

Full Length Research Paper

Elementary teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach English Language Learners

Barbara Wissink* and Suzanne Starks

Department of Teacher Education, College of Education Concordia University, Saint Paul, Minnesota, United States of America.

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With the steady increase in the English Language Learner (ELL) population in the U.S., this case study was aimed at capturing elementary teachers' perceptions of how well their teacher preparation program was prepared to teach ELLs. This work utilized the case study design, and included five North American elementary teachers as the subjects of the research who were teaching ELLs in a small Christian Academy located in southern Haiti. All of the teachers were fluent in English, and two of the teachers from Canada were also fluent in French. All of the elementary students spoke Creole. The instruments in the case study included a questionnaire, two interviews, and classroom observations of teaching. The data was coded and triangulated. The results of this study supported existing research, and specifically included a desire for explicit coursework on how to teach reading to ELLs within their teacher preparation program, as well as increased time instructing ELL students in high ELL population schools that utilized inclusive instruction during their student teaching placements. Required second language coursework was also recommended, as the teachers believed it would have enhanced their understanding of the complexity of language acquisition and develop empathy for ELL students.

Key words: Teacher education, English Language Learners, teacher perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

In North American universities, pre-service elementary teachers are being prepared to teach reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, and other subject areas to their young learners. Yet, many of these pre-service teachers are native English speakers and will be providing instruction through the use of the English language. A recent statistic stated that nearly five million English Language Learners (ELLs) attended U.S. public schools in fall 2015 (<https://nces.ed.gov>, 2018) which represented a substantial increase of 8.1% from the year 2000. With a steady increase in the ELL student

population in U.S. schools, the question arises of how effective preservice teachers will be in their instruction of these students upon completion of their college teacher preparation programs.

In the United States, the term English Language Learner (ELL) is a general term that refers to students whose native language is not English. These students are often living in a home environment with parents or caregivers who predominately speak a language other than English. These students attend schools where they are immersed in the English language throughout the

*Corresponding author. E-mail: wissink@csp.edu.

school day, as it the primary language used in instruction. As the ELL student population in the United States has steadily increased, teacher preparation programs at U.S. colleges and universities are tasked with the challenge of ensuring that the pre-service teacher candidates enrolled in their programs will be prepared to effectively instruct students whose native language is not English. Research has shown that specialized knowledge is required to effectively teach ELL students. Such specialized knowledge includes the teacher understanding the language experiences of the English Language Learner. It cannot be assumed that the elementary-aged ELL student is fully proficient in their native language, as fluent oral communication in the native or first language (L1) does not ensure that the ELL student is proficient in reading and writing (deJong et al., 2013). Therefore, the pre-service teacher preparation programs' effectiveness in providing teacher candidates with this knowledge needed to be determined after they were employed as classroom teachers, which was the intent of this study.

Other research supported the need for specialized instruction in pre-service teacher programs, and noted that some states, such as Arizona, have mandated college coursework called Structured English Immersion (SEI) that entails up to 90 h of instruction aimed at teaching strategies, such as word knowledge and building background, to pre-service teachers (Markos, 2012). Yet, Markos noted that these courses did not include pre-service teachers examining their own attitudes towards linguistic diversity, which she believed was an essential component in being an effective teacher of ELL students. Florida teacher preparation programs are also required to include two to three courses of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) that are taught by bilingual faculty or those with an ESOL endorsement and meet the ESOL teacher competency standards (Coady et al., 2011). In another study, Balderrama (2001) found that some education programs have created pre-service teacher courses that focused on building empathy for ELL students through an experiential component where the college students recorded their exposure to, or experiences with a language other than English in order to increase their understanding the complexity of language learning. Balderrama (2001) noted that empathy was an important component, but it should not be the sole focus of a course to prepare future teachers for working with ELL students. In light of these research findings, the actual perceptions of new teachers in classrooms with a high ELL population, such as the teachers in this study, were needed to determine if the need for specialized strategy and language instruction in their teacher preparation programs was accurate.

Another facet of teacher specialized knowledge for teaching ELL students has emerged in the research regarding the importance of understanding the student's cultural experiences. As native English speaking

teachers, a communication barrier exists that prevented many teachers from learning about the student's first language (L1) experiences due to the lack of ability to communicate with the student's parents or caregivers. Without communication between home and school, cultural misconceptions may have impacted student learning (Costa et al., 2005; de Jong et al., 2013). In addition, Garcia et al. (2010) proposed that culturally responsive classroom instruction relies on the teacher knowing and understanding their students' cultural experiences and without this rich background knowledge, the learning potential would not be maximized. Insights from new elementary teachers who have experienced teaching non-English speaking students from a different culture, such as the teachers from this study, were needed to shed light on the reality of the teacher preparation programs' effectiveness.

Teachers also need to have the specialized linguistic knowledge of each discipline they are teaching and be able to teach the content academic language and model the concepts the students are learning. This provides a challenge for teachers to find an effective way to engage ELL students in learning the new specialized terminology and make connections to learned vocabulary terms and concepts. Turkan et al. (2014) called this specialized knowledge Disciplinary Linguistic Knowledge (DLK) and proposed that it was necessary for the teacher to possess DLK in order to assist ELL students in accessing the concepts through oral and written communication. In other words, ELL students needed to be able to utilize the language in order to make sense of the new learning. However, teachers must avoid the misconception that ELL students will understand concepts simply based on exposure and practice with English words, as they noted that learning an additional language is seldom that simple (Harper and de Jong, 2004). Another study by Faez (2012) found that pre-service teachers who provided academic and language support for ELL students also stated that they felt a high level of responsibility for these students and would often advocate for them in the school setting. The need for experienced teacher insights on the linguistic knowledge and advocacy needed for teaching ELLs, such as those garnered in this study, proved to be essential for future teacher preparation program revision. In response to the steady increase of ELLs in American schools and the related concern of the preparation of teachers who will be educating these students, this study was aimed at understanding how effectively new elementary teachers are prepared in North American colleges or universities for teaching English Language Learners in their classrooms. As noted in the research above, teacher preparation programs in U.S. colleges and universities have started to recognize the need for the improvement of coursework and student teaching experiences in order to prepare pre-service teachers with specialized knowledge and relevant experience with the English Language Learner student population.

The primary goal of this study was to gain insights from new elementary teachers, who had less than five years of teaching experience, and who were currently teaching in a classroom with a high percentage of English Language Learners. These insights offered important contributions for university teacher education programs who are in the process of reevaluating the effectiveness of the required courses in the elementary education major, and possibly lead to new course creation that will better prepare new teachers in the field who will be teaching ELL students. The research has found that teachers who are better prepared have a higher likelihood of making an impact on student learning, which is often a large component of how teachers are evaluated in their school systems (de Jong et al., 2013). Therefore, it was essential to examine the effectiveness of teacher training programs through the lens of the teachers who were expected to have the specialized knowledge for teaching English Language Learners in their classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

The case study design was employed in this study, as it is an in-depth collection of information based on individuals in a bounded system, such as the Christian Academy located in southern Haiti. This research design is also classified as an instrumental case study as it sought to illuminate the issue of teacher preparation for teaching English Language Learners (Creswell and Guetterman, 2019). The context of study, participants, instruments, procedures, and the analysis were described subsequently to offer insights on how effective new elementary teachers are in teaching ELL students after the completion of their college teacher preparation programs.

Context of study

The study took place at a Christian Academy, which is a pre-kindergarten through second grade school located in the small village in southern Haiti. The school was developed by a Christian organization located in the Midwest region of the United States. The school employed five teachers from North America: three from the Midwest region of the United States, and two from Ontario, Canada. The five teachers in the pre-kindergarten through second grade school were native English speakers, and two of the Canadian teachers also were fluent in French. The teachers attended teacher preparation programs in North American universities within the past three years, and taught in classrooms where the ELL student population was 100%, as all of the students who attend Christian Academy were native speakers of Haitian Creole. The school also employed five Haitian teachers who were native speakers of Creole, and instructed the students in French, as this was a predominant language of educated Haitians. The North American teachers and the Haitian teachers co-teach in each grade level classroom. The Christian Academy had a Haitian director who spoke fluent Creole, French, and English, and also employed several Haitian support personnel that assisted in running the school operations. The school was developed and sponsored by a mission organization in the Midwest region of the United States.

Participants

The five North American elementary teachers were the participants

in this study, and were recruited through the use of email. The teachers' ages ranged from 23 to 27, and were therefore considered to be new elementary teachers with less than five years of experience. The five teachers' actual teaching experience ranged from six months to four years at the time of the study. Participants were not compensated for their participation in the study.

Instruments and procedures

The five teachers in this study consented to participate through the completion of a questionnaire, two on-site interviews, and by allowing one of the authors of this study to observe them teaching in their classroom in Haiti. The study's instruments included a questionnaire that included nine questions aimed at determining each teacher's demographic information and educational background, including details on their teacher preparation program. Such questions included their native language and other learned languages that they were fluent in, the number of years and grade levels that they have taught, as well as their specific college credentials. Additional information on their college coursework or experiences within their teacher preparation program in relation to teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) was asked, as well as if they were familiar with the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) of other teaching framework that was designed for supporting ELLs.

Each teacher was also interviewed. The interview included nine open-ended questions about the strategies that they used when they first began teaching non-English speaking students, and the challenges they faced in trying to communicate and teach them in English. The teachers were also asked about their Creole language instruction and how this helped them to communicate and teach more effectively in this setting. The topics of additional skills, professional development, teaching resources and curriculum that were being utilized were also explored in order to understand their existing pedagogy.

Classroom observations were based on the eight SIOP components, and were noted on an observational checklist. The eight SIOP components include lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, and review and assessment (Echevarria et al., 2017). This particular framework for effective ELL instruction was selected due to its use in several Midwestern school districts and teacher preparation programs in the U.S. The group interview questions originated from the classroom observation notes, and were based on the SIOP components that were evidenced in their instruction. When discussing each of the SIOP components that were observed in the lessons, the teachers were asked to reflect upon their teacher preparation program coursework in order to recall and identify if that particular skill was taught. The instruments, procedure, and purpose for utilization are outlined in Table 1.

Analysis

The data from this case study was coded and triangulated in order to identify emerging themes. The coding process involved labeling and segmenting portions of the transcribed responses in order to identify broad themes. Triangulation involved the process of corroborating pieces of evidence of the emerging themes among the three types of instruments used to collect data from the teacher participants in this study (Creswell and Guetterman, 2019).

The coding of the participants' responses to the questionnaire, two interviews, classroom observation checklist took place to determine if there were any emerging themes from the data that would illuminate how new elementary teachers perceived their teacher education program preparation for teaching English

Table 1. The instruments, procedure, and purpose for utilization.

Instrument	Procedure	Purpose
Questionnaire (nine questions)	Emailed and completed by each teacher before the site visit to Haiti	To obtain demographic and background information on each teacher's college preparation program.
Interview: Individual (nine questions)	Completed before classroom observations took place	To learn more about their experience teaching ELL students.
Classroom Observation Checklist (eight SIOP components)	Each teacher was observed teaching ELL students for a 45 minute period	To observe if the teachers were implementing any of the eight SIOP instructional components for teaching ELL students.
Interview: group (no prepared questions; questions arise from the sharing of classroom observations)	Completed after classroom observations took place	To share with the researcher insights from classroom observations in order to gain more specific details of the teacher's experiences and challenges teaching ELL students.

Language Learners after they gained experience in their own classrooms. Through the triangulation of the three instruments (questionnaire, interviews, and classroom observation checklist), the coding of emergent themes was evident. The emerging themes related to their experiences in teacher education programs and how well these programs supported them in their actual instruction of ELL students may offer important contributions for university teacher education programs.

RESULTS

Questionnaire responses

The demographic and general background information that was yielded from the completion of the questionnaire is outlined in Table 2. The additional commentary from the teacher participants on the questionnaire was discussed further in detail in Table 2. Table 2 shows that all five teachers stated that they were native English speakers, with two of the teachers speaking two additional languages. These two teachers noted that they were mandated to take French instruction in grades four through nine in their Canadian school system. They also noted that they learned Creole through teaching and formal language instruction at the Christian Academy in Haiti, and found that it was very similar to the French language. All five of the teachers earned four year degrees in Elementary Education, and had obtained teaching experience through teaching at the Christian Academy, with two of the teachers noting that they had one or two years of teaching in North America prior to teaching in Haiti.

It was noted that two of the five teacher participants earned English as a New Language (ENL) endorsements from their colleges, and that they had taken specific college coursework as a requirement for earning the ENL endorsement and were familiar with the SIOP model. These two teacher participants noted that this specific

coursework was assisting them in teaching English Language Learners in their current classroom. Two other teachers who did not list taking any specific college coursework aimed at teaching ELL students, were fluent in three languages: English, French, and Creole. They commented that learning these languages helped them in their teaching of ELL students. One teacher noted that she felt her Intercultural Communications and Religion coursework supported her work with ELL students. This was an interesting comment, as both of those college courses were usually considered to be general education courses, and not be required for pre-service elementary teachers.

In addition, many of the questionnaire responses included the description of college required experiences that some of the teachers felt their teacher education programs designed to support their teaching of ELL students. Four of the five teachers commented on having teaching placements or practicum experiences in schools with a high ELL student population, as well as completing Human Relations (HR) hours in schools with large ELL student populations. Two teachers specifically stated that visiting an English Immersion school as part of their college coursework was an important experience to support their current work with ELL students. One teacher mentioned that her travel abroad experiences in college benefited her understanding of students who were learning English.

Lastly, the questionnaire asked the teacher participants if they had any other thoughts regarding their college teacher education programs and its effectiveness for preparing them to teach ELL students. Two teachers commented on how learning a new language in their pre-college education was helpful to them during their college years. Two other teachers stated that they wished they had more experiences with English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and ELL students during college, more specific courses on how to teach reading to

Table 2. Questionnaire responses.

Teacher (Pseudonym)	Years of teaching experience	Grade levels taught	Native language	Additional languages	College credentials	College courses on teaching ELLs
Miss E	First year (6 months)	Kindergarten	English	none	BA: Elementary Education, English as a New Language (ENL)	Courses related to ENL Endorsement
Miss K	3 years	Pre-Kindergarten	English	French Creole	BA: Elementary Education, BA: Psychology Minor: Sociology	
Miss C	4	Kindergarten Grade 1 and 2	English	French Creole	BA: Elementary Education, BA: Psychology Minor: Sociology	
Miss M	4	Grade 2	English	none	BA: Elementary Education Minor: Art, Endorsements: Art Education, Coaching, K-8 reading	Intercultural Communication Religion class
Miss P	2	Grade 1	English	none	BA: Elementary Education Minor: Special Education ENL endorsement	Courses related to ENL Endorsement

students who are learning English, as well as coursework on teaching strategies for instructing ELLs.

Individual interview responses

When the five elementary teachers were individually interviewed, several common responses occurred. All of the teachers stated that they used actions, gestures, or hand motions when they first started teaching ELL students as a way of communicating. Three of the teachers added that they used teacher modeling to convey ideas, and one teacher mentioned that she used a lot of visuals and videos in her initial teaching. One teacher commented that she used a lot of repetition in her Kindergarten classroom.

As a part of their teaching at the Christian Academy, the five teachers were required to participate in Creole language lessons in order to support their communication with their students who are native Creole speakers. When the teachers were asked how this new language learning enhanced their teaching, they all commented that it helped them understand how complicated it was to learn a new language and increased their empathy for their students who were learning English and other subject areas through the English language. Two teachers stated that they really understood the importance of enunciation and an appropriate pacing of speech when they are teaching, as it was important for them during their Creole lessons.

When the teachers were asked about the challenges

they encountered when teaching their native Creole speaking students to read, write, and speak in English, they all commented on how the letter sounds were different in both languages which made the pronunciation of the English words very difficult for the students. They added that due to mispronunciations of English words by their students, it created more challenges for the students to spell and write correctly in English, which was also the language the students were to use to demonstrate and communicate their learning. The teachers were also asked how they addressed these challenges in the classroom, and four of the five teachers responded that they created their own curriculum materials in order to address the learning needs of their students. Two of the kindergarten teachers added that they added in more visuals and culturally relevant pictures when they created teaching materials. One example included removing the common picture of an igloo on student worksheets that were aimed at teaching the short /i/ sound with a picture of an iguana, as it was more relevant to their Haitian students' daily experiences.

The five teachers also responded that they searched the internet for resources that they can adapt for their students, when they had a stable supply of electricity. Websites such as Reading A-Z, YouTube, and Teachers Pay Teachers were mentioned as resources that were beneficial in supporting their adaptation of the curriculum materials in order to meet their ELL students' needs. One teacher commented on how difficult it was to find materials that are ready to be used and did not require modifications. When asked to reflect on their college

teacher education programs and how they could be improved to help them be better prepared teachers of ELL students, four out of the five teachers responded that they would like to have had more specific coursework on how to teach English Language Learners. Two teachers commented that they only had Human Relations (HR) hours with ELL students and how this was not enough to help them learn how to teach this population of students. One teacher added that she took a specific course on teaching strategies for ELL students, and found that it was more focused on teaching upper elementary or secondary ELL students instead of how to teach young learners who were learning English and were not strong readers or writers in their native or first language (L1). A different teacher commented on how she wished that she had more emergent reading strategy coursework, as she believed it would have supported her work in teaching ELL students to read. Another teacher who did have a practicum experience in a high ELL population school noted that it was not as beneficial as it could have been due to that school using a pull-out model for ELL instruction, rather than an inclusive model where the general education teacher is responsible for educating the ELL students and does not rely on the ESL teacher to provide the additional learning support needed by the child.

Classroom observations

Four of the five teacher participants were observed in their classroom teaching for a 45 minute period. One teacher had requested not to be observed due to student behavior issues that were taking place in her classroom. A checklist based on the eight SIOP components for sheltered instruction was utilized to mark observed teaching techniques that are the underpinning features of the eight SIOP components (Echevarria et al., 2017). Additional notes were recorded to describe the teaching that was observed, as well as the observable student responses to this teaching. Table three below provides an overview of the observation data that was collected.

As shown in Table 3, all four of the teachers who were observed teaching their ELL students utilized several features within the eight SIOP components. Interestingly, only two teachers had noted learning about the SIOP model in their college elementary education coursework on the questionnaire, yet all four teachers were implementing several of the SIOP features during the observation. Also interesting to note was the lack of a language objective in their lesson preparation, which is a key feature in the SIOP model. Language objectives articulate for learners the academic language functions and skills that they need to master to fully participate in the lesson and meet the grade-level content standards (Echevarria et al., 2017). Often teachers believe that this means they should focus on the vocabulary used in the

lesson, as three of the four teachers demonstrated during the classroom observation. Yet, language objectives also focus on the process and function of how language is used to help students access the concepts they are expected to learn. As language involves students in reading, writing, speaking and listening, an example of this involvement may be a language objective that states the process of how students will demonstrate their learning such as through writing an essay or giving an oral presentation. The functions of language may also be highlighted in a language objective that states that students will orally explain, report findings through writing, or read different author perspective on the same issue (Echevarria et al., 2017).

One notable trait that was observed in all four of the teacher's instruction was the teacher's natural and intermittent use of the Creole language in the classroom to support the students' understanding of a concept that was being taught in English. The use of the Creole language to support their students' learning was the result of the teachers' participation in learning the native language spoken in this part of Haiti. This may be considered a highly unique situation, as it may not be feasible for elementary teachers to learn the various native languages spoken by their ELL students. Yet, it does highlight the importance of how teachers may support their ELL students by understanding different languages.

Group interview responses

In a group setting, the five teacher participants were presented with the classroom observation notes, and all of them were quite surprised to learn that they were using several of the SIOP features in their teaching. They all stated that they did not intentionally plan their lessons with the SIOP model in mind. After listing a few of the features that were noted in their instruction, such as teacher modeling and appropriate pacing of the lesson, all five teachers mentioned that these were teaching skills that they learned in their college teacher education preparation programs, and that they were prepared to use them in their teaching.

When the teachers learned that three of the four of the observed lessons included intentional teaching and review of the vocabulary, they all commented that vocabulary instruction was a prominent part of their lesson design for all of the subjects that they teach, and that it was possible that one particular lesson did not have an observable focus on new vocabulary. One teacher commented that she felt that she planned her lessons based on vocabulary learning related to the concepts, as the students were most likely not familiar with the English words needed to understand the concept being taught. When asked if they were familiar with language objectives, which are a unique feature in the

Table 3. Overview of the observation data.

SIOP component	Miss E	Miss K	Miss C (Not observed)	Miss M	Miss P
Lesson preparation	(i) Content objective (ii) Vocabulary (iii) Teacher modeling (iv) Supplementary materials (v) Student opportunity for speaking, listening, and viewing	(i) Content objective (ii) Student opportunity for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing		(i) Content objective (ii) Vocabulary (iii) Teacher modeling (iv) Student opportunity for speaking, listening, and viewing	(i) Content objective (ii) Vocabulary (iii) Teacher modeling (iv) Supplementary materials (v) Student opportunity for speaking, listening, and viewing
Building Background	(i) Link to prior learning (ii) Key vocabulary was emphasized	(i) Several links to prior learning (ii) Key vocabulary was emphasized repeatedly throughout lesson		(i) Link to prior learning (ii) Key vocabulary was emphasized repeatedly through repetition and visuals on the board	(i) Several links to prior learning (ii) Key vocabulary was emphasized repeatedly throughout lesson
Comprehensible Input	(i) Pacing appropriate (ii) Teacher modeling (iii) Gestures (iv) Visuals projected on board	(i) Pacing was slow and appropriate (ii) Teacher modeling during the majority of the lesson (iii) Gestures such as clapping during counting (iv) Visuals on wall were referred to frequently		(i) Pacing appropriate and adjusted as needed (ii) Teacher modeling on board with the aid of a document camera (iii) Gestures (iv) Visuals projected on board with doc camera	(i) Pacing appropriate and teacher speech was enunciated and expressive (ii) Teacher modeling on board (iii) Gestures (iv) Visuals
Strategies	(i) Gradual release of responsibility	(i) Gradual release of responsibility (ii) Student use of strategies in stations (iii) Use of questions to support thinking skills		(i) Gradual release of responsibility (ii) Use of questions to support thinking skills	(i) Gradual release of responsibility
Interaction	(i) Student discussions (ii) Teacher spoke in Creole as needed to support students learning concepts that were in English	(i) Student discussions (ii) Students clapped out the syllables with partners (Ex: hap-py) (iii) Teacher spoke in Creole as needed to support students learning concepts that were in English (iv) Small group work		(i) Student discussions (ii) Teacher spoke in Creole as needed to support students learning concepts that were in English	(i) Small group work (ii) Individual work on the board with teacher support (iii) Teacher spoke in Creole as needed to support students learning concepts that were in English
Practice and Application	(i) Use of manipulatives	(i) Station work		(i) Students practiced writing new word family words and drew pictures	(i) Use of manipulatives
Lesson Delivery	(i) Content objective was supported (ii) Pacing appropriate (iii) Student engagement was evident	(i) Content objective was supported (ii) Pacing appropriate (iii) High student engagement was evident		(i) Content objective was supported (ii) Pacing appropriate (ii-) High student engagement was evident	(i) Content objective was supported (ii) Pacing appropriate and adjusted to support learning (iii) Student engagement was evident; use of song to refocus students as needed

Table 3. Contd.

Review and Assessment	(i) Vocabulary was reviewed (ii) Feedback to students was offered (iii) Checking in on small groups	(i) Feedback to students was offered (ii) Checking in on students in stations	(i) Vocabulary was reviewed as well as word family words (ii) Feedback to students was offered repeatedly	(i) Vocabulary was reviewed as well as the content objective (ii) Feedback to students was offered repeatedly
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SIOP model, all five teachers responded that they were not. This was interesting, as two of the teachers noted that they were familiar with the SIOP model from their earlier college coursework in the questionnaire, yet the use of language objectives was not a familiar feature to them at this time.

Lastly, the teachers were asked if they would like to add in any comments about their teacher preparation programs as it related to teaching ELL students, and all of them mentioned the need for more specific coursework on how to teach students who are learning English. Two of the teachers commented on needing more practice teaching reading in their student teaching placements, as this was one area they felt would have helped them teach their young students in the Christian Academy. In response to this comment, the three other teachers agreed that a larger focus of reading instruction during their teaching placements would have been beneficial.

Analysis

The themes that emerged from the questionnaire, interviews, and classroom observations were based on the teachers’ perceptions of their college teacher preparation programs and how they were impacting their teaching in a unique school setting where one hundred percent of the student population are English Language Learners (ELLs). The following themes occurred throughout

the teacher statements recorded in this study:

1. More specific coursework on how to teach ELLs should be required in teacher education preparation programs in order to produce teachers who are better prepared for the reality of teaching in today’s classrooms.
2. Reading coursework should include a stronger focus on how to teach emergent readers, which the teachers believed would support their work with ELL students.
3. Student teacher placements, including practicums, should include more time teaching reading and working with ELL students in an inclusive classroom setting.
4. Learning another language is beneficial for teachers, as it may support their teaching of ELL students who speak the same language, or assist the teacher in understanding the complexity of language learning and lead to the development of empathy for ELL students.

DISCUSSION

The implications of the findings in this study may be used to supplement or add credibility to the body of research presented in the introduction, for example, the insights from the experienced elementary teachers who were teaching ELL students in this study, support the need for college teacher education programs to offer more specific coursework on strategies for ELL instruction

(Markos, 2012), and for understanding language acquisition and the specific disciplinary knowledge (Turkan et al., 2014) needed to teach ELL students more effectively in both elementary and secondary teacher education programs (de Jong et al., 2013). Elementary teacher education programs, which include methods courses on teaching students to read, may find the need to redesign these courses in order to offer more practice with emergent reading strategies, and include culturally relevant literature aimed at the importance of understanding students’ backgrounds (Garcia et al., 2010). Student teaching practicums and placement expectations may also be redefined to include a larger portion of time spent on the teaching of reading, as this practice would support the new elementary teacher who is teaching ELL students. The findings may also inform how college teacher education departments select and plan student teaching placements, in order to ensure that at least one placement setting will involve the student teacher candidates in teaching ELL students in an inclusive setting where ELL students are not pulled out and intentionally supported by ESL teachers rather than the general education teacher.

Another implication from the study’s findings may result in teacher education departments examining their required general education courses for the teacher education students, as a linguistics course or foreign language requirement may help prepare teachers for teaching ELL

students, which also supports and extends (Turkan et al., 2014) findings for the pre-service teacher's need to understand language acquisition. These general education course requirements could also enhance the teacher candidate's understanding of the complexity of language learning, and foster the development of empathy for students who are learning a new language, as well as learning new concepts through instruction in this new language.

Limitations of the study

Case studies include a small number of participants, and due to this fact, the findings may not be generalizable. The setting of this case study was unique, as the elementary teachers were teaching in classrooms where the student population was one hundred percent comprised of native Creole speaking students. Another limitation of this study was related to the fact that all five teachers at the Christian Academy were being provided with Creole language instruction to support their communication with their students. In a public school setting in the United States, teachers would not be expected to learn their student's native languages, nor be provided with language instruction. Lastly, the replication of this study would be difficult due to the uniqueness of the setting which included the entire ELL student population in the school with a native language of Creole, and the teachers provided with instruction in that specific language. Therefore this study's findings could not be generalized through a repeated similar study.

Future research

Based on the limitations of the study, future research may involve replicating the instrument tools and procedures used in this study with new elementary teachers who teach in a more traditional school setting that includes a high ELL student population. In addition, this study's instrument tools and procedures could be utilized with new secondary teachers, as it would provide insights on specialized content area teachers' perceptions of their preparedness for teaching ELL students after completing their college teacher education programs. Lastly, teacher education faculty may conduct a similar questionnaire or exit survey with the teacher education graduates who have been teaching in a school setting for one year, in order to gain insights on how their teacher education programs could be improved in the area of ELL instruction practices.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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