to increase within public schools across the United States; this includes a shift from traditional urban settings to extensive growth within suburban and rural school districts in the Midwest. Although there is research regarding how ELLs are perceived in the school structure, it is not known how middle school teachers' perceptions of ELLs within a Midwestern rural and suburban middle school setting influence the pedagogical practices utilized within the general education classroom. This hermeneutic phenomenological study examined how teachers within a Midwestern middle school serving perceived ELLs and how those perceptions influenced pedagogical practices utilized within the school environment. Vygotsky's role of language and social interaction, V.P. Collier's interrelating language acquisition for school theory, and Krashen's theory of second language acquisition guided this study. The research questions addressed by this study stemmed from the conceptual framework and explored how teachers perceived ELLs academically, linguistically, and emotionally, and the pedagogical practices utilized for students acquiring a second language. Crucial findings included participants perceived the timeframes for acquiring academic language longer than conversational acquisition and effective pedagogical practices to address academic needs of ELLs were described. Perceptions varied regarding differentiation of tasks aligned to language acquisition levels and how the emotional needs of ELLs impact the learning process. Implications for transformation of society included the importance of meeting the emotional needs of ELLs and how the promotion of empathy within all classrooms could encourage an environment of acceptance.

*Keywords:* English language learners (ELLs), middle school, Midwest, perceptions, instructional strategies

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to the current and future ELL students. I admire their courage and resilience. The following research is intended to foster an empathetic educational environment with the goal of inspiring and enriching their dreams.

## **Acknowledgments**

The dissertation experience has been a continuous journey and would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of my dissertation chair, Dr. Christopher Maddox. I will be forever grateful for your constant communication, direction, and nudging to pursue the dream of earning this degree while growing my educational knowledge. Your servant-leadership attitude will always be remembered. Thank you to Dr. Shoemaker and Dr. Calabro for serving as committee members. Your feedback, patience, and kindness provided the support needed to cross the finish line of this journey.

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Finally, the dream of becoming Dr. Rachael Hoffert could have never happened without the support of my husband. Dr. David Hoffert, you are an absolute blessing from the Lord. When I wanted to quit, you encouraged me to persevere. You reminded me to take one step at a time and always provided unconditional love. I am so proud of our forever family and will always remember the special journeys we encountered to welcome our sons into our family. To our sons Ryun, Robinson, and Roosevelt, thank-you for the constant reminder of what really matters in life. . .you have taught me so much! Finally, thank-you to my Heavenly Father for your faithfulness, compassionate, and enduring love.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The population of English language learners (ELLs) continues to increase within public schools across the United States. Teachers are responsible for facilitating learning experiences to meet the needs of students acquiring a second language. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to examine how Midwest middle school teachers serving rural and suburban areas perceived ELLs and how these perceptions impacted pedagogical decisions within the general education classroom. Chapter 1 begins by introducing the background of ELLs, presenting the problem statement and purpose of the study, and providing a conceptual framework outlining interconnecting elements related to the academic success of students acquiring a second language. Research questions, relevant definitions, nature of the study, limitations, and the significance of the study are also included in this chapter. A rationale for the relevance of this study regarding teacher perceptions of ELLs and how teacher perceptions impact the pedagogical practices within the classroom is provided in this chapter.

### **Background of the Study**

Public schools are more diverse and the population of ELLs continues to increase across the United States; according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015), the percentage of ELLs in public schools throughout the United States during the 2012-2013 school year was 9.2% compared to 8.7% in 2002-2003 and 9.1% during 2011-2012. The overall population of immigrants and ELL students has continued to grow in all geographic regions of the United States. This includes a shift from traditional urban settings to population growth within suburban and rural school districts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). “Many rural and suburban communities—long dominated by white families—have also diversified racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically, often as a result of immigration from Mexico and Central

America” (Maxwell, 2014, para 11). The shift in racial and ethnic diversity has been represented by schools serving rural and suburban populations throughout the Midwest (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Indiana has experienced a 20% increase of ELLs within public schools in comparison to five years ago. The counties in Indiana experiencing the greatest increase in ELL population are no longer limited to urban areas and have shifted to include rural and suburban counties (Indiana Youth Institute, 2016).

A middle school that served students from rural and suburban areas within the Midwest was selected as the study site. The community and school district was traditionally known as a Caucasian rural community with little diversity. Shifts in demographics have transformed the racial make-up of the schools and surrounding community. As urban sprawl continued to develop, the community became known as both a rural and a suburban community. According to the contextual factors provided by the school district and the state’s Department of Education, the study site middle school experienced over a 33% increase in identified ELLs over the past decade, surpassing the national average of 9.2% ELL population and culminating into over one-fourth of the total school population. Minority population in the school trends from between one-third to one-half of the student population. The school was recognized by the IDOE as a targeted school receiving additional grants and opportunities focused on reaching a diverse population and raising student achievement.

As schools have become more racially and ethnically diverse, Tellez and Manthey (2015) described how the achievement gap between native speakers and ELLs continues to grow and noted more than half of middle school ELLs were considered non-proficient on national math and reading examinations in comparison to White students. Results from 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment indicated ELLs scored 39

points lower than native speakers during the fourth grade and the deficit increased to 45 points in eighth grade (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2015). Mathematics scores on the NAEP demonstrated a larger achievement gap between ELLS and native speakers; ELLs scored 25 points less than native speakers during fourth grade and the gap increased to 41 points in eighth grade (USDOE, 2015). Braden, Wassell, Scantlebury, and Grover (2015) argued the gaps represented in standardized test scores should be attributed to the lack of training secondary content teachers receive regarding how to differentiate instruction for students acquiring a second language.

Mainstream classes are developed for and contain native English speakers. Mainstream classes that contain ELL students have a teacher who is trained in general education and who may or may not be trained in language teaching methods, or a particular approach to content and language integrated instruction. (Braden et al., 2015, p. 439)

In addition to navigating changes impacted by adolescence, ELLs are adjusting to the high stakes learning environment of the general education classroom while developing language acquisition skills (Friend, Most, & McCrary, 2009; Harper & de Jong, 2009). Cullington (2014) argued another reason ELLs struggle to meet proficiency levels on standardized tests could be a result of how the test is only available in English limiting the ability to measure the knowledge of students with language barriers.

The inclusion of ELLs into general education classes has impacted pedagogical strategies implemented within the middle school content classroom. Middle school general education teachers are challenged to utilize best practices to meet the learning needs of non-native speakers (Vazquez-Montilla, Just, & Triscari, 2014). Berg, Petrón, and Greybeck (2012) explained most general education teachers do not feel adequately prepared to support ELLs within an inclusive

classroom setting. According to the Education Commission of the States (ECS, 2014) more than 30 states do not mandate additional ELL licensure or preparation for general education teachers. However, some teacher preparation programs are encouraged to embed best practices for ELLs into general teaching and learning coursework. The ECS (2014) cited one state in the Midwest that mandated ELL strategies be embedded into teacher preparation coursework. However, no additional licensures or increase in coursework hours or clinical field work focusing on ELLs were required. States that contained higher ELL populations required additional coursework hours and licensure requirements.

Teacher perceptions guide instructional practices. Zhu and Urhahne's (2014) study of 480 sixth-grade Chinese students who were learning English and 16 teachers indicated teachers can precisely judge the way language learning students perceive themselves regarding academic self-concept. Researchers have acknowledged how crucial teacher perceptions are for guiding pedagogical practice instruction, overcoming challenges, and motivating students to learn. The literature provided a quantitative understanding of how secondary general education teachers from urban settings or larger cities outside of the Midwest perceive students acquiring a second language (Anhalt & Rodríguez Pérez, 2013; Friend et al., 2009; Gerena, & Keiler, 2011; Reeves, 2006; Rodriguez, Manner, & Darcy 2010; Vazquez-Montilla et al., 2014; Windle, & Miller, 2012). However, the correlation to how these judgments guide the pedagogical practices of middle school educators are scarce and mostly unsubstantiated. Rural and suburban schools within the Midwest are beginning to educate more ELLs and the perceptions of teachers are crucial to study.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The phenomenon of providing equal and developmentally appropriate education to ELLs has been a recent focus of educational initiatives due to immigration and national legislation regarding accountability. Although Midwestern rural and suburban school districts have experienced a significant increase in identified ELLs within the past decade, this study provides insight regarding perceptions of middle school teachers concerning how ELLs are perceived within the school environment. The problem was, it is not known how middle school teachers' perceptions of ELLs within a Midwestern rural and suburban school setting influence the pedagogical practices utilized within the general education classroom.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Teachers plan and deliver instruction to meet the diverse needs of students within the inclusive classroom setting, including students acquiring a second language. Teacher perceptions of students and their needs influence the teaching and learning cycle. Studying middle school teachers' perceptions of ELLs adds to the literature and provide directions on how teacher perceptions influence pedagogical practices within a Midwestern middle school serving rural and suburban areas. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study explored how middle school teachers perceive ELLs academically, linguistically, and emotionally within the middle school setting.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study were:

1. How do middle school teachers perceive the second language acquisition process?
2. How do middle school teachers perceive the emotional development of ELL students?



3. What pedagogical skills do middle school teachers currently implement while teaching ELL students?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The language acquisition process, emotional factors, and academic environments were elements I identified in the literature as interconnecting factors related to the success of ELLs within the general education classroom. Teacher perceptions concerning these interconnecting factors can impact the pedagogical practices within the general education classroom (V. P. Collier, 1995; Krashen, 2013). Vygotsky's (1978) role of language and social interaction, V. P. Collier's interrelating language acquisition for school theory, and Krashen's theory of second language acquisition addressed the interconnecting factors and guided this study regarding teacher perceptions of students acquiring a second language and the impact on pedagogical practices. Vygotsky stressed social interaction guides language development and enhances the learning process. Vygotsky defined the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as what could be done independently compared to the greater progress a student could make through the aid of social interactions and guidance from a facilitator with greater knowledge. Scaffolding instruction and meeting learners within their ZPD in the general education classroom allows ELLs to participate in interactive environments while building higher-order thinking skills and developing language acquisition skills.

According to Krashen's (2013) theory of second language acquisition, the second language learning process mirrors the native acquisition process and learning should take place in a natural environment focused on realia, movement, and authentic projects. Krashen emphasized comprehensible input as an essential element of second language acquisition and concurred with Vygotsky (1978) regarding the importance of language-rich environments with a

focus on nurturing inquiry with the goal of comprehensible output production. Krashen explained affective elements such as lack of acceptance, or perceptions of discrimination hamper learning by stalling comprehensible input within the learning environment. Multicultural teaching focused on embracing cultures with integration of students' upbringings are essential to the development of ELLs and acceptance by native speakers.

Emotional and cultural factors were described by Krashen (2013) and (1995) as impacting the timeframe and cohesiveness of second language acquisition. Middle and high school ELLs are considered highly vulnerable of succeeding academically due to perceptual elements such as limited background knowledge and social interactions in comparison with native peers. V. P. Collier described the language acquisition as a challenging process requiring a person to speak, read, and write using English across social and professional settings. Attaining literacy and academic language develops within a seven to 10 year timeframe with instruction utilizing best practices. V. P. Collier concurred with Krashen (2013) and explained formal grammar instruction should proceed authentic learning opportunities promoting language acquisition. V. P. Collier, Krashen, and Vygotsky stressed the development of language acquisition within interactive academic environments facilitating comprehensible input and output through natural and concrete experiences. Interactive learning environments should facilitate learning opportunities for ELL students integrating content and language simultaneously with the goal of impacting the second language acquisition process.

### **Nature of the Study**

The quantitative studies presented in the literature review utilized surveys and incorporated at least one of the elements outlined in the conceptual framework regarding the language acquisition process, emotional factors, and academic strategies needed to contribute to

the success of ELLs in the inclusive classroom (Anhalt & Rodríguez Pérez, 2013; Friend et al., 2009; Gerena, & Keiler, 2011; Reeves, 2006; Rodriguez et al., 2010; Vazquez-Montilla et al., 2014; Windle, & Miller, 2012). However, reasons leading to specific perceptions and descriptions of the lived experiences among teachers regarding ELLs were not conveyed due to the nature of the surveys. Perceptions concerning the interconnecting elements of the conceptual framework were not represented through a qualitative research approach or correlated to middle school pedagogical decisions. According to Rodriguez et al. (2010), examining teacher attitudes toward ELLs assist with understanding curricular decisions and interventions offered to students acquiring English within the school environment. Teacher perceptions are essential for facilitating the learning process for ELLs and their perceptions must be explored and understood to enhance learning.

Multiple qualitative methods were considered for this study. A grounded theory study would have required interviewing participants and producing a theory (Creswell, 2013). A case study design was also explored as a potential research method. According to Creswell, case studies are effective when researching events or programs. In contrast, a hermeneutic, phenomenological methodology was selected for this study in order to understand and unfold the accounts of educators experiencing an increased amount ELLs into the general education classroom. Hermeneutic, phenomenological methodology evolved from the philosophical research of Edmund Husserl and pursues description and meaning regarding humans' involvement within the world (Reiners, 2012).

### **Summarization of the Methodology**

This hermeneutic, phenomenological study used semi-structured questions to understand how the perceptions of middle school teachers within a Midwestern school setting serving rural

and suburban areas influenced the pedagogical practices utilized within the general education classroom. The teachers purposefully selected to participate in this study also discussed perceived professional development needs regarding how to successfully facilitate the learning process for students acquiring a second language. Merriam (2015) explained semi-structured interviews are commonly used in qualitative studies to allow participants the opportunity to describe experiences and thoughts in open and creative ways. A hermeneutic, phenomenological study allows participants to share perceptions in response to the research questions through experiences and interpretations of the experienced phenomenon of the increase of ELLs within middle school classrooms.

Transcriptions from the interviews were read several times and member checking was utilized for validity purposes. Open coding was utilized to write annotated notes in the margins identifying data with the potential of being beneficial or interesting to phenomenon of the study (Merriam, 2015). Following the open coding process, I utilized axial coding and selective coding to synthesize essential themes and relationships. The essence of the phenomenon regarding the increase of ELLs into general education classes was organized into a narrative account with corresponding data that highlighted the perceptions of middle school teachers.

The findings of this study allows rural and suburban school leadership teams in the Midwest the ability to understand commonly held perceptions regarding ELLs within the middle school environment. The opportunity to overcome gaps in understandings will foster conversation and implementation of steps to create successful, inclusive environments for students acquiring the English language. In addition, the study could guide professional development decisions regarding topics, audiences, and how district professional development

could be spent to influence the implementation of best practices focused on improving learning for diverse learners.

### **Definition of Terms**

An applicable list of terms and definitions is provided below to assist with understanding the educational terms integrated throughout this study:

*Differentiated instruction:* Instruction and strategies tailored to meet the individual academic needs of students with the goal of increasing successful learning opportunities (August, McCardle, Shanahan, & Burns, 2014).

*Direct instruction:* Explicitly teaching content by explaining and demonstrating the academic concept providing multiple examples (Snow, 2014).

*ELLs:* Students who are learning to communicate proficiently in English and usually come from non-native speaking homes (Khong & Saito, 2014).

*ESLs:* Students who are learning English as a second language (Tran, 2015).

*Inclusion:* Classroom environments that include a variety of learners with diverse learning needs including students acquiring a second language (Coady, Harper, & De Jong, 2015).

*General education classroom:* A classroom setting focused on teaching core curriculum with an educator having general pedagogical and content preparation that may not include specific training regarding ELLs (Bunch, 2013).

*Middle School:* For the purpose of this study, middle school will include students in Grades 7–8.

*Perceptions:* Teacher attitudes and understandings towards ELLs within the general education classroom (Rodriguez et al. 2010).

*Scaffolding:* Teachers recognize the differing needs of students and provide appropriate support to aide students with comprehending the course material (Rubinstein-Ávila, 2013).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions of judgmental nature could lead to bias of themes and concepts. In order to limit bias toward themes or concepts, semi-structured questions were carefully crafted to include open-ended questions that allowed for depth in responses from participants. Themes from the individual interviews were analyzed through a specific, qualitative coding process (Merriam, 2015). Prior to the coding process, member checking was employed to safeguard validity of the transcripts. I then read the transcripts multiple times looking for consistent themes of understanding assuming interpretations were accurate according to the coded data and significant statements made by participants.

Contrary to assumptions of themes throughout the interview, the assumption of the school ELL population and staff member interaction with ELLs was a result from the data. This assumption was vetted closely through the consent process. Only after these assumptions were verified and proper consent given, was participant allowed to participate in the study. Confidentiality is a crucial element pertaining to the study. Participants were able to examine the transcriptions and decide not to participate in the study at any time during the process.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The study did not include specials teachers (art, music, agriculture) or school administrators and only focused on 10 general education core content teachers and one ELL teacher. The leadership structure of the school was not considered. In addition, the study did not include urban schools or schools from multiple geographic locations. A school that drew from rural and suburban areas with a growth in ELL population was chosen for this study.

## **Limitations**

The phenomenological research approach provided a depth of understanding and essence to the research questions regarding perceptions concerning ELLs and the impact on pedagogical practices. Although the methodology utilized in-depth analysis and coding of themes, specific limitations existed within the study and with the findings. The research study site was at a middle school drawing from rural and suburban areas with an increased ELL population over the past decade. The participant pool was limited to the individual study site school. The voices, understandings, themes, and essence regarding the phenomenon was from the faculty members at the singular school. This study did not include a wide variety or classification of schools.

The chosen school for this research study was a seventh and eighth grade middle school. The demographics only provided perspectives relative to middle school ELL students within these grades. This limitation excluded elementary and high school understandings. Equality of gender, educational experience, and race was a focus concerning selection of participants. This study was limited by the certified faculty at the study site. Another limitation included my personal background and viewpoints of ELL learning. I am a mother of an elementary ELL and an advocate for best practice instruction. However, I did not share my personal or professional opinions with interviewees to limit bias. I had a family member employed within the school system in which the school was located, and I kept all names confidential and did not share findings with the family member or any other person until completion of the study. My understanding of middle school curriculum and the challenges content teachers face are limited, thus inviting an understanding of how an increased ELL population of differing language acquisition levels has influenced the perceptions of middle school teachers within the classroom environment.

## **Significance of the Study**

The phenomenon of providing equal public education to ELLs has been a national focus due to the dramatic increase of ELLs within the general education classroom and national legislation which requires accountability for diverse learners (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Bunch (2013) explained educating ELLs should be a collective responsibility among secondary content teachers and described the rigor of the new standards requiring higher levels of reasoning and English communication across the curriculum. Teachers continue to grapple with how to support ELLs ensuring grade-level standards are achieved. However, Bunch acknowledged the lack of preparation and professional development general education teachers have received regarding the implementation of pedagogical practices to meet the needs of students acquiring a second language. Darling-Hammond (2010) explained the challenge of meeting the needs of ELLs is no longer limited to urban school settings. Rural and suburban schools are beginning to educate more students acquiring a second language. Bunch asserted the population of ELLs is not only contained to states with large populations, but is now prevalent throughout smaller, Midwest states and the perceptions of teachers are crucial to study.

Middle school serves as a transition for adolescents and can be particularly challenging for students learning a new language while grasping to learn content (Friend et al., 2009; Olvera, 2015). There were a limited amount of studies pertaining directly to middle school teachers' perceptions of ELLs in suburban and rural schools with increasing ELL populations in the Midwest and how these perceptions impact pedagogical practices within the general education classroom. After reviewing the literature, I recognized the need for a qualitative study gauging middle school teacher perceptions regarding the language acquisition process, emotional factors, and academic environments needed for the success of ELLs within the general education



classroom. Perceptions regarding the interrelating elements of the conceptual framework will provide insight into the background and reasoning process regarding how ELLs are perceived and how those perceptions impact the pedagogical strategies employed in the classroom.

## **Summary**

The phenomenon of an increased ELL population within the general education classroom, has contributed to the growing achievement gap between ELLs and native speakers. Lack of preparation and professional development for teachers regarding ELLs are factors influencing the academic experiences of students acquiring a second language (Bunch, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010). In this chapter, I outlined the background of ELLs and explained the need for a phenomenological research study within a rural and suburban middle school in the Midwest gauging the perceptions of teachers regarding an increased population of ELLs in their general education classroom and the pedagogical impact in the general education classroom. The findings of this study may enable rural and suburban school administrative teams in the Midwest to understand the perceptions of teachers and allow a foundation for gaps in understandings to be addressed through professional development efforts. In the following chapter, the interconnecting conceptual framework is discussed in depth with a brief historical background outlining ELL inclusion within public schools. In addition, I synthesize studies regarding teacher perceptions of ELLs and effective pedagogical strategies.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The inclusion of ELLs into general content courses has impacted general education teachers and their approach to instruction. In addition, the inclusion of ELLs has impacted teacher practices and perceptions of students acquiring a second language. Teacher perceptions are crucial for guiding instruction, overcoming challenges, and motivating students to learn (Tran, 2015). Literature pertaining to how teacher perceptions impact the instructional environment of the classroom will be explored in this chapter. The literature review begins with a description of the literature search strategies utilized pertaining to the study. A conceptual framework describes how emotional factors, the language acquisition process, and academic environments promoting interaction are interrelated elements contributing to the success of students acquiring a second language.

Following the interrelated conceptual framework, the literature review offers a brief historical background regarding the inclusion of ELLs in school systems across the United States. Teacher perceptions of ELLs are explained from current, refereed literature regarding emotional factors, the language acquisition process, and academic environments after examining the historical background. Next, perceptions of ELLs regarding emotional factors, the language acquisition process, and preferred academic environments are examined and compared to the perceptions of general education teachers. Finally, effective middle school strategies for providing a supportive learning environment and increasing comprehensibility of content for ELLs are described. Although the authors addressed effective strategies and classroom environments needed to facilitate the learning process for ELLs, some of the strategies and environments described in the literature did not align with the teacher perceptions described throughout the research studies on teacher perceptions.

In Chapter 2, the perceptions of general education teachers regarding the inclusion of ELLs throughout content classrooms while acknowledging varying degrees of educator knowledge regarding the interrelating elements of emotional factors, language acquisition, and best practice strategies to enhance ELL learning are explored. Studies regarding the perceptions of secondary educators and adolescent ELLs concerning best practice strategies are presented. However, within the literature, there was a lack of studies solely focused on middle school teachers' perceptions and understandings regarding how ELLs are perceived in the classroom and how those perceptions impact pedagogical decisions.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I performed an initial keyword word search with the terms *middle school teacher perceptions* AND *ELLs* utilizing the Concordia University, Grace College, and Indiana State University libraries. Parameters for the literature search included peer-reviewed journals, primary studies, and documents. Databases utilized throughout the literature search were ERIC, EBSCO, Google Scholar, ProQuest, SAGE, and Education Research Complete. Although a few primary studies were obtained during the initial search, the sources were limited using the phrase *middle school teacher* as a search parameter.

The search was expanded to include *ELLs*, *ESOLs*, and *ESLs* with the terms *teacher perceptions*, *secondary perceptions*, *high school perceptions*, *teacher misconceptions*, *teacher perspectives*, *language acquisition*, and *content strategies*. This technique yielded multiple articles pertaining to the topics outlined in the literature review. The subject and index terms for each article in the expanded search were examined and additional keyword searches were performed regarding the perceptions of adolescent ELLs concerning inclusion into the middle school environment. There were more research studies pertaining to the perceptions of

adolescent ELLs within the school environment than middle school teachers.

The search continued to expand and as relevant topics were identified, additional articles were secured through interlibrary loans. Reference lists from textbooks were also used to find additional sources pertaining to the conceptual framework and best practice strategies for ELLs. V. P. Collier, Cummins, Krashen, and Reeves were authors who were consistently cited throughout articles, and searches were expanded using their names and key concepts. Research began with a comprehensive conceptual framework that addressed interconnecting factors influencing the academic success of students acquiring a second language.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Emotional factors, the language acquisition process, and academic environments, were recognized in the literature as intersecting factors that influence the success of ELLs in the inclusive classroom. The overall growth of ELLs is dependent on the three factors working together simultaneously throughout the school environment, and teacher perceptions of these factors can influence pedagogical decisions and learning (V. P. Collier, 1995; Krashen, 2013). Vygotsky's (1978) role of language and social interaction, V. P. Collier's (1995) interrelating language acquisition for school theory, and Krashen's theory of second language acquisition address the importance of supportive classroom environments designed to facilitate the language acquisition process and nurture the emotional development of ELLs will guide this study.

**Vygotsky: Role of language and social interaction.** Vygotsky (1978) described how social and collaborative atmospheres impact cognitive development and advance language acquisition. Learning is accelerated in an atmosphere promoting interactive learning and social communication between members of the classroom community. Vygotsky was a proponent of interactive learning and stressed the importance of dialogue, teamwork, and authentic learning

experiences. Through interactive learning experiences, a teacher can facilitate co-construction of meaning and foster oral language within the learning environment.

Vygotsky (1978) stressed the importance of learning that takes place within the ZPD and defined the ZPD as what could be accomplished individually compared to the greater improvement a student could make through the aid of social exchanges and direction from a facilitator with more expertise in the area. As teachers plan and deliver lessons, the ability threshold of students should be identified and a scaffolded approach to instruction should be integrated while increasing social interaction throughout the lesson design. Utilizing Vygotsky's scaffolded and ZPD approach in the general education classroom allows ELLs to participate in interactive environments while building higher-order thinking skills. An interactive environment coupled with meaningful interaction were crucial elements identified by Vygotsky to ensure learning and language development.

**Krashen: Theory of second language acquisition.** Krashen (2013) concurred with Vygotsky and stressed how language is developed through authentic classroom experiences. Krashen's theory of second language acquisition emphasized how the second language learning process reflects the native acquisition process and a natural setting focused on realia, movement, and authentic projects should be implemented to promote learning. Authentic experiences promote engagement and provide effective surroundings for second language acquisition due to multiple opportunities for natural discussion and communication. In addition, Krashen identified comprehensible input as a necessary component of second language acquisition and asserted environments nurturing inquiry and facilitating thought will foster comprehensible input and output. Although learners are engaged in authentic tasks within interactive environments, the opportunity to converse allows ELLs to practice the target language and overcome challenges by

developing actions steps needed to achieve language proficiency. Krashen's theory emphasized interactive learning experiences to facilitate language acquisition instead of an approach focused on teaching specific grammar rules and pronunciations.

Krashen's (2013) second language acquisition theory also emphasized how emotional and cultural factors impact the timeframe and cohesiveness of the second language acquisition process. Affective factors, such as lack of acceptance, unease, or thoughts of discrimination, impede second language learning by blocking comprehensible input efforts within the classroom. The affective filter can be removed or significantly reduced in positive classroom atmospheres encouraging students to converse and take risks as a community of learners.

**V. P. Collier: Language proficiency.** V. P. Collier (1995) explained English proficiency as a demanding progression that necessitates an ELL to orally communicate, read, and write using English across many different settings and outlined the timeframe for language acquisition. Language learning is a process and social, conversational language develops within a two- to three-year timeframe. During this timeframe, ELLs can communicate with peers and hold basic conversations causing some educators to conclude ELLs should be able to perform academic tasks. In contrast, the ability to use academic vocabulary and higher order thinking skills in a decontextualized environment develops within seven to 10 years and is influenced by the learners' first language ability. According to V. P. Collier (1995),

In the early stages of second language acquisition, English learners rely on their experiences in their first language as a reference point, a source of knowledge.

Subconsciously and sometimes consciously an ESL student will apply structures and patterns from first language to the new language. Through a process of creative construction that involves both listening to and reading English and reflecting on patterns

in first language, the English learner gradually catches on to the different patterns of the new language. (p. 13)

V. P. Collier (1995) stressed the importance of ELLs being part of inclusive classroom environments and explained how comprehensible input can be fostered through concrete and authentic learning experiences. Although V. P. Collier noted comprehensible output as a valuable component of the language acquisition process, V. P. Collier also acknowledged the important role comprehensible output has on the development of students who acquire a second language. Inclusive classroom environments should consist of multiple opportunities for ELLs to make connections between content or processes acquired in their native language while learning to describe previous knowledge utilizing the target language. V. P. Collier agreed with Krashen (2013) and asserted learning regarding official grammar rules should take place after natural learning experiences facilitating language acquisition.

**Theorists' interconnecting elements.** The conceptual framework outlined emotional factors, the language acquisition process, and academic environments that promote interaction as interconnecting factors influencing the pedagogical success of ELLs in the general education classroom. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the role of social interaction throughout the learning process and stressed the importance of meeting learners within the ZPD while scaffolding co-construction of meaning. V. P. Collier (1995) described the importance of encouraging ELLs to participate in discussions with peers allowing content and language to serve as meaningful experiences coinciding with Vygotsky's emphasis on the role of social interaction throughout the learning process.

V. P. Collier (1995) and Krashen (2013) concurred with Vygotsky (1978) and advocated for the language acquisition to take place within collaborative classroom settings. Inclusive and

interactive classrooms foster comprehensible input and output through authentic and concrete learning opportunities. Interactive learning atmospheres should incorporate content and language instantaneously with the objective of fostering academic language proficiency. In addition, V. P. Collier and Krashen agreed formal grammar instruction should only be a priority after language acquisition progress has been demonstrated within social and academic settings.

A variety of emotional factors impact ELLs during the learning process. V. P. Collier outlined how socioeconomic status and ethnicity differences are challenges causing anxiety among ELLs shifting the focus away from academic learning. Krashen concurred and explained if a second language learner appears overwhelmed or displays feelings of rejection, comprehensible input will be hindered and language acquisition will halt. V. P. Collier explained how perceptual elements, middle school and high school students are most at jeopardy of succeeding educationally due to limited experiences and social interactions needed between English as a Second Language (ESLs) and native peers. The literature review begins with the historical background leading to the current state of ELL inclusion in public schools.

## **Review of Literature**

Darling-Hammond (2010), Ravitch (2010), and Singleton and Linton (2006) described the challenges facing public schools in the areas of gender equality, race, immigrant students, and ELLs are not new challenges. The challenges are throughout our nation's history of schools as a public institution requiring the traits of passion, practice, and persistence. Civil Rights leader DuBois (1970) stated,

Of all civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental. We must insist upon this to give our children the fairness of a start which will equip them with such an array of facts and such



an attitude toward truth that they can have a real chance to judge what the work is and what its greatest minds have thought it might be. (pp. 230–231)

### **American Education Foundations**

Lapsansky-Werner, Roberts, Levy, and Taylor (2013) explained how the United States was conceived with the principles that all men are created equal and an educational system intended for the masses instead of the traditional aristocracy classes was established. Washington (1901) asserted that although the established educational system was revolutionary, large inconsistencies and inequalities existed. Education was considered a governmental organization funded, controlled, and administered at the state and local levels. Education organization was determined and schools were geographically plotted through state land grants. The funding for support of the local schools came through local city and county governments taxes. This localized control provided standards relevant in the immediate geographic area and industries. Differing sides of the state or region could exhibit unique educational expectations. According to Madison (2014), local funding contributed to a system of separation or weak educational opportunities for many students. The United States was inflicted with the ills of slavery and anti-immigration prior to the Civil War. During this time, the divide between the educated and uneducated continued to grow wider.

### **Early Concepts of Equality**

In the first half of the 19th century, a geographically growing nation needed a workforce. Western expansion brought Asian families to fill the labor need and the Industrial Revolution provided a link of immigrant Europeans fleeing political turmoil and persecution. The Mexican-American War expanded boundaries into former Mexican territory, the women's suffrage movement was in its infancy, and the education of women was not considered a large priority

past rudimentary (Lapsansky-Werner et al., 2013). These factors, coupled with the fear of educated slaves coordinating a rebellion, led to a distinct division between those educated. The ending of the institution of slavery through the Civil War and breakdown of regional geographic living opened the doors to education skills (Labaree, 2010).

The Civil War concluded in 1865 and thousands of formerly uneducated slaves experienced freedom for the first time in the United States. Dire needs for transitions in the education system were identified to accommodate the influx of the former slaves needing basic literacy skills and the Freedman Bureau was developed to educate former slaves. Although only reaching a small minority of the late 19th century ELLs population, the curriculum focused on these fundamental literacy skills along with work based trades needed in the reconstruction and advancement of American's Industrial Revolution (Washington, 1901).

### **Focus on the Trades in Education**

The emphasis on technical trades and basics skills led to ELL educational pioneers, such as George Washington Carver, William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois, and Booker T. Washington. These educators believed strongly in the need for technical skills transcending past the fundamental skills. Trades training was viewed as important, if not more important, in providing educational equality through services and skills required by an expanding America. This shift to focus on trades was controversially discussed by leaders of the Black and White races. The debate was fueled by differing philosophies. Questions arose regarding if former slaves should be satisfied with professions involving trades within a White world or if a separate Black culture should be created. Although the institution of slavery was over, education was at best separate and unequal (Madison, 2014). These debates and philosophies continued into the Industrial boom of the early 1900s. During the Great Depression, education became more of a

luxury for individuals and communities that could financially afford the privilege.

## **Civil Rights Era**

Separate but equal policies were in place throughout the United States to keep equality in education divided. Many of these official and de-facto policies were dropped or modified due to the need for labor during WWII. The post-war United States experienced a culture of retuning soldiers re-entering a workforce of greater diversity, yet unready for equality. Many case policies ensured immigrant, minority, or ELLs would not receive a proper education (Ravitch, 2010). Throughout the 20th century, urbanization continued to move forward and consolidation of the one-room schoolhouse began to take shape. The small rural schools consolidated into regional school districts, and students were no longer defined by geographic boundaries. A melting pot of culture enhanced understanding and curricular practices. The traditional school structure still known 75 years later became solidified (Ravitch, 2010). These included the basic schedule of core subjects, grading practices, grading assessments, and the start of standards that transcended the local and regional interests. Schools now provided opportunities including the arts, world languages, and expanded trades classes. These advancements created an even bigger disparity between the equality of races. Professional baseball was racially integrated by Jackie Robinson in 1947, but public education remained segregated. In 1954, the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* of Topeka opened the door to the start of curricular changes for ELLs (Labaree, 2010) through the inclusion of races in public education schools.

Labaree (2010) and Lapsansky-Werner et al. (2013) described the impacts *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) had on education by legally stating separate but equal schools were unconstitutional and racial integration was to take place throughout school systems. Segregation policies by law changed, yet the de facto mindset of separation continued forward. Civil Rights

legislation impacting schools throughout President Kennedy's and President Johnson's administrations pushed the integration of public schools and equality standards. These groundbreaking reforms took place while the focal points of the nation transformed from social issues to global concerns such as the Vietnam War and the ensuing Cold War.

### **Cold War Era Education**

The Cold War era was fueled by tension and fear of out-performance by Communist block countries (Ravitch, 2010). Standards slowly moved to more regional and national over the historically local expectations. Students with limited English or foundational skills were still left behind. In 1964, Title VI legislation prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color of skin, or national origin. This ground-breaking change built upon *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling to state desegregation goes farther than building structures and includes the treatment of individual people through the inclusion of students with disabilities. The barrier of language skills still existed and was identified through the implementation of the Bilingual Act of 1968, otherwise known as Title VII. Title VII recognized the disadvantage for non-English students. The new programming under Title VII included bilingual programming and funding for disadvantaged students (Khong & Saito, 2014).

*Lau v. Nichols* (1974) became a groundbreaking case for ELL students. The ruling stated identical education was not appropriate for non-English speaking students. Instead schools must attempt to overcome educational barriers that limit student learning and achievement. The courts also included metrics and enforcement for Title VI (Khong & Saito, 2014). In 1975, PL 94–192, later known as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004) was passed to provide assurances that all students with disabilities would be provided equality of education. Although this major educational act was not designed specifically for ELL students, it did provide a basis

for ELL student services. The pillars included individual education plans, guarantee of free appropriate public education, least restrictive environment, appropriate evaluation, procedural safeguards along with parent and teacher participation. These pillars became foundational for the next four decades of special needs and ELL laws and guidance (Heward, 2012).

Additional educational reform movements were developed as culture moved from basic industrial blue-collar jobs to technical white collar. During the Reagan presidency, a national and global study of education standards entitled *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) was published by the federal department of education. This study placed emphasis on the need for educational reform as a methodology of necessity as a world political power. This pamphlet was intended to push the American educational system into a global leader.

### **Modern Day Reforms**

These new viewpoints of global reforms of education transcended into the 1990s as individual states started reform movements and comparative data were gathered. Drastic achievement gaps were recognized with ELL and minority students (Ravitch, 2010). In 2001, bipartisan legislation was passed by President Bush's administration providing sweeping changes to public education. The legislation entitled No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) was intended to address long-standing inequalities and require accountability for additional funding provided to improve educational outcomes for low income and second language learners. The concepts of every students' right to a highly-qualified teacher, standards of education, and appropriate instruction was mandated (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This legislation came with accountability and financial implications attached from a federal governmental level. Emphasis on subgroups including ELLs shifted the need for revision of instructional practices. The

majority of these reforms began in urban settings due to the diverse nature of immigration, historical low performance and wide-ranging diversity (Ravitch, 2010).

Darling-Hammond (2010) and Ravitch (2010) explained that since the inception of NCLB, accountability has grown along with new research on highly effective strategies; movements in population have inspired reforms and a new view of ELL populations in non-urban areas. These rural and suburban schools have started transitions regarding teaching strategies and curriculum as ELL populations have grown. Studying teacher perceptions of ELLs throughout the school setting will provide an understanding of how ELLs are perceived emotionally, linguistically, and academically and will offer direction on how teacher perceptions influence strategies utilized in the instructional environment.

**Teacher perceptions concerning ELLs.** According to Rodriguez et al. (2010), examining teacher perceptions and attitudes toward second language learners are crucial for understanding the delivery of pedagogical practices and services provided within the school environment. In some cases, teachers have perceived ELLs with negative perspectives regarding deficiencies ELLs may bring into the inclusive classroom. Consequently, the population of ELLs continues to increase in schools throughout the United States and secondary ELLs are spending the majority of the school day in general education classes (Tran, 2015). Although middle school students are considered cognitively more mature than younger children in acquiring a new language, the transition through adolescence contributes to a higher affective filter and creates a dissonance toward learning (Wright, 2015). Teacher perceptions are important for the acceleration of learning for ELLs and their perceptions must be explored and understood to facilitate knowledge. The perceptions of general educators regarding the inclusion of ELLs into the general education environment centered on three main themes. The first theme identified

perceptions concerning the emotional development needed for ELLs to succeed in school. The second theme pertained to the perceptions of teachers regarding the language acquisition process and time needed to speak fluently with academic proficiency. The third theme that emerged from the literature pertained to teacher perceptions of effective strategies or modifications used in the classroom to enhance learning for students acquiring a second language.

**Perceptions of teachers concerning ELLs and emotional factors.** Yunus, Osman, and Ishak (2011) described how academic success is directly related to the initiative teachers use to understand student backgrounds and the ability to form relationships between students and educators. The mindset and attitudes of teachers are essential toward the motivation and acceptance of ESL students. According to Bunch (2013), the physical and social environment of the school should represent the diverse backgrounds of learners. Social, emotional, and cultural experiences were emotional elements recognized as crucial elements impacting the teaching and learning process.

The perceptions of K–8 math teachers were researched regarding the academic and sociocultural construct of Latino ELLs in the general education classroom (Anhalt & Rodríguez Pérez, 2013). The 68 teachers who participated in the study were from urban and rural school districts in Arizona, New Mexico, and California. The survey measured social issues, home environment, discrimination, and apprehensions regarding classroom instruction. Anhalt and Rodríguez Pérez (2013) explained how teachers perceived understanding instructional strategies for ELLs as highly important. However, teachers perceived an atmosphere consisting of intolerance and emotional health as less important. Similarly, Vazquez-Montilla et al. (2014) surveyed a large sample of Florida rural, urban, and suburban educators and found 75% perceived multiculturalism with a negative perspective due to an overemphasis on the topic within

the school environment.

Although some educators perceived embracing multiple cultures negatively, Olvera (2015) explained how other teachers perceived themselves as inclusive educators disregarding race as an issue. Due to a colorblind perception, teachers had a challenging time considering the emotional needs of acceptance and lack of support experienced by students acquiring a second language. New teachers participating in Anhalt and Rodríguez Pérez's (2013) quantitative study rated social and emotional concerns of ELLs as low on the survey and attributed the findings to a *limited first hand awareness* of challenges faced by students of color. Olvera contributed the limited awareness of challenges ELLs face due to the overrepresentation of White teachers within U.S. classrooms and lack of background knowledge regarding perceptions of emotional, social, and cultural challenges. Limited perceptions of emotional challenges ELLs face can impact the affective filter and the way ELLs view themselves as inferior to a dominant group in the school environment. Although students receive the same classroom instruction, the affective filter consisting of biased feelings causes ELLs to experience a mental block halting learning (Krashen, 2013).

Khong and Saito (2014) described how political climates and the endorsement of English-only policies throughout the United States have also impacted the perceptions of educators and school administrators regarding ELLs and emotional health. Recent legislation has focused on handling the needs of ELLs in a similar manner as native speakers instead of the acknowledging the unique needs of the language acquisition process and allowing students to utilize their native languages. Riley (2015) studied the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding academic placement of ELLs. Participants were asked to place students in beginning or advanced classes based on academic achievement data. However, 11 of the 21 teachers who



participated in the study admitted making decisions based on personal perceptions regarding race or social status. “The factors outside of achievement that received the most attention were ethnicity and ESL status, and the assumptions teachers made about the family background and social behavior of such students (Riley, 2015, p. 667).

Sox (2009) explained how students in Georgia were mandated to speak English throughout the school’s academic and social environment leading to further feelings of alienation. Cho and Reichs’ (2008) survey responses regarding teacher perceptions of English fluency indicated teachers preferred English fluency prior to entering the general education classroom. Friend et al. (2009) explored urban middle school teachers’ perceptions regarding ELLs and found 44% of teachers shared the perception regarding the importance of speaking English and described how ELLs tended to collaborate with peers sharing similar native languages. “Several teachers believed that within the middle schools there was a feeling of acceptance, but not necessarily interaction among the different cultural groups present” (Friend et al., 2009, p. 65).

**The impact of professional development.** The emotional elements of language learning were perceived by many teachers as minor in comparison to academic strategies (Anhalt & Rodríguez Pérez, 2013; Harper & de Jong 2009; Sox, 2009; Vazquez-Montilla et al., 2014). According to Darling-Hammond (2010), overcoming discrimination and understanding emotional challenges of ELLs requires addressing teachers’ opinions and providing professional development focused on removing negative stereotypes with the goal of creating inclusive multicultural environments. Lower perceptions of educators to embrace the need for understanding emotional issues pertaining to ELLs could be a result of an underdeveloped understanding of culturally responsive teaching (Samson & Lesaux, 2015). Rodriguez et al.

(2010) assessed teachers' perceptions of ELLs before and after taking a methods of teaching ELLs course. Participants perceived understanding anxiety levels of ELLs as important with no statistical difference found after taking the class. However, participants rated the importance of perceiving how students' sociocultural background and acceptance impacts success in school as higher on the course post survey. In addition, teachers perceived a more optimistic view of college completion for students post professional development.

Cho and Reich (2008) explained how secondary social studies teachers perceived understanding students' cultural backgrounds as important and indicated the need for continued training based on culture and appropriate learning strategies for ELLs. Harper and de Jong (2009) advocated for teachers and ELL specialists to collaborate with the goal of transforming general education classrooms to embrace and address the needs of ELLs. Bunch, (2013), Darling-Hammond (2010), and Khong and Saito (2014) recognized the need for further professional development and acknowledged very few teachers have received preparation to understand and meet the emotional needs of students acquiring a second language.

### **Perceptions of teachers concerning language acquisition and classroom strategies.**

Although general education teachers perceived the importance of emotional development for ELLs as relatively unimportant, a wide range of perceptions regarding language acquisition, modifications, and instructional strategies for ELLs are explored. In this section, a foundational quantitative study by Reeves (2006) and numerous other studies (Cho & Reich, 2008; Edwards, 2014; Harper & de Jong, 2009; Vazquez-Montilla et al., 2014) complementing Reeves' (2006) findings stated the perceptions of general education teachers regarding the language acquisition process and classroom environment needed to facilitate learning for ELLs was explored.

### **Reeves' (2006) Foundational Study**

Reeves' (2006) study was foundational to the research regarding the perceptions of educators because it was conducted after the implementation of No Child Behind and included secondary educators. Reeves acknowledged the narrow body of research available concerning the views of educators toward the inclusion of ELLs into general education classrooms. Reeves surveyed 279 secondary content teachers and focused on perceptions of four areas (a) inclusion, (b) modification, (c) professional development, and (d) the language acquisition process. According to the quantitative survey, the majority of participants shared an accepting attitude toward the inclusion of ELLs and viewed integration as positive. However, 75% of teachers perceived inclusion of ELLs should not take place until minimal English proficiency was acquired and maintained. Educators also perceived ELLs would acquire English proficiency within two years.

The misunderstanding of the language acquisition process expressed by teachers in Reeves' (2006) study directly contradicted V. P. Collier's (1995) assertion regarding English proficiency academic language taking seven to 10 years to develop with appropriate instruction and support. Farrell and Bennis (2013) stressed the importance of educators understanding the process of language acquisition with the goal of enhancing instructional practices to meet the needs of second language learners. Reeves (2006) explained a popular classroom strategy among general education teachers was allowing more time for ELLs to complete coursework instead of decreasing or supplementing material. Allocating more time was perceived as a solid practice ensuring equity to all students. Additionally, the majority of teachers perceived the amount of time to work with ESL students as unattainable and half of secondary educators viewed professional development negatively.

**Perceptions of teachers concerning ELLs and the language acquisition process.** Cho and Reich (2008) added to Reeves' (2006) findings and examined secondary social studies teachers from six high schools in central Virginia and indicated mostly positive perceptions of including ELLs into the general classroom environment. However, Cho and Reich (2008) explained teachers perceived language acquisition and lack of background knowledge as challenging to the success of students learning English. A participant explained in a short answer that asked for additional perceptions at the end of the survey: "ELLs need to be taught separately unless they are *fluent* English speakers. ELLs would benefit most from having English immersion instead of having our school system adapt to other languages" (as cited in Cho & Reich, 2008, p. 235). Gottschalk (2016) concurred with Cho and Reich (2008) and explained a common perception held by general education teachers is the language acquisition process will evolve at an accelerated pace if ELLs speak only English at home and within the school environment.

The misguided perceptions regarding the second language acquisition process are not only perceptions held by American educators but also mirror New Zealand secondary teachers' perceptions with concerns expressed about a lack of confidence regarding the oral language and academic vocabulary development of ELLs (Edwards, 2014). Modern ELLs theorists August et al. (2014) described the importance of capitalizing on a student's first language strengths and understanding how to build on first native language strengths to facilitate second language learning within the general education classroom. Vazquez-Montilla et al. (2014) surveyed 425 teachers from multiple school districts throughout Florida and found 73% of teachers thought it was unreasonable for a general education teacher to teach students incapable of speaking English. Consequently, these findings have not changed since Harper and de Jong (2009)

described how secondary content teachers did not perceive themselves as language teachers. However, a more positive perspective toward inclusion of ELLs within the United States indicated only 43% of teachers held the perception English had to be spoken for acceptance as an American (Harper & de Jong, 2009).

**Perceptions of teachers concerning ELLs and the academic environment.** Teacher perceptions regarding instructional strategies and classroom environments needed to ensure success for ELLs varied. Marzano, Warrick, and Simms (2014) stressed the importance of ensuring instructional strategies and differentiation are delivered in a manner that learning is increased for every student. According to Vazquez-Montilla et al. (2014), only 9% of teachers perceived modifying and differentiating instruction as a role a general education teacher should assume. Extended time for coursework was the main strategy incorporated by secondary social studies teachers participating in Cho and Reichs' (2008) study. In addition, the majority of teachers surveyed by Cho and Reich rarely utilized differentiated materials or tasks. Edwards (2014) described how secondary general education teachers in New Zealand perceived the importance of grouping ELLs to encourage interaction as a best practice but acknowledged a need for continued professional development in utilizing other resources and best strategies. Edwards and Cho and Reich asserted deficiencies among educators pertaining to best practice implementation are present and cited lack of time and accountability demands as barriers for improving teaching practices.

Although many secondary teachers perceived allowing additional time for work as an acceptable strategy, some teachers perceived strategies for ELLs with a different perspective. Medina-Jerez and Campbell (2015) interviewed secondary science teachers involved in a master's program at a university located close to the Mexican border. Participants perceived two

misconceptions concerning facilitating learning for ELLs: (a) Vocabulary should be the only focus during science class, and (b) Learning English is not possible with the integration content. Similarly, Olvera (2015) described how general education teachers perceived the prerequisite of speaking and reading English fluently so grade-level content could be learned.

Language and content can be learned in a simultaneous manner with proper scaffolding (Krashen, 2013). Urban secondary science teachers perceived the integration of literacy strategies as important but the majority of the participants surveyed specified using literacy within the context of the science classroom felt discomforting (Gerena, & Keiler, 2011). Harper and de Jong (2009) described how preservice secondary teachers entering the education profession perceived building background knowledge and vocabulary as crucial practices for ELLs but viewed these strategies as generic strategies for all students and did not understand how the strategies specifically enhanced learning for ELLs. Windle and Miller (2012) explained how secondary teachers of low-literacy refugee-background students in Australia perceived value in scaffolding vocabulary but preferred whole class discussion. Although educators valued whole class discussion, Windle and Miller asserted teacher-led, whole class discussion can be difficult and intimidating for ELLs struggling to learn and produce a new language.

A major need exists for secondary content area teachers to participate in professional development with a focus on strategies to meet the needs of students acquiring a second language (Braden et al., 2016). Explicitly teaching content specific academic vocabulary with the use of cognitive strategies increased the performance of ELLs on standardized tests (Janzen, 2008). Cummins's (1991) model of academic language indicated the majority of instruction in today's classrooms consists of low context high cognitive demand practices. Practices such as lecture, limited scaffolding, and lack of differentiated instruction deliver content in a

decontextualized environment resulting in anxiety and lack of learning for ELLs.

**Similarities in findings.** Many of the findings described in Reeves (2006) study continue to align to recent research studies. Cho and Reich (2008), Edwards (2014), Harper and de Jong (2009), and Vazquez-Montilla et al. (2014) specified a workforce of teachers with a slightly positive perception of acceptance towards ELLs, but also demonstrate fallacies toward the language acquisition process and best practice classroom instruction. Reeves (2006) concluded,

Although educators may, in theory, believe that ELL inclusion creates a positive atmosphere, in their own classrooms they may experience a different reality. In a climate of educator accountability for the learning of all students, the inclusion of ELLs can likely create a situation in which attention is torn between meeting the needs of non-ESL and ESL students. The findings that many teachers did not perceive benefits for non-ESL students during ELL inclusion, in addition to teacher preparation that they did not have enough time to deal with ELLs needs may be indicative of a teaching force feeling overwhelmed by ELLs in the mainstream. (p. 138)

Boone (2011) concurred with Reeves (2006) by describing how Southern California High School teachers shared perceptions of feeling overwhelmed due to the continued increase of ELLs in the classroom. In addition, teachers perceived ELLs in the general education classroom as influencing pay, certification, and unfair unaccountability of teachers. Although Reeves (2006) findings were similar to present research, teachers' attitudes towards professional development seem to more positive as cited in several studies (Cho & Reich, 2008; Edwards, 2014; Medina-Jerez & Campbell, 2015) and is needed to increase positive perceptions of ELLs and the utilization of best practices.

**ELLs perceptions concerning inclusive environments.** The experiences and perceptions of ELLs regarding experiences in schools throughout the United States were documented by Boone (2011), Castro-Olivo, Palardy, Albeg, and Williamson (2013); Jung, Nam, and Han (2015); Lopez, (2010); McCrocklin and Link (2016) and Sox, (2009). ELLs expressed perceptions concerning lack of acceptance within the school environment due to the educational atmosphere and language barriers. The perceptions of ELLs concerning the school environment differed in comparison with those of general education teachers. Significant considerations for secondary general education teachers were expressed by adolescent ELLs.

**ELLs perceptions concerning emotional factors.** ELLs perceived a lack of acceptance and low self-esteem as contributing factors to unsuccessful schooling experiences and reasons for dropping out of school. Boone (2011) interviewed language minority students in urban California high schools and found students felt disengaged with schooling and shared a lack of acceptance among teachers and peers. One language minority student described a sense of apprehension regarding the school environment existed because he did not have similar resources as his peers. He said, “I got tired of not having things that I needed—things I saw others with. I was angry all the time” (as cited in Boone, 2011, p. 425). Students explained lack of English proficiency skills as discriminatory factors leading to unwelcomed feelings into extracurricular activities and the classroom environment (Boone, 2011). Jung et al. (2015) concurred with Boone (2011) and utilized a child depression survey to identify depression factors of ELLs relating to the school environment. Korean transnational adolescents between the ages of 11 and 19 expressed feelings of depression due to the lack of self-esteem and low ethnic identity within the school culture. Jung et al. (2015) concluded reasons for misbehavior among ELLs could be attributed to social and emotional challenges resulting in anxious or depressive conduct.



Sox (2009) noted how Latino adolescents described immigration status as a factor leading to feelings of isolation and discrimination within the United States. Similarly, immigrants from secondary schools in Quebec expressed intense discrimination between themselves and native-born peers. Immigrants noted friendships were challenging to form and segregation was evident throughout school culture. One interviewee described team work with native students as an isolating experience because of the way native speakers would *stick together* while the immigrant student would be *all alone* longing for another immigrant student to be present in the classroom (Steinbach, 2010). In contrast, Lopez (2010) found intermediate ELLs placed in bilingual or dual-lingual programs perceived themselves with a stronger sense of pride and belonging in comparison to ELLs in environments discouraging the students' first language. In addition, the quantitative study of 295 ELLs compared positive perceptions with academic perceptions and found students that were more comfortable socially had marginally higher perceptions of achievement on literacy assessments (Lopez, 2010).

**ELLs perceptions regarding the language acquisition process and barriers.** Anxiety and stress among ELLs has been attributed to not only perceptions of non-acceptance but also to the challenging process of second language acquisition. A large sample of Latino ELLs and non-ELLs from urban middle schools were compared to measure levels of anxiety within the school environment. The amount of stress experienced by Latino ELLs was significantly higher compared to non-ELL students. Castro-Olivo et al. (2013) found perceptions of ELLs to communicate without proper clarity and pronunciation led to a mental state of uselessness and possible exclusion. McCrocklin and Link (2016) added to the research and described the desire to *speak English correctly* included the aspiration to speak in the same manner as English speaking peers with a willingness to lose any accent associated with the ELLs' first language.

Furthermore, loss of identity was not an issue for ELLs if a native accent was acquired and positive acceptance was gained (McCrocklin & Link, 2016).

Yi-Hsuan (2011) interviewed 36 middle school students who were learning English and found negative and anxious thoughts regarding learning difficult grammar rules integrated throughout the English language. Learning English was compared to a strenuous procedure instead of a natural joy of learning. According to Steinbach (2010), Afghan immigrants in Quebec schools perceived learning a new language as difficult due to the lack of confidence and mockery experienced for misunderstood production or the ability to speak the native language in an accepted and efficient manner. Yoon (2010) found ESL middle school students' participation increased when relationships were formed within the classroom and when cultural needs were valued with less of an outward emphasis toward oral language abilities and needs. Although the case study was limited to interaction within ESL classrooms, Yoon (2010) claimed the findings regarding participation and sustained cultural values can be applied to the general education classroom to increase student learning. Wang and Holcombe (2010) found middle school students perceived competitive school environments as a detriment to learning and described classes focused on improvement and collaboration as supportive environments.

**Perceptions of ELLs regarding classroom environment and strategies.** The creation of healthy and welcoming environments was perceived by ELLs as a strategy to combat identity loss and aligns with the language acquisition and socio-cultural pieces of the conceptual framework needed to facilitate success for ELLs (Jung et al., 2015; McCrocklin & Link, 2016).

When children enter middle school, they're particularly vulnerable to social factors that can contribute to anxiety and truancy. For students who struggle with managing anxiety and have poor social skills, feelings of isolation and rejection can occur when they integrate

with their peers. (Casoli-Reardon, Rappaport, Kulick, & Reinfeld, 2012, p. 52)

Additionally, facilitating conversations within the classroom regarding different cultures and value systems would allow students the opportunity to understand and embrace the differences of others outside of typical social circles (Steinbach, 2010).

Yi-Hsuan (2011) described how learning English has been perceived as an *individual endeavor* by many language learners. ELLs perceived a learner-centered focus should be implemented to engage students in the learning process. Boone (2011) described how students expect relevancy of curriculum and learning skills in order to find a connection that will complement real world experiences. Curtin (2006) concurred with Boone and Yi-Hsuan and described the perceptions of middle school ELLs from a Texas middle school. Students perceived learning more valuable when the environment was interactive and included visual and kinesic inquiry approaches to content. Curtin described secondary interactive teaching styles focused on creating environments with the goal of embracing cultures as personalized with knowledge and integration of students' upbringings. Interactive classrooms should utilize active learning strategies with flexible grouping opportunities to maximize interaction between students and the teacher.

Braden et al. (2016) interviewed 147 middle school ELLs regarding best practices within the school environment. Most ELLs described concrete learning experiences and hands on projects as the most effective practices. Student interaction with teachers and peers was also considered a beneficial practice within a supportive learning environment. In contrast, ELLs perceived didactic classrooms as impersonal with limited opportunities for interaction or scaffolding of content (Curtin, 2006). According to Yi-Hsuan (2011), lecture based learning was perceived negatively by ELLs and a student-centered environment embracing the sociocultural

aspect of learning should include project based materials, interactive conversations, and differentiated assignments promoting literacy.

**Perception differences and significant considerations.** The perceptions of ELLs differed from secondary educators pertaining to the importance and understanding of emotional factors impacting success within the school environment. Adolescent ELLs perceived acceptance by their peers as foundational to their schooling experience. Discrimination has impacted greater drop-out rates, but also had led ELLs to associate with similar peers and offer to surrender native accents for further belonging (Boone, 2011; Jung et al., 2015; McCrocklin & Link, 2016; Steinbach, 2010; Yoon, 2010). In contrast, although general education teachers perceived emotional factors as elements pertaining to ELLs, the importance of socio-cultural awareness and acceptance was perceived lower than the significance of language acquisition and academic strategies (Anhalt & Rodríguez Pérez, 2013; Vazquez-Montilla et al., 2014).

Jung et al. (2015) recommended teachers become more culturally aware of students from other countries and transform negative perceptions to engage students in the schooling process. Boone (2011) urged teachers to identify early challenges language minority students face and work to make the school environment welcoming. Teachers should embrace language minority students by seeking to understand the difficulties ELLs face when attempting to advocate for themselves and embrace school-wide interventions of support designed to reach out to students concerning grades, credits, and access to counseling services. Educators can advocate for interventions and counseling efforts aimed at helping ELLs manage anxiety attributed to learning a new language and the school atmosphere (Castro-Olivo et al., 2013). Furthermore, teachers should promote tolerance and celebrate the contributions language-minority students bring to the classroom and school environment.

Preciado, Horner, and Baker (2009) confirmed how the interrelating factors of classroom environment and academic tasks related to the behavior of ELLs. Results indicated challenging academic tasks outside of the ability threshold of the ELLs strengthened problem behavior. According to Preciado et al. (2009), changes in curriculum were needed to reverse behavior challenges encountered by ELLs within the inclusive classroom. Pedagogical changes included differentiating academic tasks to meet the instructional thresholds of students acquiring a second language. The promotion of social and emotional wellness was addressed through tiered assessments and interventions. Creating a positive multicultural environment allows the emotional needs of ELLs to be met and provides opportunities for best practice strategies to be embedded into the classroom environment.

### **Academic Strategies to Enhance Learning for ELLs**

Numerous academic strategies to increase comprehensible input and comprehensible output pertaining to inclusive classrooms were identified to increase the academic achievement of second language learners (Fisher & Fry, 2014; Kareva & Echevarria, 2013; Marzano, 2012; Medina-Jerez & Campbell, 2015; Rubinstein-Ávila, 2013; Taboada, Bianco, & Bowerman 2012). Cummins (1991) explained the importance of high context and high cognitive demand classrooms consisting of scaffolded content, facilitated vocabulary, and making content literacy comprehensible while integrating oral language. These strategies are critical for enhancing instructional practices within the classroom and increasing the perceptions of educators towards ELLs.

**Scaffolding instruction.** Rubinstein-Ávila (2013) described scaffolding as an important strategy for facilitating the understanding of content and language within the inclusive classroom. Scaffolding directly fits into Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD theory as scaffolding provides

assistance by coming along the learner to develop further learning. The growth of ELLs is dependent on highly qualified educators utilizing research based practices coupled with modeling, guided practice and continued encouragement throughout the learning process (S. Collier, 2015). Medina-Jerez and Campbell (2015) explained scaffolding in the secondary science classroom should include the practice of thinking aloud. Thinking aloud allows the teacher to communicate his or her thinking progression. In a content classroom, think alouds could be used while reading a textbook, solving a math problem or demonstrating a lab procedure.

Rubinstein-Ávila (2013) observed two successful middle school teachers teaching general education content classes with large ELL populations. The narratives explained how teachers used scaffolding within the classroom environment to simultaneously facilitate comprehensible input and comprehensible output. Scaffolding strategies included increased amount of time to process content and answer questions, instructional conversations with peers, and the use of visuals or organizers to represent content. In addition, synonyms were provided to explain tier three content words.

The teachers observed utilized small group work and partner talk to increase interaction focused on academic language. Lesson objectives were explained to students and teachers were consistently modeling new concepts. Rubinstein-Ávila, (2013) described how the goals of the teachers were to understand the differing needs and levels of students to ensure proper scaffolding and support to comprehend course material effectively.

Van Staden (2011) agreed with Rubinstein-Ávila (2013) and found direct instructional methods with scaffolding increased the academic skills of ELLs and noted the effectiveness of visual, concrete, and repetitive strategies. Providing differentiated reading materials, previewing

new content, using visual representations, and facilitating discussion before, during and after reading content material were other strategies mentioned for making learning meaningful through scaffolding (August et al., 2014). Additionally, reciprocal teaching allows for intentional scaffolding by having students work in collaborative groups to summarize and clarify academic content using structured language (Medina-Jerez & Campbell, 2015). “Just as many children benefit from language environments that are intentionally designed to ensure adequate quantity and quality of input, even more probably need explicit instruction in the features of language that characterizes its use for academic purposes” (Snow, 2014, p. 117). Opportunities for language production through scaffolded direct instruction are crucial elements to second language acquisition.

**Facilitating vocabulary development.** Vocabulary development should be a strong focus for content learning because comprehending words allows adolescents to utilize reading, writing, and speaking skills to foster academic understanding (Fisher & Fry, 2014). The National Literacy Panel was commissioned to review peer-reviewed literature for best practice instruction for ELLs. The panel found scaffolding vocabulary and background knowledge as important but cautioned these practices must coincide with opportunities for students to practice oral language through instructional conversations (August & Shanahan, 2006). Fisher and Fry (2014) stressed effective vocabulary lessons should encourage interaction between the instructor, peer groups, and content area reading.

Beck et al. (2002) described three tiers of instruction for vocabulary learning. Tier one words are general words familiar to most students and include high frequency words, color words, and concrete objects. Tier two words are considered *high utility* words and appear across the academic curriculum. Tier three words encompass specific academic content and include

technical, historical, and infrequent words. According to Beck et al., the focus of direct instruction should focus on tier two words with appropriate consideration given to tier three content specific vocabulary words to ensure academic success.

In contrast, Marzano (2012) argued ELLs benefit from direct instruction throughout all the tiers identified by Beck et al. (2002) to enhance the language acquisition process. Knowing the ELLs background and first language is helpful when working with tiered vocabulary because teachers can connect words to cognates. Cognates are words containing similarities between languages such as the Spanish word *problema* and the English word *problem* (Medina-Jerez & Campbell, 2015). Cognates allow ELLs to make powerful connections between first and second languages. In addition, cognates apply to all levels of tiered vocabulary.

A strategy identified to facilitate learning across the tiers consists of clustering words into categories to grow the basic and academic vocabularies of ELLs. According to Marzano (2012), a content example of clustering focused on bodies of water would include words such as *sea*, *stream*, *pond*, and *ocean*. Clustering vocabulary terms allows educators to present words in groups and provides a mental model for scaffolded instruction promoting connections between words. Baumann and Graves (2010) integrated the tiers of vocabulary and cluster-orientated theories by presenting a classification scheme for secondary teachers to utilize across content areas. A math example illustrating the classification scheme was described as follows:

- Domain-specific academic vocabulary: content specific words related directly to the subject such as: *vertex*, *absolute value* or *expanded form*.
- General academic vocabulary: frequent words integrated across the curriculum including *evaluate*, *coordinate*, or *equation*.
- Metalinguage: explains routines or specific expressions unique to a given content



area. Math metalanguage could include: *factor a number*

- Symbols: visual representations of words including X, =, #. (Baumann & Graves, 2010).

Tretter, Ardasheva, and Bookstrom (2014) integrated vocabulary from the classification scheme approach with ELLs in a mainstream science classroom and reiterated the importance of planning lessons with content vocabulary and foundational language structures that encouraged students to interact with the English language. Vocabulary instruction should not be an isolated event limited to lists of unit terms with textbook definitions. In comparison, an integrated and interactive approach should be incorporated into secondary classrooms to increase comprehensible input and output for ELLs (Fisher & Fry, 2014).

According to Tretter et al. (2014), ELLs posttest scores increased after concrete vocabulary and language structure strategies were implemented into the classroom. Vocabulary words were introduced with pictures, student friendly definitions, and concrete objects. Sentence frames with crafted language structure were used to show students how content specific words fit into the format of the English language. Students recorded the sentence frames in notebooks and engaged in academic conversations centered on newly acquired language and vocabulary.

Marzano (2012) reiterated the importance of vocabulary notebooks and explained how vocabulary words should be logged and consistently reviewed as learning expands and misunderstandings are revised. Vocabulary notebooks should provide space for students to write the word, definition, visual representation, and associations with other words (Marzano, 2012; Tretter et al., 2014). Tiered vocabulary words paired with direct instruction, concrete learning opportunities, and instructional conversations are essential strategies needed inclusive classrooms to facilitate content and language learning for ELLs. Bolos (2012) explained

vocabulary learning of ELLs will increase as educators implement and integrate a variety of methods including visuals, interactive experiences, cognates, and continual assessment.

**Increasing comprehension within content reading.** Many ELLs are faced with the challenge of reading and comprehending grade level appropriate textbooks within the mainstream classroom. Content textbooks are considered difficult for ELLs due to limited contextual cues, challenging academic language, and few visual representations (Brown, 2007). Scaffolding texts throughout the reading process and incorporating the use of comprehension strategies into content instruction have been effective methods to increase comprehensibility for ELLs (DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2013; Klingner, Boardman, Eppolito & Schonewiese, 2012).

There were several *promising practices* described by Klingner et al. (2012) that serve as tools to be integrated before, during, and after reading to facilitate understanding for ELLs. These practices include setting a purpose for reading, previewing the text, asking questions, and summarizing. DelliCarpini and Alonso (2013) described how anticipation guides are tools to facilitate setting a purpose for reading, previewing the contents of the text, and facilitating during and after reading discussions. Students are able to identify background knowledge concerning a specific subject and make predictions regarding the content of the text. Although students read the text, anticipation guides can be utilized as a tool to change predictions and launch discussions regarding new information learned after reading the text. Taboada et al. (2012) agreed with Klingner et al. and endorsed the practice of questioning to increase the comprehension of ELLs.

Text-based questioning allows making the reading comprehension process more explicit as students demonstrate levels of understanding as well as highlight areas of confusion in relation to details or key concepts in a text. By listening to and discussing each other's questions, students can become aware of others' text-based processing and expand the

range of interpretations of the text. (Taboada et al., 2012, p. 88)

Through explicit instruction, a teacher directly explains and models a comprehension strategy or thinking process with the goal of having students apply the strategy to the text (DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2013). A study evaluating the use of text-based questioning among intermediate ELLs immersed in science content found ELLs demonstrated gains in reading comprehension and content knowledge due to explicit instruction and application with text-based questioning (Taboada et al., 2012). However, the study asserted the importance of integrating scaffold vocabulary instruction, text-based questioning, and oral conversations to facilitate knowledge and language acquisition. Snow (2014) expounded on the urgency of the development of comprehension and oral language skills explaining how the common core standards present many challenges to ELLs because the *domains of language are greater*. Educators need to work to increase the background knowledge of ELLs and simultaneously engage in interactive discussions and experiences.

Brown (2007) added how graphic organizers could be utilized throughout content reading as a practice to scaffold vocabulary, summarize content and assist with understanding language structures. According to Brown (2007), understanding the main idea of the text benefits language acquisition. Graphics organizers should be flexible to meet the needs of individual learners and can be adapted to contain simple or complex details according to language levels. General education content teachers can use graphic organizers prior to reading to scaffold content and vocabulary. In addition, graphic organizers can aide ELLs during and after reading to review content and facilitate oral language through academic conversations. Vaughn et al. (2009) found middle school ELLs in a treatment group using graphic organizers complemented with direct vocabulary instruction showed greater growth over ELLs in a traditional social

studies classroom.

Adding to the research of Vaughn et al. (2009), Gerena and Keiler (2011) highlighted the integration of content literacy strategies into two urban secondary biology classes with large ELL populations. The study found ELLs scored higher than students who did not receive specific instruction in effective reading strategy skills. In addition, Barber et al. (2015) described a middle school intervention for ELLs to increase academic achievement in social studies. Modeling of comprehension strategies with the use of authentic text was implemented alongside new social studies content to increase literacy and content knowledge of ELLs. The study found after the program was employed, content knowledge and comprehension increased among ELLs in comparison to other middle school classrooms not implementing the content based literacy strategies. The ability to transfer literacy skills into other content area classes was also demonstrated by ELLs. Bolos (2012) urged educators to recognize ELLs need different academic support than native speakers and to use differentiated reading strategies to increase achievement and comprehensibility.

**Sheltered instruction observation protocol.** The sheltered instruction observation protocol (SIOP) model was developed as a result of a study funded by the USDOE. The purpose of the study was to develop a framework to be utilized by content teachers merging best practice strategies for all learners, embedding specific practices for ELLs with the goal of increasing comprehensibility. The SIOP model stressed the importance of promoting academic literacy for ELLs through scaffolding background knowledge and vocabulary while increasing opportunities for academic conversations promoting continued language development. Comprehensible input and comprehensible output are foundational elements integrated throughout lesson planning and delivery (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2000; Kareva & Echevarria, 2013).

According to Echevarria et al. (2000), the SIOP model included

- Lesson preparation: Content and language objectives are developed and explained to students. Materials to supplement the lesson are chosen and content materials (textbooks or assignment) are adapted to meet the learning levels of ELLs.
- Building background: Backgrounds of students are considered and appropriate experiences are implemented to build on previous knowledge. Vocabulary is represented using visual representations and concrete experiences.
- Comprehensible input: Body language, modeling and appropriate speech are implemented.
- Strategies: Opportunities for practicing the content in concrete ways are offered and levels of questioning promoting deeper understanding are planned.
- Interaction: Collaboration using grouping techniques are implemented to promote oral language development.
- Practice and application: Practice opportunities are implemented using multiple learning preferences. Literacy skills are integrated into the practice and application activities.
- Lesson delivery: Content and language objectives are constantly referred to during the lesson and students are engaged.
- Review and assessment: Formative assessments are integrated throughout the lesson providing feedback regarding the lesson objectives.

Kareva and Echevarria (2013) explained the success of the SIOP model in an urban school setting with 50% of students learning ESL. Reading and writing scores increased significantly after a three-year period of SIOP implementation. Although, Kareva and Echevarria

acknowledged the importance of a strong academic framework to increase the success of ELLs within the classroom, the authors emphasized the importance of understanding and working collaboratively to address the difficulties ELLs encounter inside the school environment and within society. The SIOP model provides a structured framework for educators to utilize to facilitate a positive learning experience for ELLs.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

Throughout the literature review, multiple research articles from peer-reviewed journals were examined. I identified authors who used quantitative and qualitative studies regarding the experiences of ELLs in general education classrooms and several studies regarding best practice strategies to be used in the classroom environment to increase comprehensibility and language acquisition for ELLs. Additionally, several primary research studies regarding teacher perceptions of ELLs from secondary grade levels and areas were examined.

Although Reeves' (2006) study focused on high school teachers in a mid-sized suburban city, Gerena and Keiler (2011) targeted high school science teachers in urban districts. Friend et al. (2009) studied perceptions of middle school teachers in urban districts. Anhalt and Rodríguez Pérez (2013) identified K–8 math teachers as surveyed participants throughout the western United States within urban and rural districts. Cho and Reich (2008) studied high school social studies educators throughout Virginia. Rodriguez et al. (2010) sample was small and limited to teachers in Grades 7–12 in North Carolina. Vazquez-Montilla et al. (2014) referred to survey participants as educators from southwest Florida without indicating a grade level break-down. In addition, most of the studies were quantitative in nature and conducted throughout larger, urban districts or cities outside of the Midwest.

The quantitative studies synthesized in the literature review employed surveys and

utilized at least one of the interconnecting elements described within the conceptual framework concerning the language acquisition process, emotional factors, and academic pedagogy necessary to facilitate academic achievement of ELLs in the general education classroom (Anhalt & Rodríguez Pérez, 2013; Friend et al., 2009; Gerena, & Keiler, 2011; Reeves, 2006; Rodriguez et al., 2010; Vazquez-Montilla et al., 2014; Windle, & Miller, 2012). Although the authors indicated varying perspectives regarding teachers' perceptions towards ELLs, understanding the reasons leading to those perceptions proved to be challenging due to the numerical rating system the studies employed. Each of the interconnecting elements were not represented in a qualitative manner or connected to the environment within a middle school classroom.

Although immigration is not new within the United States, providing equal education to ELLs has been pushed to the forefront of American education within the past 15 years because of immigration and national accountability legislation. In addition to urban schools, rural, and suburban schools are beginning to educate more ELLs and the perceptions of teachers are crucial to study. Middle school serves as a transition for adolescents and can be particularly challenging for students learning a new language while grasping to learn content (Friend et al, 2009; Olvera, 2015). There was a limited amount of studies pertaining directly to middle school teachers' perceptions of ELLs in suburban and rural schools with increasing ELL populations.

After reviewing the literature, the need for a qualitative study gauging middle school teacher perceptions incorporating all of the interrelating elements of the conceptual framework would provide insight into the background and reasoning process regarding how ELLs are perceived and how those perceptions impact the instructional environment of the classroom. A phenomenological approach was utilized in this qualitative study to explore how rural and suburban middle school teachers in the Midwest perceive the phenomenon of an increased

population of ELLs in their general education classroom and school environment. The findings of this study may assist rural and suburban school collaborative teams the capability to evaluate commonly held perceptions regarding ELLs within the middle school atmosphere while working to overcome deficiencies in understandings in order to create successful academic environments for students acquiring the English language.

## **Summary**

Within this chapter, relevant research studies were reviewed regarding the perceptions of secondary educators concerning the increased ELL population mainstreamed into general education content classrooms and effective pedagogical practices. The review began with a conceptual framework describing the importance of understanding how the language acquisition process, emotional factors and academic environments are interrelating factors contributing to successful school experiences for ELLs. V. P. Collier (1995) explained the importance of these factors developing simultaneously throughout the schooling process. Many authors described how adolescent youth recognized when emotional factors were not understood or embraced by educators the desire to work towards success in school decreased (McCrocklin & Link, 2016; Steinbach, 2010; Yoon, 2010).

Teachers' perceptions of ELLs within the general educational environment were mixed. Although teachers generally perceived ELLs as a positive addition to the classroom, mixed perceptions existed concerning the language acquisition process and best practice strategies. ELLs perceived emotional and social issues as elements crucial to acceptance and success in school, and teachers' perceptions were focused on the academic process. However, teachers' perceptions of language acquisition and academic strategies were highly prioritized in the literature with a slight disregard for the emotional and sociocultural factors impacting ELLs.



Most educators recognized the need for best practice strategies, but many educators perceived allowing extra time as an appropriate modification. Strategies to facilitate the language acquisition process and comprehension of content were identified. These strategies consisted of interactive environments with instructional conversations and acceptance of differing cultures and languages. In addition, classroom environments should scaffold content, employ a variety of strategies for learning tiered vocabulary, and embrace content reading by incorporating authentic texts and modeling of comprehension strategies.

Although this broad literature review addressed the perceptions of teachers regarding the interrelating factors essential to the success of ELLs with recognized best practice strategies, research could be expanded to include a qualitative focused study seeking to understand the perceptions of middle school educators regarding ELLs included into content classrooms. The conceptual framework guided the questioning in a semi-structured interview and provided contextual details. The following chapter describes the research methodology for gauging the perceptions of middle school teachers and the impact of these perceptions regarding pedagogical practices.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The presence of ELLs into general education classrooms has affected middle school content teachers and their strategies concerning pedagogical practices (Anhalt & Rodriguez Perez, 2013). There was limited research concerning the pedagogical practices of middle school educators regarding how ELLs are perceived in the school structure emotionally, linguistically, and academically. Furthermore, studies concerning how middle school teachers' perceptions of ELLs impact the instructional environment are limited to schools serving urban areas or states with higher ELL concentrations and are mostly quantitative in nature. Exploring middle school teachers' perceptions of ELLs adds to the research and offers guidance on how teacher perceptions impact pedagogical practices within a Midwestern middle school setting serving rural and suburban areas. This phenomenological study examined how middle school teachers perceived ELLs and how these perceptions impacted pedagogical practices within the classroom.

Research methodology is presented within this chapter. This phenomenological study took place in a Midwest middle school with an increased ELL population that drew from rural and suburban areas. My role as the researcher consisted of being the interviewer, active listener, data recorder, and data analyzer. Research questions were identified with the purpose of seeking an understanding of how ELLs are perceived throughout the school environment and how perceptions impact classroom instructional efforts. Semi-structured interview questions gauged the experiences and perceptions of middle school teachers regarding the interrelating elements of emotional development, linguistic, and academic needs of students acquiring English as identified throughout the conceptual framework. A plan for data analysis regarding the validity and reliability of data are presented with ethical procedures regarding the nature of the study.

## Research Questions and Design

The research questions for this study were:

1. How do middle school teachers perceive the second language acquisition process?
2. How do middle school teachers perceive the emotional development of ELL students?
3. What pedagogical skills do middle school teachers currently implement while teaching ELL students?

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study with the goal of developing an understanding of the *lived experiences* of middle school educators pertaining to the inclusion of ELLs into content classes. Creswell (2013) explained how the qualitative research process starts with the exploration of presumptions regarding challenges within society related to human relationships or specific collective issues. Researchers employ qualitative methodology to explore the problem, assemble data, and analyze relevant themes.

A theoretical lens allows the researcher an opportunity to view the study through an identified context (Creswell, 2013). The contexts identified for this study included societal and educational circumstances. Cho and Reich (2008) described how the United States has been a country consisting of a melting pot of different languages, nationalities, and increased economic opportunities. Today's 21st century classrooms do not resemble learning environments of the past recognized by previous generations of immigrants and students acquiring a second language. These changes called for major changes in curricular pedagogy. Darling-Hammond (2010) acknowledged how current legislative policies focused on high-stakes testing and English only initiatives have presented educational challenges for students acquiring a second language. Cho and Reich explained educators have the unique role of instructing ELLs and increasing the

economic opportunities requiring a successful education experiences.

According to the NCES (2015), the percentage of ELLs in schools throughout the United States continues to increase and during the 2012–2013 school year was 9.2% compared to 8.7% in 2002–2003. De Jong (2013) explained due to the increase of ELLs within the U.S. educational system, most ELLs are placed within inclusive content classrooms and receive fewer than 10 hours of services from an EL specialist per week. Although some secondary teachers embrace and welcome ELLs into the general education classroom, the lack of professional development has influenced the use of best practice strategies. Some states require formal ELL coursework for all teachers. Khong and Saito (2014) recommended the need for increased professional development focused on addressing the perceptions of educators regarding ELLs in the general education environment. Although there is research regarding how ELLs are perceived in the school structure, there were few authors who discussed the pedagogical practices of middle school teachers within Midwestern rural and suburban areas regarding how ELLs are perceived emotionally, linguistically, and academically. In this study, I examined interview data drawn from middle school teachers' perspectives regarding how ELLs are perceived in the school environment and how these perceptions impact pedagogical practices.

A plethora of qualitative approaches were evaluated pertaining to this study. A grounded study would have required the research process to include interviewing participants with the goal of producing a theory including circumstances, context, and consequences (Creswell, 2013). A case study was identified as an additional option. Creswell explained that the purpose of a case study consists of examining a *bounded system* with the focus of collecting rich, descriptive data. Case studies are beneficial when examining *events* or *programs*. A hermeneutic, phenomenological methodology was utilized for the purpose of identifying meaning related to

the experiences of middle school teachers regarding ELLs into the general content classroom environment.

The philosophical research of Edmund Husserl during the 20th century provided the historical and theoretical underpinnings related to modern hermeneutic, phenomenology. Husserl's research developed during the aftermath of World War I and described how humans approach the world with involvement and consciousness. He explained human experiences and involvement within the world offer a basis for knowledge and meaningful perspective (Husserl, 1970). According to Reiners (2012), modern hermeneutic, phenomenological research built upon Husserl's philosophies and is defined as being able to focus upon the essence of a shared phenomenon in order to find understanding and meaning. This methodology allows the natural attitude and lived meaning of humans' involvement within the world to be described and interpreted. Reiners explained the research process consists of analyzing themes evolving from the descriptions of participants to offer meaning and interpretation pertaining to a specific phenomenon. The research design of this study utilized a hermeneutic, phenomenology approach to describe and offer meaning to the lived experiences of middle school teachers regarding the phenomenon of an increased population of students acquiring a second language within the classroom. My goal as the researcher was to describe the shared experiences explained by participants and analyze the themes regarding teacher perceptions captured during the qualitative interview process.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as researcher in this study consisted of spectator, active listener, primary data collector, and data evaluator. The study site selected was a school located in the Midwest serving students from rural and suburban areas. According to the demographic breakdown

provided by the school district and the IDOE, the population of ELLs has increased significantly over the past decade. The school selected was not my place of employment. Although the school was located within a radius of my personal work location, relationships with school employees were limited to accreditation efforts implemented every six years or infrequent participation in community events. Faculty members who represented various academic disciplines, grade levels, and years of experience were selected as potential study participants. As I met with potential participants, I provided a brief introduction to the study and described my role as a researcher. Participants who were willing to participate in the individual interview sessions were given the approved research consent form to review and an individual interview date and time were selected. A follow-up email be sent to the agreed participants to confirm the interview date and time.

At the beginning of the individual interview session, the consent form was reviewed in depth and participants were asked to sign the document indicating they had an understanding of the research project and guidelines. A formal interview followed, and I interviewed teachers utilizing the semi-structured (Appendix A) research study questions. A private setting within the school environment was used for individual interviews. The private setting allowed the researcher to record the experiences and perceptions of participants concerning the inclusion of ELLs within the middle school environment. I recorded interviews with an iPad voice recorder application. As the primary researcher, I wrote notes during the interviews and transcribed the recordings afterwards.

The proposal for this phenomenological study was presented to the Concordia University Portland Institutional Review Board (IRB). Information discussed in the interviews was limited to material approved by IRB, thus eliminating the opportunity for vagueness or possible

researcher bias. Although, I am a mother of an elementary ELL and an advocate for best practice instruction, I did not share my personal or professional opinions with interviewees in order to limit bias. Although I have a family member working within the school district in which the school resides, I kept all names and interview transcripts confidential by storing materials relevant to the study in a locked, fire-proof drawer at my professional workplace. I did not share findings with the family member or any other person until completion of the study. In addition, my knowledge of middle school standards and the pressures placed on content teachers were relatively low; this invited an understanding of how an increased ELL population of varying levels has impacted the *lived experiences* of middle school teachers and the classroom environment.

## **Methodology**

In order to understand the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding inclusion of ELLs in the general education classroom, middle school teachers who represented a variety of content areas were included in individual semi-structured interviews. Questions were composed stemming from the literature and were presented in a semi-structure approach to allow participants opportunities to identify and reflect upon perceptions regarding the phenomenon (Appendix A). Coding to identify themes and triangulation of data were employed as a means for correlating validity and reliability of data. Ethical procedures were outlined and submitted to the Institutional Review Board at Concordia University-Portland.

## **Participant Selection Logic**

Purposeful selection of participants has been recognized as a foundational step for a strong qualitative study (Patton, 2002). Ten middle school content teachers with varied years of experiences and one ELL teacher participated in individual interviews. Purposeful selection was

utilized to recruit participants. According to the teaching staff roster located on the IDOE website, 22 general education content teachers (including ELL teachers) were identified as eligible participants. I sent an initial email to the 22 eligible teachers asking for participation in the study. Interested participants had five days to indicate willingness to participate.

The faculty roster assisted with purposefully selecting 11 participants (including one ELL teacher) who indicated willingness to participate and represented a variety of content areas, grade levels, and years of experience. A sample balanced between male and female participants was a priority of the purposeful selection process. These qualifications were dependent upon the staff members employed at the selected middle school as indicated on the faculty roster. In addition, a supplemental list of six additional teachers who met the study qualifications was compiled and utilized if a selected participant declined to participate or withdrew from the study. Initial contact with potential participants was through the school district's email system and followed by a phone call as needed.

Creswell (2013) explained the sample size of participants involved in a phenomenological study should range between five and 25 individuals in order to capture the essence of the phenomenon. I believed this study was best conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 11 total participants. This sample size allowed the essence of the phenomenon to be explored and analyzed in a deeper capacity. An explanation of the study and an informed consent form were provided to each participant. Only after each participant understood the purpose of the study and issued consent through a written signature, did the interview process begin (Appendix B). Aligning a middle school site and teachers with the description of this study was critical to the scope of this project. Criteria for school selection are outlined below:



- Rural/suburban: A school serving rural and suburban populations was ideal for this study. Multiple studies cited in the literature review, focused quantitative research efforts on stating the perceptions of secondary teachers regarding ELLs and instruction in urban environments. Currently, the population of ELLs is no longer limited to urban schools. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), ELL populations have continued to migrate into non-urban areas in search of jobs and opportunities. These shifts in population demographics have required instructional practices to change from traditional K–12 academia.
- Increased ELL population: The optimal school selected for this study demonstrated an increased number of ELLs over the past 10 years. An increased ELL population illustrated the essence of the phenomenon and allowed participants to describe perceptions due to the elevated number of ELLs included into the content classroom.
- Inclusion of ELLs: Although inclusion of ELLs into content classrooms has been a practice within the United States, this study was maximized with a school that participated in the practice of ELL inclusion throughout general education classrooms.

Criteria for selection of participants included,

- Licensed teachers: Only middle school teachers who had passed recognized content licensing exams required by the Midwest state in which the school resided were accepted as participants for this study. Ideally, participants should have completed a state approved teacher education program. Although the preference was teachers considered qualified in their licensed areas, some states and school districts allowed educators to teach outside licensed content area due to growing teacher shortages.

Every effort was made to select participants licensed in content areas completed within state approved teacher education programs.

- Variety of contents represented: Middle school teachers represented a variety of content areas. Optimal data collection consisted of interviewing participants from different content areas and grade levels to determine how the essence of the phenomenon has impacted perceptions of the examined topic. Although a wide variety of curricular subject matters was desired, teacher certification, willingness to participate, and school contextual factors dictated involvement in this study.
- ELL teacher: Triangulation of data were essential within this study. To provide an additional viewpoint on classroom instructional practices and perceptions, I interviewed the ELL teacher who serviced students within inclusive classrooms. This viewpoint provided data from an ELL faculty member to provide perceptions and depth of practices regarding students who were acquiring a second language. Perceptions of the ELL teacher could be similar or different to those of general education teachers due to knowledge and implementation of ELL pedagogy. Although the preference was teachers certified in ELL instruction, some schools accept general education licensure for this position and the teacher completes necessary coursework. Selection of research participants depended on licensure requirements of the participating school corporation.
- Years of experience: Perceptions of middle school teachers with varying years of experience allowed for further triangulation of data. Veteran teachers with more than 9 years of teaching experience within the middle school were able to provide perceptions regarding the steady increase of ELLs integrated into the general

education classroom which included a perspective on possible shifts in instructional strategies. Newer teachers with fewer than 9 years of experience were able to provide additional perceptions regarding knowledge and understanding how data impacts the instructional environment and reflected on how the needs of ELLs are being addressed within the classroom. Perceptions of veteran teachers and beginning teachers were compared for triangulation purposes.

### **Data Collection: Interviews**

Interviews were the main method utilized in this hermeneutic phenomenological study. According to Merriam (2015), interviews allow the opportunity for participants to share perspectives and interpretations of current reality. Patton (2002) concurred with Merriam and explained how strong interviews should allow the participant to share *open thoughts* about specific experiences in a manner encouraging thoughtful reflection. Ten content middle school teachers and one ELL teacher were selected to participate in individual interviews.

After the informed consent form was signed, one semi-structured interview took place with each general education content teacher. In addition, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the ELL teacher in the building to gain further perceptions concerning the phenomenon of an increased ELL population included into the general education classrooms. Follow-up interviews were scheduled if further clarity or perceptions were needed and were agreed upon by the interviewer and interviewee. All interviews took place in person at the school of employment in a confidential setting. Merriam (2015) asserted semi-structured interview settings are utilized within qualitative studies to foster the opportunity for participants to describe perceptions and experiences in open and innovative means. Semi-structured interviews include both controlled and flexible questions to guide the interview session and elicit

consistent feedback from participants. Merriam stressed reflective thinking and flexibility are fostered throughout the interview process through the use of follow-up questions.

Creswell (2013) explained how semi-structured questions should stem from the study's main research questions. The individual, semi-structured interviews were 60–75 minutes in length and consisted of questions associated to the research questions and conceptual framework that addressed teacher perceptions regarding the emotional, linguistic, and academic development of students acquiring a second language. Furthermore, perceptions concerning the academic environment and pedagogy utilized were probed throughout the semi-structured interview process.

The questions were general in nature and arranged in a flexible manner that permitted the participant opportunities to convey perceptions and experiences in a reflective manner (Appendix A). Research Question 1 was addressed with semi-structured Interview Questions 8, 9, 10, 11, and 14. Research Question 2 was addressed with semi-structured Interview Questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, and 14. Research Question 3 was addressed with semi-structured Interviews Questions 3, 4, 12, 13, and 14. The role of the interviewer was to ask questions, listen, record, and continue with follow-up questions when necessary.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

According to Creswell (2013), collecting and consolidating data are essential steps which lead to effective data analysis. Individual interviews were recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms for the middle school site and each participant involved for confidentiality purposes. I recorded the interviews using a hand-held voice recorder and an iPad digital recorder. Digital recordings were labeled and secured in a locked drawer within my professional office and residence. I transcribed each interview and listened to the interview several times to

ensure the accuracy of the transcription. Each of the 11 individual interview participants were emailed a secured copy of the transcription within 12 business days of the initial interview. Participants were asked to confirm the transcript or suggest specific corrections. The option to withdraw from participation in the study were offered upon review of the transcript.

All participants responded to the email containing interview transcriptions and confirmed the usage of interview content. The supplemental participant list was not utilized due to participant approval. Creswell (2013) explained the importance of reading data multiple times before moving into the interpreting data phase of qualitative research. Transcriptions were read several times and open coding was utilized to highlight similarities and identify data with the potential of being beneficial or interesting to phenomenon of the study (Merriam, 2015). Significant statements made by participants during the interview process were also noted and annotated accordingly. A list of similar codes was electronically compiled for further examination and coding.

After the open coding process, I classified the information using *axial coding*. According to Merriam (2015), axial coding allows the researcher to categorize data in a concise manner. I utilized the practice of *axial coding* by examining the identified open codes and re-reading the interview transcripts to identify themes pertaining to the central research questions guiding the study (Creswell, 2013). Frequency and consistency of data and significant statements were also considered as themes and patterns were analyzed. The coded transcripts and electronic table were presented to an additional research evaluator to ensure validity of the data analysis effort.

*Selective coding* was employed as the final step of the data analysis process to synthesize essential themes and relationships related to the phenomenon (Merriam, 2015). The coding was peer-reviewed for inner reliability purposes. I connected the identified categories to describe the

essence of the phenomenon utilizing stories, descriptive details, and important statements (Creswell, 2013). The themes and essence of the phenomenon regarding the increased population of ELLs into general education classes were compiled into a narrative explanation consisting of relevant data and findings regarding the perceptions of middle school teachers.

### **Trustworthiness: Validity and Reliability**

Creswell (2013) described validity as explaining data and findings in a precise manner as described by participants throughout the qualitative study. Triangulation of data has been recognized as an essential practice regarding validity efforts. Merriam (2015) described the important role triangulation of data has regarding the validity of findings. Triangulation requires connecting information from a variety of different data points. Individual interviews, an interview with the ELL teacher, and a comparison of responses from teachers with varying levels of experiences were data sources utilized to compare and triangulate data throughout this phenomenological study.

According to Merriam (2015), reliability has been a complex subject within the realm of qualitative research due to the nature of analyzing human experiences and behavior. Merriam described qualitative research methodology as an opportunity for researchers to analyze unique experiences through the lens of participants involved in the phenomenon. Creswell (2013) explained recording and transcribing interviews coupled with member checking as methods to enhance reliability and trustworthy efforts. These methods were employed throughout this phenomenological study to ensure trustworthiness of data.

### **Ethical Procedures**

I submitted the methodology of this proposal to the IRB at Concordia University-Portland for approval. I also obtained letters from the school principal (Appendix C) and a central office

administrator (Appendix D) gaining approval to conduct the study within the designated school. Ten content teachers and one ELL teacher were interviewed throughout the study and signed an informed consent form which indicated the purpose, guidelines, time requirements, risks, and benefits for participating in the proposed study. Interviews were conducted in a private setting and pseudonym names were employed to ensure confidentiality of participants. I recorded and transcribed the interviews. Transcripts were locked in a secure drawer at my workplace and are to be discarded after three years upon completion of the study. Participants had the opportunity to review transcriptions and offer revisions with the understanding withdrawal from the study was accepted upon indication from the participant.

### **Summary**

The research rationale, participants, and methodology utilized during this hermeneutic phenomenological study regarding the increased population of ELLs throughout the school environment and inclusion into the general education classroom were presented in this chapter. This study recognized the limited literature pertaining to the perceptions of middle school teachers concerning ELLs within the inclusive classroom serving rural and suburban areas. I proposed a qualitative semi-structured interview format of 10 middle school content teachers and one ELL teacher from a Midwestern middle school. Furthermore, triangulation of data was employed for validity and reliability purposes. Ten individual interviews with middle school content teachers and one individual interview from the ELL teacher were conducted. Responses were compared according to the varying levels of years of experiences and content areas to ensure triangulation. Interviews took place in a private setting with the use of pseudonym names to ensure confidentiality. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were used to extract themes and significant statements regarding the perceptions of participants. This study sought to

understand the experiences and understandings of middle school teachers regarding ELLs within the school environment.



## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

This hermeneutic, phenomenological study examined how middle school teachers perceive ELLs linguistically, emotionally, and academically within the middle school setting. Studying middle school teachers' perceptions of ELLs adds to the literature and provides direction on how teacher perceptions influence pedagogical practices within a Midwestern middle school serving rural and suburban areas. The study site, data sample, and the data analysis process are presented with the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews. Triangulation of data relating to trustworthiness is outlined. Results are discussed according to the study's central research questions. Common themes and summaries from participants' responses are described.

### **Study Site Setting and Demographics**

The study sample was drawn from a middle school located in the Midwest serving students from rural and suburban areas. According to the demographic breakdown provided by the school district, the study site middle school experienced over a 33% increase in identified ELLs over the past decade which surpassed the national average and culminated into over one-fourth of the total school population. The surrounding community and school corporation has experienced an urban sprawl resulting in a shift from a traditional Caucasian school community. Current demographics indicated one-third to one-half of the students at the study site are now considered within the minority population due to the shifting demographic data. In addition, the middle school was recognized by the IDOE as a targeted school that received additional grants. The opportunities provided by the grants included offering faculty members the option of adding additional certifications to their current teaching licenses. Faculty members could choose from the following areas: high ability, teachers of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL),

and school administration certifications. The certification areas offered were focused on raising student achievement within the school due to the accountability challenges the study site school faced associated with reaching a diverse population.

Purposeful selection was utilized to select 10 middle school teachers from the study site who were employed to teach general education core classes. Teachers from each core content area were represented in the study sample and participated in the semi-structured interviews. Core classes included science, math, social studies, language arts, and health/physical education. All students at the study site are required to take these core classes and interviewing teachers from these areas provided relevant data concerning how the essence of the phenomenon has impacted teacher perceptions regarding the inclusion of ELLs in the general education classroom. In addition, one ELL teacher was purposefully selected to provide additional perspectives regarding how ELLs are perceived throughout the school environment. A balance between males and female participants was a priority during the selection process; five male teachers and six female teachers were purposefully selected. A supplemental list of six additional teachers who met the study qualifications were compiled in the event a selected participant decided to withdraw from the study. To protect the identities of teachers who participated in the study, participants were referred to using assigned numbers. Appendix E outlines participant demographics and assigned numbers.

Years of teaching experience between the 11 participants ranged from 0 years to 30 years and participation was voluntarily. The study site school had been in existence as a middle school for 27 years, and two of the 11 teachers had taught at the school since its opening. Other teaching experience included teaching at other public schools. All participants were licensed in their specific content area through the state's department of education. Three of the participants

were currently enrolled in TESOL classes offered by the targeted improvement grant, and other professional development experiences regarding ELLs varied from faculty meeting topics to prior educational experiences which consisted of working with students acquiring a second language. The principal had been employed at the study site school for two years and had a wide range of educational experience including central office and school supervision experience at other sites.

Prior to the interviews, I explained the purpose of the study and participants signed the informed consent form. Participants were familiar with the increasing population of ELLs at the middle school study site. Interviews were conducted in person within a private room outside of instructional hours. Interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length and participants arrived on time. There was one interview rescheduled and completed at a later date due to an illness. Interviews were transcribed and member checking was used to ensure validity of transcripts.

### **Research Questions**

The central research questions were directly aligned to the conceptual framework and include the following:

1. How do middle school teachers perceive the second language acquisition process?
2. How do middle school teachers perceive the emotional needs of ELL students?
3. What pedagogical skills do middle school teachers currently implement while teaching ELL students?

### **Data Collection**

A hermeneutic, phenomenological methodology was selected as the data collection process to understand the unfolding experiences of middle school teacher participants regarding an increased population of ELLs into the general education classroom. The data collection tool

consisted of semi-structured interview questions derived from current, refereed literature.

According to Merriam (2015), an interview setting allows participants the opportunity to share perspectives and interpretations of current reality. Creswell (2013) concurred with Merriam and advocated for data collection to take place in a location familiar to participants with the data analysis process consisting of identifying major and supporting themes across participant responses.

Data were collected from each of the 11 participants utilizing individual, semi-structured interviews and consisted of questions associated to the study's main research questions and conceptual framework addressing teacher perceptions regarding the linguistic process, emotional factors, and pedagogical strategies utilized for students acquiring a second language. Follow-up questions were asked when needed to clarify perceptions. These questions were minimal and asked for clarifying details or experiences. Semi-structured interview data were collected inside a private conference room with the door shut for confidentiality purposes. The interviews were conducted with minor interruptions. A digital RCA voice recorder was the primary source for data collection. An iPad recording application was also used as a secondary source. A back-up set of batteries was available if needed but were not utilized during the semi-structured interviews. The beginning interview question asked for participant information concerning subjects and grades taught, years of experience, years taught at the study site, and professional development experiences. Following the initial interview question, the semi-structured questions were asked and participants willingly provided responses. Throughout the interview process, the researcher asked questions, listened, recorded, and continued with follow-up questions as necessary.

## **Data Analysis Plan and Coding**

Upon completion of the semi-structured interviews, the interviews were transcribed and the researcher implemented the member checking process; each participant was asked to review the transcript and recommend modifications as needed. Every participant agreed to allow his or her interview data to be analyzed and used in the research study. A hard copy of each transcript was printed, and the data analysis process began by reading the transcripts several times utilizing the open coding method. According to Creswell (2013) and Merriman (2015), open coding consists of identifying similar words, experiences, and perceptions shared by participants throughout the interview process. Highlighting pens were used to code each semi-structured interview response according to similar experiences and perceptions. A different colored highlighting pen was utilized for each recognized similarity and transferred electronically into the transcript. Highlighted interview data and significant statements were further analyzed and frequency and consistency of data were noted. The open coding process concluded by transferring consistent codes into an electronic table aligned to the study's central research questions (Appendix F).

Following the open coding process, axial coding was conducted. Creswell (2013) and Merriman (2015) explained axial coding consists of consolidating the open coding data into core themes. I reread the transcripts to affirm the highlighted similarities and perceptions represented in the data were accurate and pertained to the study's central research questions. Then, the highlighted data were synthesized and annotated by identifying core themes and imported the axial themes into the electronic table (Appendix F). The coded transcripts and table were presented to an additional research evaluator to ensure validity of the data analysis effort. The research evaluator confirmed the coding analysis process and results outlined within this chapter.

Finally, the researcher employed selective coding by connecting the themes to specific stories, summaries, and descriptive details shared by participants highlighting their perceptions of ELLs corresponding with the study's main research questions.

### **Coding Analysis: Central Research Questions**

Responses from semi-structured Interview Questions 8, 9, 10, 11, and 14 resulted in 24 open codes coinciding with Research Question 1, How do middle school teachers perceive the second language acquisition process? Common open codes represented across the semi-structured questions and related to Research Question 1 included (a) specific amounts of years needed to obtain academic and conversational language, (b) specific factors influencing language acquisition, (c) willingness to try, (d) diversity in language, (e) difficulty of not understanding the language, and (f) the need for a better understanding of language levels. The 24 open codes were narrowed into six axial codes and included (a) varied perceptions of timeframes for academic and conversational language acquisition, (b) conversational language develops at an accelerated pace, (c) motivation influences language development, (d) strengths related to language diversity, (e) language barrier challenges, and (e) professional development focused on world-class instructional design and assessment (WIDA) levels.

Responses from semi-structured Interview Questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, and 14 resulted in 23 open codes coinciding with Research Question 2, How do middle school teachers perceive the emotional needs of ELL students? Common open codes represented across the semi-structured questions and relating to Research Question 2 included (a) the need to fit in within the school environment, (b) prejudice toward Latino male students, (c) traumatic experiences, (d) impact of politics, and (e) the need for a better understanding of culture. The 24 open codes were narrowed into six axial codes and included (a) acceptance, (b) disconnect among Latino male

students, (c) cliques, (d) the need to be understood, (e) empathy, and (f) professional development focused on cultural differences.

Responses from semi-structured Interview Questions 3, 4, 12, 13, and 14 resulted in 32 open codes coinciding with Research Question 3, What pedagogical skills do middle school teachers currently implement while teaching ELL students? Common open codes represented across the semi-structured questions and related to Research Question 3 included (a) specific techniques for building background, (b) use of visuals, (c) word associations, (d) group work, (e) respect, and (f) the need for professional learning communities (PLCs) and ELLs. The 32 open codes were narrowed into six axial codes and included (a) scaffolding, (b) vocabulary practices, (c) interactive learning, (d) classroom management, (e) cooperative environment, and (f) collaborative professional development focused on learning. The themes from each central research question are discussed in the research results section of this chapter.

### **Trustworthiness: Validity and Reliability**

Creswell (2013) described validity as explaining data and findings in a precise manner as described by participants throughout the qualitative study. Triangulation of data has been recognized as an essential practice regarding internal validity efforts. Internal validity strategies included in this study were (a) analyzing individual interview experiences from middle school teachers with varying content areas and years of experience, (b) comparing general core content participants' experiences with the perceptions and experiences of the ELL teacher, (c) member-checking and third-party coding examination for validity and (d) current refereed literature. Practices to ensure validity throughout this phenomenological study were implemented with no changes.

According to Merriam (2015), reliability has been a complex subject within the realm of

qualitative research due to the nature of analyzing human experiences and behavior. The data from this study may not have external validity due to participants being seventh and eighth grade teachers from a Midwestern middle school serving rural and suburban populations.

Transferability and reliability of this phenomenological study could be utilized if a similar middle school study site and participant selection were carefully considered. In addition, reliability could be considered if the same interview questions from refereed current literature were utilized. Creswell (2013) described recording and transcribing interviews coupled with transcript review from participants as methods to enhance reliability efforts. These methods were employed throughout this phenomenological study.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability approaches throughout this study included triangulation of data by analyzing interview data from 10 general education middle school teachers of varying content areas, interview data from the ELL teacher, and a comparison of perceptions from teachers with various years of experience. Implications for transformation was also reflectively considered and interpreted. Chapter 1 discussed the researcher's knowledge of ELLs and awareness of best practice instruction. This awareness could have impacted the confirmability of this study.

However, throughout the data collection process, personal opinions were not shared with participants to limit bias, and the semi-structured interview questions regarding the perceptions of participants were asked. Additional strategies to ensure confirmability included engaging the participants in member-checking, reading the transcripts several times before coding, coding the transcripts according to the process outlined in Chapter 3, and inviting another researcher to cross-check the coding and documented themes.



## **Research Results**

Data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed according to the study's main research questions. Themes, supporting details, and narratives that described teacher perceptions regarding the increased population of ELLs throughout the school environment were summarized. The following results provide an understanding of the phenomenon.

### **Research Question 1**

Participants' perceptions were explored regarding the development of language acquisition. Research Question 1 asked, How do middle school teachers perceive the second language acquisition process? Initial semi-structured interview questions concentrated on participants' perceptions regarding the timeframe for academic and conversational language acquisition coupled with specific reasons for the perceived time lengths. Subsequent questions followed and explored participants' perceptions concerning the strengths and challenges ELLs bring to the inclusive classroom environment. The second language acquisition process was a challenge noted by multiple participants and cultural diversity was a common strength. Finally, professional development perceptions pertaining to the language acquisition process are outlined.

**Academic language perceptions.** Overall, participants perceived varied lengths of time for English academic proficiency. Participant 3 shared her initial perceptions were within a year; but she also noted she knew a year had to be incorrect relating the fallacy to personally not being able to acquire a new language with academic proficiency in a year timeframe. Participant 7 shared the timeframe taking "definitely more than three years." Other participants discussed specific time ranges. Participants 4, 6, and 11 discussed academic language proficiency ranging from four to eight years depending on opportunities to converse in the targeted language. Participant 1 noted she perceived the process taking closer to 10 years and stated,

I would imagine it would take their entire school time (sic), I mean they might be seniors and still not quite understand everything and it still may be hard for them to understand certain concepts because they don't understand the language.

In contrast to mentioning specific timeframes, Participants 2, 5, 9, and 10 perceived the age and level of the students as important factors impacting the timeframes for English academic acquisition. Participant 5 discussed watching the kindergarteners in the district's Spanish immersion classroom presenting to the school board and stated, "I was just blown away by how quickly the young kids picked up that second language. So, I think it probably depends on when they acquire the skills." Participant 9 referred to Level 1 ELLs in her eighth-grade classroom and attributed their emerging levels to not being able to meet academic proficiency standards by the end of their high school experience. However, Participant 9 stated, "But we need to do the best we can to continue to promote that (sic)."

Four out of the 11 interviewed participants perceived language spoken at home as a crucial factor impacting the second language acquisition process. Participant 6 discussed the importance of English acquisition being promoted at home and attributed quicker acquisition to the reading materials and media that students were being "exposed to at home." Participant 4 concurred and spoke of a student consciously watching English television shows and taking home textbooks to read in English. According to Participant 4, the student's language ability grew significantly within a year's time span. The second language acquisition process is challenging, and Participant 3 stated, "It's hard because some of those kids are going from English at school and Spanish at home. So, I think it depends on motivation and the willingness to stick with it and perseverance." Participant 8 spoke of the challenges ELLs face as they return to school after weekends or summer breaks. She spoke of an ELL coming back to school and

struggling to speak English acquired prior to the break. Participant 8 attributed the communication barriers to English not being spoken or heard in the home.

**Conversational language acquisition perceptions.** Overall, participants agreed the ability to acquire conversational language was a much quicker process in comparison to reaching English academic proficiency. Participant 9 reflected on her TESOL class knowledge and described how second language theorists assert that conversational language develops at a faster pace due to the immediate need to acquire everyday language. She asserted a main focus of school curriculum for ELLs should be relevant real-world curriculum with less focus on proper grammar instruction and usage. Participant 2 described conversational English as a survival skill. He discussed the importance of ELLs producing the target language even if they are stuttering and stopping. “I would be worried if they were so nervous about failing that they would not produce at all.” Participant 3 noted how ELLs are more willing to make mistakes while producing conversational English with their friends in comparison to producing academic language in the classroom and attributed the perception to ELLs feeling more comfortable being corrected by their peers.

**Language acquisition challenges.** Participants in this study perceived the language acquisition process as a significant challenge impacting the inclusive classroom environment. Participant 10 explained although he recognized language barriers as a critical challenge within the classroom and constantly reminded himself of the experiences he has had in other countries regarding understanding the native language. He reflected on the briefness of these experiences in comparison to ELLs within a permanent school setting. Participant 10 expressed empathy for ELLs realizing language barriers are an everyday occurrence for students acquiring a second language.

Participants 2, 3, 8, and 11 perceived challenges with academic vocabulary and language structure as another barrier associated with the language acquisition process. Participant 8 stated, “We are constantly making sure that the vocabulary is understood and that they’re not just nodding (sic) and that they really understand and comprehend what we’re trying to get across.” The lack of foundational knowledge regarding terminology was perceived by Participant 11 as he described how native speakers are able to make connections between word parts. Due to an emerging language acquisition process, Participant 11 reflected on the extreme disadvantages ELLs have and how “a fairly simple word a lot of times stops the conversation due to understanding.” Participants 3 and 8 discussed how language barriers impacted the language arts classroom and explained a larger disparity in ability was displayed during reading and writing tasks. Participant 8 explained “Science and math are probably a little bit more understandable for them (ELLs) but in Language Arts, grammar and sentence structure are just more challenging for them.”

**Culture and language diversity strengths.** Although interviewed participants perceived language barriers and the language acquisition process as challenges impacting the inclusive classroom, seven of the 11 participants perceived the diversity in culture and language ELLs bring to the inclusive classroom as strengths. Participant 11 reflected on how ELLs enhance the science classroom by sharing experiences of living in another culture. He shared how ELLs will enrich discussions by sharing experiences with earth science topics such as volcanoes or living through earthquakes. Participant 3 concurred and explained how ELLs contributed to the understanding of diverse experiences by writing and sharing stories concerning coming to the United States. She spoke of an ELL who shared a narrative about how he came to the United States on his own without adult support. Participant 3 reflected, “I think that it really made my

other students appreciate things a little bit more (sic) and see those students in a whole different light.” Participant 9 explained how she encouraged “cultural sharing” within her classroom and allowed ELLs to utilize the language they felt more comfortable using as they shared their cultural experiences. According to Participant 9, the goal of this practice was to facilitate empathy in the classroom and she perceived having “students put themselves in the shoes of others” as crucial for developing empathetic minds. Five participants explained the importance of building relationships with ELLs and described understanding their cultural stories and language needs as foundational.

**Language acquisition professional development perceptions.** Professional development needs regarding the language acquisition process were addressed by several participants. Participant 1 discussed the importance of knowing the timeframe it would take an ELL to move through the levels to develop English language acquisition. She explained knowing more about the language acquisition process would allow an understanding concerning why ELLs are not demonstrating English acquisition by the end of a school year. Overall, participants expressed the desire to understand and implement the WIDA language acquisition levels as an immediate professional development need.

Participant 3 described how she would benefit from knowing exactly what the WIDA levels located in the school’s data management system meant along with the “level of support that is needed (sic).” She reflected on how beneficial collaborating with the ELL teacher would be concerning instructional support and modifications. Participant 11 agreed and explained having better knowledge of the language acquisition levels and methodologies to support the varying levels of ELLs within the classroom would be beneficial. Participant 9 reflected on her TESOL training and stated,

I think teachers need to be aware of the levels. People do not realize that there are different levels. I think that looking at it and thinking about designing just one lesson. . .

Take one of your lessons and break it down for a L1, L2, L3, and L4.

Participant 4 perceived the need existed within the school to understand how language acquisition levels can inform modification efforts within the classroom. When asked if he saw modification corresponding with the language acquisition levels, he responded, “No, normally there’s modification or no modification.” However, Participant 4 asserted he did perceive teachers are willing to collaborate with the ELL teacher and are starting to realize the importance of modifications.

## **Research Question 2**

Participants’ perceptions were examined regarding the emotional needs of ELLs within the school environment. Research Question 2 asked, How do middle school teachers perceive the emotional needs of ELL students? Subsequent questions followed and explored participants’ perceptions regarding how ELL students interact with their teachers and peers inside and outside of the classroom. Themes varied with the need for acceptance identified as a crucial emotional need within the school environment. Professional development perceptions were analyzed according to the emotional development of students acquiring a second language.

**Sense of acceptance and belonging perceptions.** Participants 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 perceived ELL students desired a sense of belonging and acceptance within the school environment. Participant 9 described how an ELL student in her class was sent to the United States to live with her uncle so she could receive an education. The student did not want to come and cried all the time. Participant 9 expounded,

There are real emotional needs that we almost need a counselor that’s specifically trained

in those specific needs. I think it's an emotional trauma let alone (sic). . . I'm up at the front of the classroom. I mean there's so much here fitting in with other people and that's why here is a huge tendency for them to click.

Participant 7 perceived a sense of belonging and acceptance as the main emotional need of ELLs and agreed with Participant 9 by evidencing the way ELLs form friendships with similar peers. "Rambunctious" and "ornery" were descriptions of the similar cultural cliques formed by Latino male students in the hallways. Participant 6 agreed and also described how ELLs, particularly Latino male students, form cliques and perceived a disparity regarding the way Latino male students are viewed throughout the school environment. She described walking into a detention room of 30 middle school students and saw only "two or three White faces" and the rest of the students were Latino boys. Participant 6 spoke of very few teachers in the building that Latino boys felt comfortable forming a relationship with and stated,

I think the rest of the teachers. . .they're (sic) trying to put up with as long as they have to and then get out. So I think Latino boys are, in particular, are in a really precarious position in our building where those emotional needs are not being met. They don't feel comfortable here. They don't feel like they belong here.

Participant 4 perceived frustration among ELLs within the school environment and explained a small percentage of ELLs display a "refusal to learn" with some teachers. He wondered if the frustration could be attributed to the multiple disciplinary referrals received. Participant 2 and Participant 5 attributed misbehavior in the classroom as a display of the emotional needs ELLs exhibit. Participant 2 concluded, "It can be a struggle for sure trying to balance what they need versus what I need to give to everyone.

Participant 7 concurred with the disconnect regarding the emotional needs of Latino male

students and reflected on the school's yearly science show. She explained her role was to help students complete missing work to ensure the students could attend the science show. She described how there were 145 students who needed help and that when she walked into the room almost all of the students unable to attend the science show were Latino male students.

Participant 7 wondered if an "unconscious prejudice" existed or if the missing work was linked to culture or not paying attention to directions. In addition, Participant 8 perceived the behavior struggles of Latino male students as an issue and described how one Latino male ELL student struggled with a sense of belonging for being penalized with an in-school detention for constantly being tardy to school. She expressed apprehension with the disciplinary action due to a misunderstanding of culture and how time was viewed differently within his family.

Participant 8 perceived coming to school late was not "necessarily his fault" and requested the student be allowed to attend math class instead of spending the time in the office.

Participant 11 discussed how the emotional needs of ELL students vary, but noted ELLs who tend to be "more adjusted" and farther along with language acquisition "seem to be more like themselves" when they are in blended social groups compared to ELL students within initial phases of the English acquisition. Participant 7 concurred and asserted, "They will interact with native peers but if they're higher level, they can interact with or who they feel more comfortable interacting with. . .Caucasian, African American, or Asian or whoever it might be." In contrast, Participant 9 perceived ELL students identified as Levels 1 or 2 as withdrawn and wanting to only associate with students who had similar language ability and cultural similarities.

**The need to be understood perceptions.** Other participants perceived the need for ELL students to be understood and respected as critical emotional needs. Participant 8 stated,

I think they want to be understood and respected. I've taught long enough to know that



and I will say it. . .I have never had an election or an event as catastrophic as Trump becoming president ever in my 20 years of teaching.

She described how some students were chanting, “Yeah,” and ELL students were filled with complete terror. Participant 8 perceived the reason ELLs are emotionally fragile could be because other students are unaware of why ELL students are in the school and “that they have no control over the situation.” Participant 6 agreed and reflected on the emotional need for ELL students to be understood and also described how some native students “could just not conceptualize” why the Trump election “would bother anyone else.” According to Participant 6, some ELL students verbalized uncertainty regarding whether their family members would be deported due to the election results and asserted how “eye-opening” of an experience it was for native students to be made aware of other’s cultural needs and identities. Participant 10 emphasized how some ELL students struggled emotionally due to the burden of school work and being pressured to send money back to families in their home countries, and stated, “I try to place myself in their position, and it is hard to even imagine, and that would impact you emotionally and also factor into classwork and social aspects too.”

**Emotional needs professional development perceptions.** Few participants discussed the need for professional development pertaining to the emotional needs of students acquiring a second language. However, Participant 5 acknowledged he would have a better background pertaining to the emotional needs of ELL students if he had participated in the TESOL cohort. Participant 3 perceived how her own professional knowledge and empathy toward ELL students has grown due to the emotional needs addressed in the TESOL classes. She viewed many of the behavior problems at the school stemmed from ELL students struggling to cope and feel accepted within the school environment.

Participants 6 and 8 perceived the need for faculty at the study site to address misunderstandings regarding why ELL students are present within the school and work toward an understanding of what their goals are for the future. Participant 6 discussed the importance of developing a “cultural understanding” regarding the backgrounds of ELL students with a consideration of the needs and strengths ELLs “bring to the table.” She further explained how a former colleague would “knock this out of the park” by having her students share their backgrounds in class. Students would share stories regarding the emotions personally felt as “the family translator” at young ages during tragic medical situations. According to Participant 6, professional development with topics of study consisting of understanding the emotional and cultural backgrounds of ELLs could bring “a whole level of empathy to the table” and patience for working with ELLs within the classroom and school environment.

### **Research Question 3**

Participants’ perceptions concerning various pedagogical strategies implemented within the general education classroom as they taught ELL students were explored. Research Question 3 asked, What pedagogical skills do middle school teachers currently implement while teaching ELL students? I listened to the participants list and explain specific strategies prior to asking a follow-up question regarding specific examples. Toward the conclusion of the pedagogical skills portion of the interview, I inquired about the classroom environment and culture fostered for learning. Understanding the implementation of pedagogical skills coupled with the classroom environment provided a greater understanding of how teachers perceived the needs of ELL students and how those perceived needs were addressed within the classroom. Finally, pedagogical professional development needs described by participants are summarized.

**Scaffolding perceptions.** All 11 participants recognized the importance of scaffolding. Rubinstein-Avila (2013) defined scaffolding as recognizing the differing needs of students and providing appropriate support to aid students with comprehending the course material. Participants described different strategies utilized to assist with the scaffolding process. Participant 3 described scaffolding as starting with a goal and breaking down the goal into smaller steps with appropriate modeling during every phase of the process. Participant 3 stated, “I will show what I would do (sic) and especially as we work on a research paper, I’m color coding, this is what it should look like.” Participant 2 concurred and explained how scaffolding corresponded with the gradual release of responsibility and described how modeling with examples should take place followed by gradually allowing students to take responsibility and try the task. Participant 1 also perceived demonstrations as part of the scaffolding process as crucial for helping ELL students understand classroom content and directions. Participant 1 stated, “I mean that’s just something (sic) like when we’re running from first to second, and I want them to go around a cone, before they go, I’ll go out and do that, not just say it.”

Utilizing visuals was another pedagogical strategy mentioned by participants to scaffold concepts and to assist with making content comprehensible. Participant 9 asserted, “I need to always have visuals. It is really good for all students but it is essential for my ELLs.” Within the math classroom, Participant 8 explained how ELL students are familiar with numbers because they are universal. However, she discussed how words in story problems are transformed into visuals with the goal of understanding the problem and solving for a solution. According to both social studies teachers interviewed, visuals are crucial to incorporate into the classroom with the goal of differentiating instruction for students acquiring a second language. Participant 6 described how she used “as many visuals as possible” coupled with audible and written

instructions. Participant 5 described a specific example involving scaffolding social studies vocabulary with visuals and stated,

Okay (sic), an example could be like the equator and the hemisphere. The equator divides the earth into two, but the earth is also divided into the hemispheres. So to have that visual. . . I just think it is good for kids to see that, and I think that it helps them and when you know it's okay to memorize definitions, but if you have nothing to put in your background knowledge, a visual is important. So, I think doing that with the sentence in the context of the picture, I think that that helps actually all students remember the word and concept. You cannot learn anything unless you have academic vocabulary.

Participants 8, 9, and 11 described the role technology plays within the scaffolding process. Participant 11 described how the use of iPads allows ELL students the opportunity to interact with content and provides a visual representation. Participant 11 reflected on how utilizing visuals became a priority as the ELL population began to increase within the school. Participant 8 concurred and explained technology assisted with a visual and quick translations needed within the classroom. According to Participant 9, the use of visuals and technology can also serve as a hook at the beginning of a lesson and is also incorporated throughout the lesson. She described how showing a short video clip to frontload students regarding the concept of bullying followed by a group Web Quest activity aimed at making the content understandable for ELL students. In addition, Participant 9 reflected on how the lesson benefited ELL students because they were not alone and were able to work with peers to comprehend course content.

**Vocabulary instruction and interactive learning perceptions.** Pedagogical strategies regarding vocabulary instruction was a common theme described by seven of the interviewed participants. Participant 4 acknowledged how challenging parts of the English language can be

for ELL students. He described how ELL students may shut down if they are presented with complex vocabulary or idioms, and he stressed the importance of accommodating or modifying the assignment to reduce frustration. The importance of learning and carrying over academic vocabulary into other contents was perceived as a crucial practice by Participant 5. He described pedagogical practices such as creating Google slides with visual and student-friendly definitions. Both social studies teachers described the practice of role-playing vocabulary through skits, visuals, and demonstrations aligning with practices outlined by Marzano (2012). Participant 7 described the pedagogy of understanding vocabulary within the math classroom and stated, “I try to come up with something they already know from before (sic). For instance, like when we are talking about quadrilaterals. . . I will say what else is four or the quadrants.” Participant 8 acknowledged the importance of breaking down math vocabulary while speaking very clearly with multiple examples. Although Participant 11 acknowledged the importance of images complementing terminology, he commented, “I’ve always believed that my job as a science teacher is not to be a vocabulary guy.” Instead, Participant 11 explained how cause and effect relationships are crucial to understanding science, and that if students understand those relationships, the “terminology kind of (sic) takes care of itself.”

All teachers interviewed referred to either cooperative learning or peer-to-peer interactions as pedagogical strategies occurring during a typical class period. Participants 6, 7, 9, and 10 mentioned project-based learning activities involving flexible grouping and the opportunity for all students to enter into the task. Participant 10 commented, “We rarely go through class where we are not doing something out of our seats and getting involved.” Other participants described cooperative strategies such as turn and talks, stand up if you agree, discussions, and pair work for checking answers or responses to specific tasks.

**Classroom environment perceptions.** Finally, participants described the classroom environment and format for learning. Six participants described classroom management procedures and techniques as important to the classroom environment. Understanding procedures for entering the classroom and starting on specific tasks were important management techniques mentioned by Participants 3 and 8. Participants 4, 5, 6, and 10 associated the concept of respect with classroom management. Participant 10 discussed the importance of students knowing that the classroom is a respectful environment, and “This means if I get any hint of anyone bullying someone else (sic) that they are going to get nailed and it’s not going to come back on you.” Participant 6 stressed how she valued the demonstration of respectful behavior with explanations of why specific behaviors are considered respectful to the classroom environment. According to Participant 5, taking advantage of “teachable moments” while implementing the Golden Rule were essential elements to a positive classroom environment. Participant 8 emphasized an environment of teamwork and stated, “We are a team and everybody has to help everybody because you might understand this and somebody might (sic) not understand. So there’s a lot of sticky notes all over along with kids work all over.”

**Pedagogical professional development perceptions.** Professional development needs regarding pedagogical strategies for ELL students varied among participants. Participants 3 and 10 discussed how it would be helpful to study how ELL students learn best. Both participants suggested having current or former ELL students share experiences and pedagogical strategies within the classroom and school environment that facilitated or hindered their personal learning. Participant 10 concluded this type of professional development experience would be practical and encourage him to implement pedagogical changes into the classroom, due to the success described by actual students. Participant 3 stated,

A lot of people probably want professional development more for their specific subject area. I just think that we need to get to know these kids in our classrooms and how they learn best and how they feel about learning.

Other participants stressed the importance of growing their understanding of best-practice strategies to enhance the learning for students acquiring English language acquisition.

Participant 2 explained the need for professional development opportunities to reinforce the “extra steps” and “best practices” needed in the classroom to make content comprehensible for ELL students. He discussed checking for understanding and increasing wait time as areas needed to continually develop to “help students work together more productively.” Participant 1 perceived learning how to group ELL students into flexible groups to enhance understanding and communication would be beneficial. Participant 5 acknowledged the need for literacy skills to be embedded into the content areas. He perceived the need for professional development regarding content-based literacy strategies while describing the ongoing need for collaboration within the PLC framework. He stated, “I would like having one TESOL leader per content area or group that could incorporate professional development on those days that I feel we are searching for things to talk about if that makes sense.” Overall, participants also valued school-wide collaboration efforts.

## **Summary**

The middle school study site, study sample demographics, and efforts to ensure trustworthiness of the data were described in this chapter. The data analysis process was presented utilizing open, axial, and selective coding to identify common themes and supporting details regarding the phenomenon of an increased ELL population within the inclusive classroom environment. Summaries of the individual semi-structured interviews were presented and

categorized according to the study's central research questions. Participants described the language acquisition process as a challenge within the inclusive environment and the length of time for ELL students to obtain academic and conversational language varied among participants. Overall participants perceived the desire to be accepted and understood as crucial emotional needs impacting the school environment. Scaffolding content, fostering vocabulary development, and maintaining well-managed classroom environments were common pedagogical strategies described by participants. Professional development needs included better knowledge of the WIDA levels, understanding the cultural backgrounds of ELL students, and knowing pedagogical practices ELL students found beneficial within the inclusive classroom.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The population of ELL students continues to increase within public schools across the United States; this includes a shift from traditional urban settings to population growth within suburban and rural school districts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; USDOE, 2015). Rural and suburban schools within the Midwest are beginning to educate more ELLs and the perceptions of teachers are crucial to study. The literature provided a quantitative understanding of how general education teachers from urban settings or larger cities outside of the Midwest perceive students acquiring a second language. However, few authors explored the perceptions of middle school teachers within Midwestern rural and suburban areas regarding how ELL students are perceived linguistically, emotionally, and academically how those perceptions impact pedagogical practices within the classroom.

The purpose of this hermeneutic, phenomenological study was to explore how middle school teachers perceived ELL students within the middle school setting. Researching middle school teachers' perceptions of ELL students will add to the literature and provide direction on how teacher perceptions influenced pedagogical practices within a Midwestern middle school serving rural and suburban areas. The researcher summarizes and interprets the findings of this study and discusses the findings in relation to the literature within this chapter. Limitations, theoretical, and transformative implications pertaining to future practice are explored. The expansion of the study sample is suggested as a recommendation for future research.

### **Summary and Interpretation of the Findings**

Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data from 11 participants. Interview questions were aligned to the study's central research questions,

conceptual framework, and derived from current, refereed literature. To address the sparse qualitative research concerning teacher perceptions regarding the phenomenon of an increased ELL population within the middle school environment, the researcher collected, analyzed, and connected participants' perceptions to recent literature regarding the linguistic process, emotional factors, and effective pedagogical practices for students acquiring a second language. Crucial findings included middle school teachers perceived the timeframes for acquiring academic language longer than conversational language acquisition and they described effective pedagogical practices implemented within the classroom to address the academic needs of ELL students.

Participants' perceptions varied on understanding specific practices and differentiation of tasks aligned to language acquisition levels. In addition, teachers' perceptions differed concerning the emotional needs of ELL students and how those needs impact the learning process. All teachers recognized the need for the continued professional development and most participants conveyed the need for continuing to understand how ELL students learn best within the inclusive classroom. The following themes and supporting data offer a summary and interpretation of data regarding the phenomenon of an increased population of ELL students within a Midwestern middle school.

### **Findings Related to Perceptions of Teachers Regarding the Language Acquisition Process**

The participants had varying perceptions concerning the length of time needed for English academic language acquisition. Years of experience did not provide conclusive differences within the participant responses. Overall, participants recognized the process as taking "years" or large amounts of time to fully develop. Seven participants provided specific numbers of years with the median amount of years being seven years. The ELL teacher

described the amount of years needed to obtain academic language acquisition by the actual WIDA language levels of students, but participants also agreed that most students take six to seven years from the beginning to obtain English academic proficiency. Multiple middle school content teacher participants and the ELL teacher identified conversational language acquisition developing at an accelerated pace compared to the academic language acquisition process. Five of the interviewed participants attributed the need to converse in English conversations daily for basic need fulfillment and peer relationships as reasons for the accelerated pace.

The amount of English spoken at home was stated by four of the participants as a major factor that impacts the acceleration of language development. The remaining participants discussed age, or current language acquisition levels, as other factors influencing the language acquisition process. Equal viewpoints were provided regarding the challenges corresponding with the language acquisition process as participants described either vocabulary or language barriers as challenges encountered within the classroom. Although vocabulary and language were perceived as challenges, eight participants perceived diversity in language and cultural experience as strengths ELL students brought to the general education classroom. Participants shared professional development needs related to developing a greater knowledge of the specific language acquisition levels and how specific acquisition levels could guide pedagogical decisions for teaching and learning.

Unlike Vazquez-Montilla et al.'s (2014) results which indicated 73% of teachers throughout multiple school districts in Florida perceived the practice of instructing students learning English as unreasonable due to language barriers, participants at this middle school study site did not express negative opinions of ELL students within the general education setting pertaining to language acquisition and the learning process. The findings regarding the

perceived timeframes for academic and conversational language acquisition process were fairly consistent with V. P. Collier's (1995) analysis of conversational language developing faster than academic language; within two to three years due to the need to converse within society.

According to V. P. Collier, the ability to use academic vocabulary takes between seven and 10 years and is impacted by first language ability and development.

Participants' perceptions regarding how communicating in English at home accelerates the timeframe for second language acquisition process aligned with a common theme throughout the literature. Cho and Reich (2008) and Gottschalk (2016) found a common perception held by general education teachers was the language acquisition process will develop at a faster pace if ELL students speak English within the home and the classroom setting. However, V. P. Collier (1995) stressed the importance of ELL students linking to their native languages as a point of reference while acquiring a new language. Utilizing the native language allows ELL students to recognize similarities and differences and connect those areas to becoming literate in a second language.

Farrell and Bennis (2013) asserted how understanding the language acquisition process and language levels are critical for effective pedagogical practice within the general education classroom. The ELL teacher at the study site concurred with the general education participants and perceived the need for teachers to understand and utilize the WIDA language acquisition levels. Knowledge of the WIDA acquisition levels could inform pedagogical practices. According to the ELL teacher, using the language acquisition levels to provide targeted differentiation and modification would be a beneficial practice to implement and requires further development within the general education classroom.

## **Findings Related to Perceptions of Teachers Regarding the Emotional Needs of ELL Students**

The participants provided differing perceptions regarding the emotional needs of ELL students within the school environment. Over half of the participants made statements referring to ELL students wanting to be accepted and understood; these perceptions were considered as crucial emotional needs of ELL students pertaining to the school environment. In addition, these participants shared specific lived experiences regarding the emotional health of ELL students and connected these experiences to an apparent disconnect with Latino male students and the impact of the current political environment on students acquiring a second language. These participants were considered seasoned teachers and showcased higher levels of understanding regarding the social and emotional challenges ELL students experience within the school environment. The ELL teacher explained how a small amount of ELL students described the school environment as racist and support their opinions with current event topics. However, the ELL teacher asserted socioeconomic status also was a major factor related student emotional health.

According to Creswell (2013) phenomenology utilizes participants' lived experiences to reflect on essential elements related to the topic of study. All participants identified or described the need for ELL students to clique with native peer groups and some of the participants noted how Latino male students tend to cause most behavior problems. However, five participants were not able to correlate these perceptions as contributing factors to the emotional health of ELL students or provide concrete examples of how these characteristics impacted the teaching and learning process. Lack of experiences and the ability to analyze experiences within the school environment could be contributing factors in the lack of fully understanding the impact of the affective filter described by Krashen (2013).

These findings aligned with the actions and perceptions of ELL students regarding experiences in schools throughout the United States as described by Castro-Olivo et al. (2013), Jung et al. (2015), Lopez, (2010), McCrocklin and Link (2016), and Sox, (2009). Perceptions regarding the lack of acceptance and belonging were attributed to the educational environment lacking an understanding of the emotional needs of ELL students and the ability to implement pedagogical practices to enhance learning. Students explained lack of English proficiency skills as prejudiced elements leading to unwelcomed perceptions into school activities and the classroom environment (Boone, 2011). In addition, Khong and Saito (2014) described how political climates and racist undertones continue to impact the emotional health of students acquiring English. This theory was supported by the interviewed participants acknowledging current politics and election cycles impacting social cliques with Latino students.

A disconnect was identified between the theory and knowledge of social and emotional acceptance within the school environment due to the concrete examples noted by participants' descriptions of the disproportionate number of Latino to Caucasian students assigned to homework detentions. This inordinate number noted by participants also pertained to disciplinary referrals for tardiness and behavior. Although these were noted as concerns within the school environment, participants did not provide any statements regarding corrective actions for these measures. Jung et al. (2015) asserted explanations for misbehavior among ELL students could be connected to social and emotional trials causing in anxious behavior.

### **Findings Related to Perceptions of Teachers Regarding Pedagogical Practices for ELL Students**

The remaining time of the semi-structured interviews were allotted to exploring middle school teachers' perceptions concerning various pedagogical strategies and the classroom climate

fostered within the general education classroom while teaching ELL students. All participants regardless of years of experience described effective pedagogical practices implemented within the classroom to address academic needs, but perceptions varied on the classroom environment needed to foster learning for students acquiring the English language. Participants identified the importance of scaffolding and provided concrete examples of appropriate ELL techniques pertaining to specific content areas. Pedagogical scaffolding strategies described consistently by multiple participants included (a) the use of visual representations, (b) technology, (c) demonstrations, and (d) gradual release of responsibility techniques.

The implementation of pedagogical strategies to enhance vocabulary acquisition was a common theme described by seven of the interviewed participants. Participants explained how student-friendly definitions for academic terms were collaboratively developed utilizing visual representations and descriptive sentences. In addition, all teachers interviewed referred to either cooperative learning or peer-to-peer interactions as pedagogical strategies occurring during a typical class period. Multiple participants described turn and talks, pair work, authentic projects, and interactive skits as pedagogical practices designed to increase interaction and learning within the general education classroom.

Few perceptions were stated concerning the differentiation or modification of tasks according to language acquisition levels. The lack of differentiation or modification of academic tasks coupled with overall pedagogical knowledge, demonstrated a strong understanding of current ELL practices, yet a lack of individual learning strategies. Participants rarely referenced individual student data. Instead, responses focused on whole group pedagogical practices. The participants' responses demonstrated an overall understanding of ELL strategies; but responses also highlighted the necessity for a greater understanding of the individualized language needs of

ELLs and the pedagogical decisions needed for academic success.

Finally, both newer and veteran teacher participants described varying reflections concerning pedagogical strategies related to the classroom environment needed to foster learning and acceptance for students acquiring the English language. Multiple participants described classroom management techniques as crucial to the classroom environment. Common management techniques included the implementation of procedures, demonstration of respect, and accountability. Other participants described the importance of teamwork and the incorporation of joy throughout the class period. These reflections showed both newer and veteran teachers had similar perceptions regarding perceptions pertaining to classroom culture.

The interviewed participants at the study site did not express any negative opinions concerning the need for ELL students to be fluent in English prior to entering the general education for instruction; unlike Olvera's (2015) findings regarding general education teachers who perceived English as a prerequisite to learning grade-level content within the general education classroom. In contrast, findings in this study indicated all participants valued the practice of scaffolding. Rubinstein-Ávila (2013) and Van Staden (2011) described how the academic learning of ELL students increased as visual and concrete scaffolding were implemented within the general education classroom. In addition, over half of the interviewed participants described the implementation of pedagogical practices to increase the vocabulary threshold of ELL students, directly corresponding with the literature. According to Marzano (2012) and Tretter et al. (2014), vocabulary terms introduced with pictures, student-friendly definitions, and sentence frames are essential pedagogical strategies for making content comprehensible to students acquiring English.

The participants displayed empathy and an understanding of the background of ELL



students. Numerous participants spoke about a genuine care for all students and ELL students being part of their personal and professional educational mission. This care and passion for ELL students provide a moral purpose to the pedagogical advances in curriculum implementation within the general education classroom. Differentiation of instruction and academic tasks according to language acquisition levels are essential pedagogical skills needed to increase learning and make content comprehensible for ELL students within the inclusive classroom (Marzano et al., 2014; Rubinstein-Ávila, 2013; Vazquez-Montilla et al., 2014). Although several authors described the importance of differentiating instruction and tasks for ELL students; only two study participants made statements and provided examples of differentiation of tasks according to language acquisition levels of students. The ELL teacher supported these statements by explaining little modification of tasks exist at the study site related to language acquisition levels and multiple participants acknowledged the need for further professional development according to acquisition levels.

The creation of healthy and welcoming classroom environments were perceived by ELL students as a pedagogical strategy to combat identity loss and promote tolerance, celebrating the unique influences ELL students bring to the general education classroom (Jung et al., 2015; McCrocklin & Link, 2016). The facilitation of conversations within the classroom regarding different cultures and value systems provides opportunities for students to develop empathy for peers outside of typical social circles (Steinbach, 2010). Interviewed participants verbalized the need for empathy. This need was stated as more in the realm of procedural importance. The participants did not explicitly discuss empathy building strategies within the classroom among students. The researcher saw an area of continued growth in the individual student needs and empathy of understanding the personal needs of comfort and acceptance.

## **Limitations of the Study**

Specific limitations existed within the study and with the findings. The phenomenological research approach provided a depth of understanding to the lived experiences of middle school teachers concerning perceptions of ELL students and the impact on pedagogical practices. The methodology utilized in-depth analysis and coding of themes from each semi-structured interview responses related to the central research questions. However, I did not observe specific classrooms within the school environment to view interactions between ELL students, non-native speakers, and teachers.

The study site was situated in a Midwestern middle school drawing from rural and suburban regions with an increased ELL presence. Participants were limited to the individual study site middle school. The perceptions and themes regarding the phenomenon were from core content faculty members at the singular study site school. This research did not include a wide-ranging grouping of middle schools spanning throughout many geographical locations.

The study site middle school demographics included only seventh and eighth grade students. Overall, participant experiences and perceptions corresponded to ELLs within these grades. Elementary and secondary perceptions were excluded. The selection of participants was guided by equality of gender, years of experience, and race; however, the study was limited by the certified faculty at the middle school site. Another limitation could include the researcher's particular background; the researcher is a mother to an ELL and a supporter of effective pedagogical instruction. To limit bias, the researcher's personal and professional thoughts were not communicated, fostering an understanding of how an increased ELL population of differing levels has impacted middle school teachers and the classroom environment. In addition, the researcher had a family member employed within the school

system in which the school resided. Names of participants were kept confidential and findings from the study were not shared with the family member or any other person until completion of the study.

### **Implications of the Findings for Future Practice**

To address the limited studies regarding teachers' perceptions of ELL students within Midwestern middle schools serving rural and suburban areas, this phenomenological research was conducted to describe middle school teachers' perceptions regarding the language acquisition process, emotional factors, and academic environments needed for the success of ELL students within the general education classroom. This study was employed to gain insight into the thought process regarding how ELL students are perceived and how those perceptions impact pedagogical strategies implemented within the classroom environment. The findings and implications of this study may enable school leadership teams to confront gaps in perceptions with professional development efforts. Theoretical and transformative implications are described in this section with implications for future practice within the middle school study site environment.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Vygotsky (1978) explained how social interaction guided language development and enriches learning; all participants described interactive learning experiences within the classroom designed to increase social interaction between ELLs and native speakers. Vygotsky explained the importance of meeting students within the ZPD while guiding students to further learning. Overall, all participants provided concrete examples of whole group scaffolding techniques; but few participants described differentiating academic tasks according to individual ZPD ranges or language acquisition levels. An implication for future practice would be to establish intentional

collaboration between instructors and the ELL teacher regarding language proficiency levels. Recognition and a better understanding of levels can lead to increased student performance on differentiated academic assignments.

According to Krashen's (2013) theory of second language acquisition, comprehensible input and output are developed within a natural environment focused on realia, the facilitation of language rich opportunities, and authentic projects. Pedagogical strategies to facilitate vocabulary acquisition and increase interaction were common pedagogical strategies described by multiple participants to enhance comprehensible input and output for ELL students within the general education classroom. Krashen (2013) explained emotional factors, such as lack of acceptance, unease, or feelings of discrimination block second language learning. Although participants identified the need for ELL students to be accepted and understood within the school environment, a disconnect was noted due to the descriptions and statements provided by participants regarding social, behavioral, and academic experiences isolating students acquiring a second language. An implication for future practice would be to examine the reasons regarding the disproportionate number of Latino to Caucasian students assigned to behavioral and homework detentions and work towards developing an academic and behavioral plan consisting of emotional and academic tiers of interventions prior to disciplinary actions.

Collier (1995) explained the process for acquiring academic language acquisition across social and professional settings to develop within a seven to 10 year timeframe and is impacted by learning opportunities promoting interaction and concrete experiences. All participants recognized the academic language acquisition as a process taking significant amounts of time. The median amount of years stated by participants was seven years. In addition, all participants described interactive strategies and concrete experiences implemented within the classroom to

increase comprehensible input. An implication for future practice would be increasing the awareness of general education teachers regarding specific pedagogical techniques designed to engage ELLs in more oral conversations within the classroom environment to accelerate the comprehensible output process.

### **Transformation of Society**

Implications for transformation of society were described within the responses of participants as the social and emotional experiences encountered by ELL students within the middle school environment were shared. Implications for transformation of society included the importance of meeting the emotional needs of ELL students and understanding how the current political atmosphere influences the social and emotional wellness of students acquiring English. The implementation of effective pedagogical strategies to address academic needs are a critical component to the success of ELL learners within the general education classroom. However, long-term success will be limited and sporadic without a focused effort pertaining to meeting the emotional needs of student acquiring a second language through pedagogical practices (Castro-Olivo, et al., 2013). Participants described ELL students as longing for acceptance within the school environment and continuously cliquing with similar race and ethnic peer groups. An implication for future practice would be implementing a systematic approach within the school and classroom environment focused on building a multicultural understanding and embracement of culture, with the goal of bridging the acceptance gap between ELL learners and native speakers. The initiative of promoting understanding and empathy within all classrooms could encourage an environment of acceptance.

Today's political climate has created numerous challenges impacting ELL students' social and emotional wellness. Discrimination has led to increased drop-out rates, but also to the

desire of ELL students to isolate themselves to similar peer groups (Boone, 2011; Jung et al., 2015; McCrocklin & Link, 2016; Steinbach, 2010; Yoon, 2010). Participants described how the recent political election and atmosphere coupled with fear of the unknown led to feelings of fear and lack of understanding within the school environment. These factors impact the feeling of a safe learning environment engineered for the success of all students. An implication for future practice would be the inclusion of a multi-tiered intervention approach to the academic and emotional strategies implemented to embrace a welcoming and tolerant environment toward ELL students within the middle school. Empathy-based instruction for students and staff would assist with establishing an understanding between ELL students and peer groups. This empathy does not have to transcend or include the politics of the day, yet an understanding of students' cultural backgrounds and emotional needs would provide a greater empathy for every student entering the school door.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Recommendations for future studies regarding teacher perceptions of ELL students could include an expanded sample group of schools and participants. Middle schools from multiple public school districts and geographic locations could be included to provide a broader understanding of teacher perceptions regarding how ELL students are perceived linguistically, emotionally, and academically and how those perceptions impact pedagogical practices within the classroom. Perceptions from different geographical locations could be analyzed for similarities and differences regarding ELL students within the inclusive environment. In addition, a future study could also compare perceptions from elementary, middle school, and high school teachers. These proposed studies could identify areas of strengths and challenges regarding effective pedagogical practice and guide future professional development decisions.

A case study could also be recommended for future research efforts. Semi-structured interview data coupled with classroom observations and documentation of pedagogical practices relating to the elements of the conceptual framework would be beneficial for triangulation of data purposes. Perceptions of the school principal could be compared with observation data. In addition, specific interview questions designed to elicit participation and responses from ELL students would offer a deeper understanding of their personal and educational perceptions concerning the inclusive school environment. These combined elements would provide a deeper perspective and correlation of data pertaining to students acquiring English.

Participants also mentioned several other topics pertaining to ELL students that could be recommended and molded into future research studies. Comparing responses from teachers with TESOL training to those without formal training, effective collaboration methods, literacy instruction for ELL students, and school-wide models for academic services pertaining to language acquisition levels. The ELL teacher also stated continued professional development and research on culture and socio-economic status would benefit general education teachers as pedagogical decisions are implemented pertaining to all students.

## **Summary**

Findings of this hermeneutic, phenomenological study regarding how teachers in a Midwestern middle school serving rural and suburban areas perceived ELL students academically, linguistically, and emotionally within the inclusive classroom are explained in this chapter. Findings regarding how those perceptions impact pedagogical practices were presented and connected to current, refereed literature. Data from 11 middle school teacher participants was analyzed utilizing open, axial, and selective coding techniques. The participants' responses demonstrated an overall understanding of effective pedagogical practices for ELL students based

on academic needs. Findings also highlighted the necessity for a greater understanding of individualized language needs, differentiation of academic tasks according to language acquisition levels, and the continued development of empathetic and accepting classrooms.

Theoretical and transformative implications were discussed and connected with practical implications for future practice. Recommendations for future study included expanding the sample to include numerous geographic locations and participants representing a variety of grade levels. Participants in this study valued the unique backgrounds ELL students bring to the inclusive classroom environment and described a desire to implement pedagogical practices to meet the needs of ELL students and foster learning. In addition, participants acknowledged the need for continued professional development focused on how ELL students learn best within the school environment.



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## Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself:
  - a. What is your first name?
  - b. What subject and grade(s) do you teach?
  - c. How many total years have you been teaching?
  - d. How long have you been teaching at this study site?
  - e. What professional development have you received regarding ELLs?
2. How would you define the term *English Language Learner*?
3. Describe a typical day in your classroom.
4. Explain your experiences with ELLs inside of the classroom.
5. Describe your interactions with ELLs outside of the classroom (e.g. hallway, school events, etc.)
6. How do you perceive the emotional needs of ELL students?
7. How do your ELL students interact with their peers?
8. How long do you believe it takes an ELL to acquire English academic proficiency? Why?
9. What is the time allotment for ELLs to acquire conversational language acquisition interaction and academic proficiency? Why?
10. What are the strengths ELLs bring to the inclusive environment?
11. What are the disadvantages ELLs bring to the inclusive classroom?
12. What pedagogical skills do you implement for ELLS within your classroom?  
  
Describe instructional strategies.  
  
Describe the classroom environment and format for learning.
13. How do you think your perceptions of ELLs and the instructional practices utilized within

your classroom are similar or different to those of your coworkers?

14. If you could design professional development opportunities regarding ELLs what topics and content would you want included and why?

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent Form**

### **CONSENT FORM**

**Research Study Title:** The Pedagogical Impact of Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of English Language Learners

**Principal Investigator:** Rachael Hoffert

**Research Institution:** Concordia University, Portland, OR

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Christopher Maddox

**Purpose and what you will be doing:**

The purpose of this study is to examine how teachers perceive ELLs within the middle school setting. It is not known how middle school teacher perceptions of ELLs within a Midwestern rural and suburban school setting influence the pedagogical practices utilized within the general education classroom. This study will provide direction on teacher perceptions of ELLs and pedagogical practices.

We expect approximately 11 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study.

We will begin enrollment on March 25, 2017 and end enrollment on May 25, 2017. To be in the study, you will meet with the researcher for an interview session and review the interview transcription. Doing these things should take less than 2 hours of your time.

**Risks:**

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be replaced by a pseudonym. Data will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside an office drawer. When I look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. I use pseudonyms to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after I conclude this study.

**Benefits:**

Information you provide will help those in educational leadership positions understand how middle school teachers perceive ELLs.

**Confidentiality:**

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

**Contact Information:**

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Rachael Hoffert at XXXXXXXXX X XXXXX XXX. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

**Your Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.



_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date

Investigator: Rachael Hoffert email: XXXXXXXXX X  
 XXXXX X XXX c/o: Professor: Dr. Christopher  
 Maddox  
 Concordia University – Portland  
 2811 NE Holman Street  
 Portland, Oregon 97221



Concordia University – Portland Institutional Review Board  
 Approved: April 5, 2017; will Expire: April 5, 2018

### Appendix C: School Permission Letter

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XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

February 2, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter to inform you that Mrs. Rachael Hoffert has requested to use XXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX as a study site for her doctorate dissertation. We are in full support of the research Mrs. Hoffert will conduct at our school regarding teacher perceptions of English Language Learners during the 2017 school year. A conference room will be provided to conduct individual interviews. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

XXX X. XXXXXXX, Principal

**Appendix D: School District Permission Letter Appendix E: School District Permission  
Letter**

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XXXXXXXXXXXX  
X XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXX XXXXXXX, XX XXXXX  
XXX XXX XXXX XXXXXXX

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter to inform you that permission has been granted to Mrs. Hoffert from the XXX district office to conduct her dissertation research regarding teacher perceptions of English Language Learners at XXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX during the 2017 school year. The district approves of Mrs. Hoffert using a school conference room at XXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX to conduct individual interviews.

Respectfully,

XX XXXXX XXXXXXXXXXX-Chief Academic Officer  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

## **Appendix E: Presentation of Study Sample**

### **Participant List**

Participant	Core Content Area	*Years of Experience
1	Health/PE	0
2	LA	1
3	LA	4
4	ELL	4
5	Social Studies	6
6	Social Studies	8
7	Math	9
8	Math	22
9	Health/PE	22
10	Science	27
11	Science	30

\*Years of Experience are defined and accounted for by the State Department of Education

### **Supplemental List**

12	Science	2
13	Language Arts	2
14	Health	12
15	Math	15
16	A.P. Language Arts	19
17	Social Studies	25

## Appendix F: Central Research Question Coding

### Research Question One: Open and Axial Codes

Open Codes	Axial Codes
6–8 years 5 years 4–7 years More than 3 years It takes years	Varied Perceptions of Timeframes for English Academic Proficiency
2 years Less than 2 years 1 year Much quicker than academic	Conversational Language Develops at an Accelerated Pace
Language willing to speak at home Depends on willingness to try Age level and interest Learn to converse with peers	Motivation Influences Language Acquisition
Diverse languages in the classroom Diverse cultures and experiences Cultural backgrounds and languages lead to empathy	Strengths Related to Language Diversity
Language Not understanding English Not understanding vocabulary Difficult academic terms Planning for different language levels	Language Barrier Vocabulary Challenges
Need to know ELL levels Need to understand language acquisition levels Strategies linked to levels	Professional Development Focused on WIDA Levels

### Research Question Two: Open and Axial Codes

Open Codes	Axial Codes
Need to fit in Higher the level of ELL associate with mixed social groups Misbehavior in the classroom linked to belonging Low levels withdrawn	Acceptance
Hallway trouble Males misbehave Possible prejudice with males Unconscious prejudice	Disconnect Among Latino Males

Males stick together ELLs travel in packs Talk to each other Want to work together	Cliques
Impact of presidential election Trump policy impact Racism Emotional experiences coming to U.S.	Need to be Understood
Need to know and identify with backgrounds Afraid to share stories Traumatic experiences Deportation	Empathy
TESOL cohort impact and awareness Know difference with family Know more about culture of ELLs Identify misunderstandings of culture and needs	Professional Development Focused on Cultural Differences

#### Research Question Three: Open and Axial Codes

Open Codes	Axial Codes
Building on previous knowledge Gradual release of responsibility Technology to build content awareness Demonstrations	Scaffolding Practices
Visual representation Sample sentences Word associations Non-examples Vocab four square sheets Translations Enunciate	Marzano Vocabulary Instruction Practices
Discussion Group work Pair work Turn/Talk Hands on activities Pair with native speakers Skits	Interactive Learning
Bell to bell Respect Routines Clear expectations	Classroom Management

Attitude	
10 minute increments of learning Group work Teamwork Effort Fun	Cooperative Environment
ELL focused PLCs ELLs share how they learn Strategies to levels Strategies for comprehension	Collaborative Professional Development Focused on how ELLs Learn Best

## Appendix G: Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Rachael L. Hoffert

Digital Signature

Rachael L. Hoffert

Name (Typed)

November 29, 2017

Date