Insights into the Lived Experiences of English Language Learners

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Rina A. Kassem
Curriculum and Social Inquiry Doctoral Program
Doctor of Education
in the National College of Education

Submitted in Partial fulfilment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education

National College of Education
National Louis University
June 2020
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INSIGHTS INTO THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Curriculum and Social Inquiry Doctoral Program

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Date Approved
Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine how schools can provide special language instruction to meet the increase in the numbers of English language learners (ELLs) and its effect on educators as well as students. This is a descriptive single case study that is focused on a public school, prekindergarten through fifth-grade located in a middle class suburb in a big metropolitan area in the Midwest. This study addresses the commonality problems that face a school system include academic performance, different cultural backgrounds, communication issues, professional development, and funding. To address these issues it is necessary to understand how the culture of a school affects a student’s performance in the school’s environment. The literature most relevant to this study includes; historical development of Bilingual Education Act, main contributors to drafting Bilingual Education laws, goals of the laws and policies in educational practices, instruction and interventions for ELLs, and vocabulary development and Language acquisition. The data from this study will come from interviews, observations, documentations, and physical artifacts.
DEDICATION

I want to give honor, glory, and praise to Almighty God, the most Merciful for giving me the energy to achieve this dream. This dissertation is dedicated with gratitude and love to my family, especially my parents, Ahmad and Souriya, who instilled in me a love for education, and for their unconditional love, prayers, and support. Additionally, it is devoted to my husband, Kassem, who encouraged me to never stop learning, and to my brothers (Houssam, Samer, Rami, and Firas), my son, Mohammad, and my daughters, Zena and Layan, who are the source of my inspiration, and continuous encouragement. I thank you!
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I would like to thank the teachers who participated in this study. I am forever grateful for the warmth and openness with which they welcomed me into their classrooms.

I would also like to thank my family for their never-ending love and encouragement. Mama (Souriya Khalil), Baba (Ahmad Kassem), and my brothers (Houssam, Samer, Rami, and Firas), thanks for putting up with me. I love you.

A huge thank you to my husband (Kassem Saad) for the endless hours that you spent alongside of me, your smiles, your giggles. You are my constant source of joy, and my comic relief during this doctoral journey. A big thank you to my three children (Mohammad, Zena, and Layan) for your continued and undying support. It kept me going.

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# Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE ........................................................................................................................................... 1

INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................................................... 1

Statement of the Research Purpose ......................................................................................................... 4

Contemporary Contexts of the Study’s Problem ................................................................................... 5

Teachers’ Challenges ............................................................................................................................ 5

Pressures on ELLs to assimilate ............................................................................................................. 7

Family and Parents .................................................................................................................................. 9

Theoretical Context: Democratic Schools/multicultural education ..................................................... 11

Theoretical Orientation of Second Language Acquisition: Socio-Cultural Theory .... 13

Inspiration for the Study ......................................................................................................................... 15

My Life Journey ..................................................................................................................................... 15

Significance of the Study ....................................................................................................................... 24

Research Question ............................................................................................................................... 25

Sub questions ......................................................................................................................................... 25

Roadmap of the Study ........................................................................................................................... 26

CHAPTER TWO ....................................................................................................................................... 28

LITERATURE REVIEW .......................................................................................................................... 28

Bilingual Education Act and Policies .................................................................................................... 28
Sociocultural Theory ...................................................................................................................... 28

Historical Development of Bilingual Education Act ................................................................. 31

Major Approaches to English Language Acquisition .............................................................. 35

Language Acquisition .................................................................................................................. 35

Dual Language Approaches in the United States ...................................................................... 35

Main Contributors to Drafting Bilingual Education Laws ......................................................... 38

Goals of the Laws and Policies in Educational Practices .......................................................... 41

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Bilingual Education Law and the Dual Language Program: A Critical Analysis .................................................................................................................. 43

Appropriate Instruction and Interventions’ Strategies for ELLS ................................................. 48

Vocabulary Development ............................................................................................................ 52

Summary ........................................................................................................................................ 53

CHAPTER THREE ............................................................................................................................ 58

METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................................................ 58

Statement of the Research Purpose ............................................................................................... 58

Research Question .......................................................................................................................... 58

Sub questions .................................................................................................................................. 59

Theoretical Positioning of the Study ............................................................................................. 59

Case Study as a Methodology and Research Design .................................................................. 59

Research Participants ..................................................................................................................... 63
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Site and Background</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods and Sources of Data</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations and Field Notes</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents and Physical Artifacts</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis and Interpretation</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Consideration of the Study</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Subjectivity</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity and Trustworthiness Strategies</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Study</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Methodology</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUNDAMENTAL BACKGROUND FOR UNDERSTANDING THE CASE</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Study</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Research Purpose related to Pilot Study</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question related to Pilot Study</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot’s Study Participant</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Study Data Analysis</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial Work Experiences</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Awareness</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Academic Success ................................................................................................................. 85
Effective Teaching Instruction for ELLs .................................................................................. 86
From the Pilot Study to the Dissertation Research: ................................................................. 88
Dissertation Research.................................................................................................................. 89
Dissertation’s Purpose Statement ............................................................................................. 89
Dissertation’s Research Questions ............................................................................................ 89
Sources of Data.......................................................................................................................... 89
Interviews................................................................................................................................. 90
Direct Observations .................................................................................................................. 91
Documents and Physical Artifacts .......................................................................................... 92
Study Setting.............................................................................................................................. 92
Data Collection Experience ...................................................................................................... 94
Participants............................................................................................................................... 94
Demographics of the Participants ............................................................................................ 94
Description of the Participants ................................................................................................. 95
Mrs. S ...................................................................................................................................... 96
Mrs. C ..................................................................................................................................... 97
Mrs. L ..................................................................................................................................... 98
Mrs. W .................................................................................................................................... 99
Ms. N .................................................................................................................................... 100
Ms. H .......................................................................................................................... 101
Ms. G .......................................................................................................................... 102
Ms. J .......................................................................................................................... 104
Mrs. T .......................................................................................................................... 105
Mrs. Z .......................................................................................................................... 106
Summary ...................................................................................................................... 107
CHAPTER FIVE ............................................................................................................ 109
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA .................................................................. 109
Data Analysis Procedures .......................................................................................... 109
  Analysis Process of Interviews’ Data ........................................................................ 109
  Analysis Process of Observations’ Data ................................................................... 111
Emergent Categories and Themes ............................................................................. 112
  Theme I: Impact of Parental Involvement ................................................................. 115
    Summary of Theme I: ............................................................................................. 119
  Theme II: Considering Cultural Background when Teaching ELLs ......................... 119
    Summary of Theme II: .......................................................................................... 125
  Theme III: Effective Instruction/ Strategies that contribute to ELLs’ Academic Success ........................................................................................................................................................................... 126
    Summary of Theme III: .......................................................................................... 133
  Theme IV: Challenges that Weaken ELLs Motivation and Success ......................... 134
Summary of Theme IV: ................................................................. 138

Theme V: School Curriculum Related to ELLs ........................................... 139

Summary of Theme V: ..................................................................... 142

Theme VI: School Policies and Standardized Tests ................................. 142

Summary of Theme VI: ................................................................. 147

Summary of the Interviews ................................................................ 148

Observations .................................................................................. 149

BPAC (Bilingual Parent Advocacy Committee) Observation .................. 150

Board Meeting Observation .............................................................. 152

English Learners Night .................................................................... 153

ELL Registration Event ..................................................................... 154

Classroom Observations ................................................................... 156

Observation’s Summary .................................................................... 171

Documents ....................................................................................... 173

Summary of the Findings ................................................................... 175

Triangulation and Interpretation of the Data ................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.

Impact of Parental Involvement ....................................................... 176

Considering Cultural Background when Teaching ELLs .................. 179

Challenges that weaken ELL’s Motivation and Success ........................ 182

School Curriculum Related to ELLs .................................................. 184
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citi Training Certificate</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Guide</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Work</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Interviews</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBIS Arabic Note</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPAC (Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee) Polish/English Document</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPAC Arabic (Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee)</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPAC English Meeting (Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee)</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL Team Meeting</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LIST OF TABLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Overview of Participants</td>
<td>.................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Themes derived from Mrs. B’s interview ........................................... 83
2. Emergent Themes extracted from the data........................................... 115
CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND LINGUISTICS OF ELLS

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language that goes to his heart.”

Nelson Mandela

The growing number of students from linguistically and culturally diverse families is on the rise in the United States, especially the number of Arabic-speaking students. Census 2000 data (United States Census Bureau, 2003) counted 1.2 million U.S. residents who reported Arab ancestry, representing an increase in the Arab population in the United States of nearly 40 percent during the 1990s. Acquiring a second language requires a collaborative and laborious work between educators and parents that goes beyond the basics of child development. Not surprisingly, having large numbers of Arab immigrant families has had an effect on early childhood education.

Similar to the Arab immigrants, non-English speakers’ families also face difficulties when it comes to early childhood education. Based on recent Department of Education published data, the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) enrolled in public schools increased from 3.1 million, to 5.2 million or by 63 percent. (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2011). During the same period, the general population of students enrolled in Pre-K-12 grew by 4.44 percent, to 49.86 million from 47.7 million. The National Education Association (2015) expects that by 2025 English language learners will comprise one-fourth of the student population in the nation.

Such an increase of English Language Learners poses unique challenges for educators striving to ensure that ELLs get access to the core curriculum in schools and acquire knowledge, as well as English-language skills. Properly addressing the educational needs of ELLs who have come to school with varying degrees of proficiency in English has proven to be a challenge for public
schools across the nation (Collier & Thomas, 2009). Furthermore, Collier (1987) argues that the time it takes to acquire second language skills depends on contexts, and age. Her findings show that immigrants (12-15 years) who arrive during middle school or early high school have the most complications acquiring language for academic purposes. These students, Collier proposes, need to acquire a large amount of content knowledge as well as develop language skills in a short period of time.

Almost all teachers at some point in their careers will deal with struggling ELLs. In addition, schools with ELLs can be places of contradiction and conflict, sources of misrepresented identity, and sites with many misunderstandings between teachers and students. The fast growing population of English Language Learners, which include students that are performing below grade level in English, brings many challenges to the classroom. Miller and Endo (2004) indicates that:

English Language Learners face a plethora of problems as they begin to build new lives in a strange land. The problems stem primarily from linguistic and cultural differences, and they are not the fault of teachers. However, it is important that teachers understand these problems so that they can provide these students the help they need (p. 786).

This expands the need in many public schools to provide special language instruction programs that can contribute to constructive learning. According to Lipka, Siegel and Vukovic (2005), “Given this number of ELLs, it is important to know whether their development of literacy skills differs in significant ways from children who are native speakers of English” (p. 39). The previous examples indicate that elementary public schools have experienced an increase in the numbers of ELLs, along with the increased expectations for their academic achievements. Abu-Rabia and Siegel (2013) note that, students with low reading skills in their first language will also
exhibit poor skills in their second language, and students whose performance is high in their first language will acquire good results in their second language.

In “Affirming Identity in Multilingual Classrooms” Cummins, Bismilla, and Chow, (2005) claim that prior knowledge refers not only to information or skills previously acquired in formal instruction but also to the totality of the expressions that have shaped the learner’s identity (p. 38). Researchers (e.g. Carrel & Eisterhold, 1988; Cheng, 2000; Millan, 1999) find that when the information presented in their readings matched the reader’s already present background knowledge, a greater understanding and recollection of the text exists. The opposite is also true; when readers do not have background knowledge of the content, or if the information is very new, they have difficulties in comprehension (as cited in Al-Mahrooqi, 2011, p. 1561). I agree with Al-Mahrooqi, for example, when I teach the transportation unit, students who travel more often than their peers, would answer more comprehension questions than students who do not have similar experiences.

As the English Language Learners population continues to grow, it is significant to recognize how the need to speak English or consequential bilingualism (de Jong, 2011) has required school districts to adapt bilingual program models to meet the linguistic needs of diverse immigrant groups. Van Lier (2004) posits that diverse linguistic groups will have an ominous future if the educational system ignores their linguistic needs. The design of Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) stresses a paradigmatic shift to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Breeze and Laborda (2016) report that a culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) addresses the integration of students into a new culture. As a bilingual teacher, I recognized the need to develop culturally sustaining pedagogy as clarified by Django Paris (2012) that, “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 93). CSP demands that educators understand the scope and breadth of the parallels between the
classroom and society. Furthermore, ELLs require flexible educators who are trained to work with, rather than against a cultural drive.

This chapter is divided into four major parts. In the first part, I will present my research purpose as well as the problem statement. The second part will focus on the theoretical context and theories of Second Language Acquisition. In the third part of the chapter, I will reveal my subjective perspective about the topic through sharing my personal life’s journey. The final section will include the research question and a roadmap of the study.

**Statement of the Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to find out, from the perspective of public school teachers, how their ideas and teaching strategies are applied to foster the academic success of their ELLs and the social challenges these students face in school. I also hope to develop some understanding of how these practices affect students’ experiences. This is a descriptive single case study that is focused on a public school, pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade, located in a middle class suburb in a metropolitan area in the Midwest.

The focus of my research work is on public schools’ delivery of special language instruction to the increasing numbers of English language learners (ELLs) and its effect on educators as well as students. Today, while teaching the common core curriculum to ELL student population, educators are faced with many challenges—academic performance, different cultural backgrounds; communication issues, professional development, and funding. In order to teach these students effectively, ELL teachers will need to “demonstrate knowledge of the language of instruction to levels consistent with the demands of the literacy and content standards” (Brisk & Proctor, 2012, p. 115). To address these issues I argue that it is necessary to understand how the culture of a school affects students’ performances in the school’s environment.
Contemporary Contexts of the Study’s Problem

The topic at the center of my work is that the fast growing population of ELLs, which include students that are performing below grade level in English, bring many challenges to the teachers in the classroom. In addition, lack of parents’ knowledge of the school culture adds another disadvantage to the success of ELLs. These students come from various backgrounds and often face multiple challenges including assimilation as well as discrimination in the public schools.

According to Roekel, 2008:

Many teachers lack practical, research-based information, resources, and strategies needed to teach, evaluate, and nurture ELL students, whether those students were born in this country, or elsewhere, or whether they are the first, second, or third generation to attend an American public school (p. 2). Other challenges the ELL populations may face include the following challenges:

Teachers’ Challenges

As a bilingual teacher who works in a school of more than 50% population that comes from different regions of the world, I find it challenging to work with the background experiences those students bring to the classroom. These challenges contradict some of the expectations teachers have. NEA (2008) states, “the issue of communication looms large for teachers of ELL students” (p. 2). A survey (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2004) of California teachers found “poor communication among students, teachers, parents and the community” to be a huge issue (as cited in NEA, 2008, p. 2). I do not think this issue is restricted to California. For instance, in my school, general education teachers always come to me complaining about the bilingual students not bringing field trip forms or other important documents back to school on time. This is due to language barriers as well as poor teacher-parent relationships. For example, when talking with parents I
realized that parents do not understand the information sent home due to language barrier differences. I believe that communication is a very important issue to help ELL students succeed in school. Cooper, Denner, and Lopez (1999), point out that immigrant parents who have limited English skills often find it difficult to monitor their children’s academic progress, keep track of their children’s after-school activities, and understand their children’s experiences (as cited in Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009, p. 714)

Other challenges that NEA included in the report was “the lack of tools to teach ELL students as well as the appropriate assessments to diagnose student needs and measure student learning” (p. 2). Teaching ELLs require knowledge of their diverse cultures. When students do poorly on tests, it cannot simply be assumed that they lack the intelligence or skills. Sometimes, students have not been exposed to culturally relevant materials or do not have the vocabulary in English (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez–Orozco, 2015). In addition, teachers should be familiar with second language acquisition research. Many teachers who teach ELLs lack those important tools. Furthermore, teachers need the right professional development to conduct ELL assessments. Many ELL teachers find themselves at a disadvantage because they are unfamiliar with the accommodations that ELL students require.

Another challenge that arises is the teacher’s ability to manage diverse classroom in culturally competent ways. Weinstein, et al., (2003) declare that:

Teachers sometimes are acting in ways that actually discriminate against students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds. Such discrimination occurs when teachers do not recognize that behavior is culturally influenced; when they devalue, censure and punish the behaviors of non-mainstream groups; and when they fail to see that, their management practices alienate and marginalize some students, while privileging others (p. 269).
This unfortunate behavior on the part of teachers is normal since most are not aware of the different cultures students bring to school. In one of the general education rooms, the homeroom teacher always makes one particular very active bilingual student miss recess, because he does not follow school procedure of being quiet and taking turns. She never stopped for a moment to think why this student was behaving in such manner, her behavioral expectations in class is definitely different from the one that exist in the student’s home. Furthermore, professional development workshops that emphasize cultural behaviors can attribute to better classroom management.

**Pressures on ELLs to assimilate**

In the school where I work, I noticed that there is great pressure for the ELL students to assimilate, so they can pass the grade level tests. These young students are not interested in learning their home languages because they feel more successful speaking fluent English. Miller and Endo (2004) argue that “despite the 1974 ruling in Lau v. Nicholas that required schools to provide services to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students, recent government education policy has sought to bring immigrant students to “proficient” levels of English within three years”. In addition, public school teachers across the board believe that if an ELL student speaks fluent English he/she will be successful in mainstream classrooms.

On the other hand, Miller and Endo insist that most of the time these same students still lack the academic language that will help them succeed in the regular education classroom. Miller and Endo (2004) assert that the government’s “policy contradicts language research that indicates that students need five to seven years in language programs to reach academic proficiency” (p. 786). Many students come into ELL classes with very low scores in the four domains, listening, speaking, reading and writing. The results of the Access Test—which addresses the English language development standards- that is conducted in January for all ELL students in the nation, supports the
benefits of teaching ELL students the four domains of English language. This is in agreement with Miller and Endo’s argument that government policies that push ELL students to exit these programs to mainstream general education classes too early tend to suffer the most since they would lose the support that they get from ELL teachers. I also noticed that students, whose parents refuse the ELL / ESL programs, probably thinking that their children speak English fluently, are the ones that suffer the most.

To ensure successful transition for ELLs, I believe that ELLs should bring their cultural background to the classroom and share their experiences with other students. This will certainly help provide an environment of acceptance and belonging. Cummins (2005) mentions that when students take ownership of their learning- when they invest their identities in learning outcomes- active learning takes place (p. 38). In addition, Miller and Endo agree and acknowledge that.

New language learners are likely to be more successful if instead, they are encouraged to embrace their own culture as they learn the new language. They should be encouraged to add to their existing language and culture, rather than to exchange their own for the new one (p. 788).

Many educators share the same point of view as Miller and Endo about the benefits of including the culture and language of ELLs in the acquisition of a new language. On the other hand, many school districts prefer the assimilation of ELLs as soon as they get to the classroom. By rejecting ELLs’ native language and culture, students may feel that they are somehow inferior and the language and culture that they are learning in school are superior, thus experiencing a form of racism and discrimination within their learning environments. Cummins, et al., (2005) state, “it is hard to argue that we are teaching the whole child when school policy dictates that students leave their language and culture at the school house door” (p. 38) Scholars such as Bernal and Ladson-
Billings have asked “whose knowledge counts, and whose knowledge discounted?” (As cited in Yosso, 2005, p. 167).

This kind of debate about whose race’s knowledge and about racism has been discussed throughout U.S. history. Murrel (2007) states, “Contrary to popular belief, there is an increasing, not a decreasing impact of race in school practices and policy” (p. 6). It has also been over a century since DuBois predicted that racism would continue to emerge as one of the United States’ key social problems (as cited in Yosso, 2005, p. 167). Schools are supposed to act as a vehicle of equality in a democratic culture (Dewey, 1916). Unfortunately, equality only exists on paper.

In addition, political conflicts in the same school system, powerful economic groups, funding disparities, and curriculum constraints affect our schools’ ability to play its role as an educational institution in a democratic society. The U.S. Department of Education, 2002 notes that many bilingual programs face implementation challenges characterized by inadequate resources, uncertified personnel, and poor administrative support (as cited in Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2015). Issues of equality and discrimination are affecting ELLs and other minority groups and people of color.

**Family and Parents**

Research studies on immigrant families are largely concerned with the families’ lack of social and cultural capital. Aldous reports, “parents’ high aspirations and value of education, regardless of direct involvement with school activities or academic tasks, were found to be related to higher achievement” (as cited in Arzubiaga, et al., 2009, p. 255). I agree with Aldous as I noticed immigrant parents always try to push their kids to achieve their best. They value education as the only avenue for success in life since most of the students I have taught for the past ten years come from poor families.
As the parents get involved in their kids’ education, such as participating in teacher-parent conference, respond to notes I send home, their kids show much better results in class compared to students whose parents are not involved at all. However, Carreón et al. state that “parents were characterized as in need of guidance because they lacked an understanding of school culture, the implicit social rules that permeate schools, their rights within educational systems, and the organization of educational systems” (as cited in Arzubiaga, et al. p. 255). Magnuson et al. notes that the social, economic, and educational “instability” of parents were contributing factors in creating a host of difficulties, including isolation, stress, and environmental disadvantages. Economic resources were identified as necessary to support learning such that the low income of many immigrant families was perceived as a risk (as cited in Arzubiaga, et al. p. 255).

In our school, the administration initiated a new program where a parent volunteer is teaching English every Thursday to a group of mothers who are having some difficulties helping their children with homework due to language barriers. This program is not only helping the parents but also their children as well. Two other issues identified by Arzubiaga, et al. (2009) as problematic were limited English proficiency and parents’ educational levels. In my school, for example, parents do not always come to parent-teacher conferences because of communication issues. Furthermore, speaking a different language prevents them from participating in school activities as well as helping their kids with homework.

Communicating and collaborating with families is an integral, but challenging component of effective classroom management (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003, p. 273). According to the authors, another challenge that comes up when dealing with families of different cultures is the issue of generating a genuine two-way communication. “Too often, teachers assume that poor, uneducated parents simply do not care, or that parents who are learning English as a second
language have nothing of value to offer” (p. 274). Over the years, I met with many parents who discussed with me their passion for understanding all aspects of their children’s schooling, however cannot come to school and volunteer due to language barriers and other challenges such as, working two jobs nor having extended family to help with younger kids. In order to search for solutions to the assumptions made about the lack of involvement of immigrant parents in their kids’ education, it is important to understand the theoretical context and linguistics of ELLs.

Theoretical Context: Democratic Schools/multicultural education

One of the most important aspects of public schools is to provide equality in a democratic setting, where students act as citizens of the school who feel they belong to one community. Dixon (2003) states, “just as important is making school a place where students of color, the ones who most often experience less success in public schools, can not only be successful, but also feel like they belong” (p. 39). I believe that this statement is valid not only for students of color but also to ELLs who too are the other. In Embracing Race, Dixon (2003) cites Moses, a philosopher of education, who argues for race-conscious policies, suggests that living a good life, having an ideal public education and personal autonomy is tied to the goals of self-determination, authentic cultural identity, and favorable social texts of choice. In addition, Moses argues that students cannot authentically be themselves when their cultures and languages are devalued, suppressed, and pathologized by school practices and policies. She prefers bilingual education to ESL because she believes that bilingual education values the students’ native language. My experience as a classroom teacher reinforces Moses’s assertion. To elaborate on this issue, I have a student this year that I share with the general education teacher. He is a six year old boy who just came from oversees with no knowledge of the English language. He begins the school day crying and refuses to take off his hat and coat. He also sits alone in a corner and does not participate in any of the classroom
activities. When he comes to my bilingual classroom, he acts differently and feels more relaxed because my students and I can understand his language and can more easily communicate with him.

Moreover, Moses’ philosophy for multicultural education is in agreement with the Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective on education, which recognizes that racism has unfortunately become common in the American society.

Moses believes, “that multicultural education: (a) cannot only shape attitudes that honor multiculturalism, but can also evaluate, challenge, and end racism and oppression; (b) creates social contexts where all students are treated equally; and (c) fosters empowered, self-determining students” (as cited in Dixon, 2003, p. 40). Arzubiaga, Nogeuron, & Sullivan (2009) claim that bilingual students feel marginalized, socially neglected and educationally underserved. They also feel that they are labeled as problematic students. In addition, the researchers explain that students of immigrant families are being categorized in ways that emphasize their inability to master English. In 2015, Adair stated that educators often consider limited English proficiency of ELLs as a huge hurdle to learning and more than likely would be placed in special education classes. In 2006, Abedi argued that tests designed for mainstream students might not be suitable to identify ELLs (as cited in Sullivan, 2011, p. 220). So far, I have witnessed misplacement of children of immigrant parents so many times in the eleven years I have been teaching. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2000):

CRT in education is defined as a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural cultural and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of African American and Latino students. CRT asks such questions as: What role do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination?(p. 42).
Ladson-Billing & Tate (1995) claim that the multicultural paradigm works in a way identical to civil rights law, which is undermined regularly to benefit white people. They argued that the current multicultural model is entangled in liberal ideologies that offers no radical change in the current order. Ladson-Billing & Tate concluded that critical race theory scholars reject the multicultural paradigm that benefit everybody and offers nothing to anyone hence maintain the current order.

I have just explored the viewpoints of the multicultural education in a democratic setting. Now, I would like to present the theoretical orientation of second language acquisition.

**Theoretical Orientation of Second Language Acquisition: Socio-Cultural Theory**

In order to meet the needs of ELLs, it is important to take into consideration several theories and approaches of language development and language acquisition. Sociocultural orientation is the theory that captures my thinking about language acquisition, which I will discuss in this section.

The socio-cultural theory initially proposed by Vygotsky in 1978 refers to the human learning processes, which includes language learning. Other researchers, such as Lantolf, Swain, Lapkin and others expanded Vygotsky’s theory to Second Language Acquisition (SLA), and concentrated on how second language acquisition can be interpreted through the socio-cultural perspective. Johnson, 2001 summarizes Vygotsky’s social-cultural theory in terms of three major principals: (a)” the developmental analysis of mental processes; (b) the social origin of human mental processes; and (c) the role of sign systems in the development of human higher mental function” (Johnson, 2004, p. 105).

According to Vygotsky, “mental development arises as a consequence of the interaction of two distinct processes, one with biological roots and the other with sociocultural origins. These two developmental lines merge during the ontogenesis of children” (Lantolf, 1994, p. 418). From this
aspect, children are active participants in the learning process whose capacities are influenced by the culture of the environment in which they develop (Anning, Cullen, & Fleer, 2008).

The Zone of proximal development (ZPD) is another core concept of socio-cultural theory. It is described as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

ZPD indicates that there is a difference between what students can do on their own and what they can do with the help of others. In other words, a student may be able to complete more cognitively challenging tasks if he/she has the appropriate support from an adult or peer. The ZPD uses “social interactions with more knowledgeable others to move developmentally forward” (Blake & Pope, 2008, p. 62). In the case of language education, the teacher’s support and peers’ cooperative efforts are essential for second language development. The ZPD insists that the teacher’s most essential role is to deliver instruction and allow for the social interaction students need to move from what they know to what they need to know. Many researchers on language learning tried to study how social interactions can lead to successful second language acquisition.

Swain (2000) claims that in collaborative dialogues “language use and language learning can co-occur. It is language use mediating language learning. It is cognitive activity and it is social activity” (p. 97). This stresses the significance of active participation for language acquisition. Lantolf explains, “Learning is embedded within social events and occurring as an individual interacts with people, objects, and events in the environment” (as cited in Liang, 2013, p. 57). Play is an important activity in Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory of development. Through play, children create a zone of proximal development in collaboration with others, in which they perform beyond their current abilities since they have the support of others (Vygotsky, 1978). The belief is that what
a child was once able to achieve with the help of others, she/he will be able to achieve on her/his own later in life.

In regards to SLA, many researchers, have noted the occurrence of language play and identified its significance in the process of acquisition for both children and adults. The continual interactions in the classroom as a whole class, small group or peer work can foster the development of social skills that are supported throughout Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory. I have just explained the theory that captured my thinking about language acquisition, and now I would like to discuss my life journey during the civil war.

**Inspiration for the Study**

**My Life Journey**

Rolling hills of greenery, a culturally rich environment, and a frequent tourist site, my birthplace was one of the most amazing and beautiful countries in that area. As a Palestinian born in Lebanon, I had only lived four short years of my life as any normal, happy child. I used to attend school every day like all the other children. I used to wake up so happy waiting for the bus to come and pick me up in front of my parent’s house. I used to play with my friends like all the other children. I used to ride my bike on the balcony. I vividly remember running out to the balcony excitedly, squealing, “Baba came, Baba came!” when I heard the peeping sound my dad’s car would make that would alert me of his arrival. I can still remember the street where my mother would buy me new toys. I also fondly remember my school, my teachers, my gym class, and my parents sitting on the benches clapping for me from afar during competitions. Everything was beautiful, real-normal.

When the mid-seventies rolled around, everything I had ever known and held dear to me came crashing down. I was a little girl in a private Catholic school attending kindergarten when the
Lebanese civil war started. School was my whole life at that age. Mrs. Chukair was my favorite teacher because she used me as a role model for other students. She used to ask me to stand in front of the class and tell everyone that they should follow my steps, from dressing nicely to finishing homework. I was so proud and happy. The nice friends that I met back then still live in my memory – even the mean classmates- with all the talks, the giggles, and the happiness.

The Phalangists- a Lebanese militia faction that was engaged in the civil war- attacked two buses and murdered the majority of the passengers. This marked the beginning of a seemingly endless cycle of violence, which lasted for about fifteen years. The warring parties were many: Socialists, Leftist, Phalangists, Amal and many others. Alliances formed, then changed and new alliances formed of necessity and benefits. It was a very dangerous and horrific war.

My family, at the time, lived in the Eastern side of the city, a Phalangists-controlled area, near our friends and family. Heartbreakingly, Phalangists began to kill people left and right if they did not share the same ideals. These same forces abducted my father for no apparent reason; my dad had nothing to do with any political or militia parties. As a teacher working towards becoming a principal, he used to go to school with stacks of papers and come home with another stack of books and papers to work through during the evening.

My mother was panic-stricken, tears constantly pouring down her cheeks, and all I remember were the gut-wrenching feelings of pain, confusion, and fear. We were unaware as to where he was or what was happening to him until one of our close family friends who is of a different religion began to search for him. My father told us of the days he used to fall asleep with no food to nourish him and the torture he endured day after day. They hanged him from the ceiling by his feet and beat him until no shouts of protest were heard any longer, only a gurgling, which spewed forth blood that would gush forth from his body. When he heard the jingling of the keys against the rusted metal
bars of the prison cell where many of the abductees were imprisoned, he fled to the bathroom, pretending to need it. He knew when the militiamen barged into the bare, grungy room, wielding their weapons, and roughly removing person by person, those people were never to be seen again. 

This horrifying routine occurred for nearly three months until his friend had located him. In order to release him from captivity, he convinced the Phalangists of the truth that his occupation was that of a simple school principal and that he had nothing to do with what was going on politically in the area. He also convinced them of his status as a family man. My father kept quiet throughout his time in prison wondering about the bad treatment and humiliation surrounded him. He suffered for many months and days in prison for no fault he did, but because his nationality differs from the Phalangists. It is hard to reason with people who were consumed with hatred and ignorance, but he did so with dignity. Although my dad was a well-respected principal, his wisdom and principles did not help thaw the hatred and ignorance of his captors. As Paulo Freire (1970) says:

Humility cannot demand that I submit myself to the arrogance and stupidity of those who do not respect me. What humility asks of me when I cannot react appropriately to a given offense is to face it with dignity. The dignity of my silence, of my look. (p. 89)

During the first week of being alone, my mother, who was taking care of three young children on her own, knew that there was no longer a “normal” and safe life for our family in this area. The neighbors, our former friends, accosted her during this time and forced her to give up our hard-earned car and the apartment that held so many dear memories, as we were told, “We no longer belonged there.” They mercifully allowed her to take a change of clothes for myself and my two younger brothers and diapers for the youngest-only seven months old at the time-in a small red bag, before we were promptly kicked to the curb with nowhere to go.
I still remember feeling scared as I witnessed the burned bodies strewn on the streets. I still remember the people who were screaming from their pain, needing it to end and for those who were shot dead with no mercy as we fled the place that I used to call my home. Still to this day, whenever I watch a movie or a show that feature war scenes, my immediate dreams that night would not be dreams at all, but nightmares of the reality I once lived during the civil war. These retched memories never go away; it always feels as if it were yesterday.

My scared and helpless mother had taken us to her friend, who had previously fled the area, to be safe away from the war zone. We roomed at Auntie Rose’s house for 21 desolate days until a well-trusted friend picked us up and drove us to the Western part of the city where my uncle had a vacant apartment in which we stayed. With the help of good Samaritans, my battered father joined us after one month in captivity.

In the western region, we all began our new lives together and there was a new school for me filled with new people I did not know and a new job for my father. It was quite difficult to leave everything dear to me behind and start a new life in a new area. It was shocking and scary. At first, I was the new girl in the school who did not want to talk to anyone. I just wanted to go back to my old house and my old school where I had a beautiful life. After my initial bout of sadness, I finally met new neighbors and friends in the new apartment. I began another chapter in my life, a decidedly happier one.

We lived there safely for about five years until we had to relocate once again because of my father’s placement as a principal in another government regulated school. In our new home, different factions dominated that area who, at the time, were killing people they deemed as “the enemy”.

After several uneventful years, fighting unfortunately broke out between two factions, Socialists and Amal movement-Lebanese factions. Snipers trashed the land. Nothing alive was safe from their deadly shots. The snipers were everywhere from rooftops in residential areas to high-rise buildings in the business areas shooting at anything that moves in alleys, streets, and open areas. As a result, the body count was rising at a rapid rate. Schools closed for weeks at first, then for months as no clear winner emerged as this round of fighting dragged on. These closings left us with nothing to do except for playing cards and board games. We used to wait anxiously for the schools to reopen, so we could feel we had some semblance of normality in seeing our friends again.

It took an entire year until the fighting stopped and things were slowly becoming normal again. That was until a new round of fighting began by Amal movement attacking Palestinian civilians in the camps where they live and elsewhere. Amal fighters brutally killed people who had identifications that were not up to par. These innocent Palestinians were dragged out of their supposedly safe homes and held at gunpoint and were asked to state where they were from. Amal spared no soul; they killed them in front of their wives, husbands, kids, and neighbors. They flung the supposed “enemies” alive from the rooftops of high-rise buildings. Mortar shells and car bombs became a fashion of the time, and everybody wore the aftereffects of them. We used to miss weeks of school at a time and if we attended for a day, we did not know if we would return home safely, if at all. I can distinctly remember the prayers I used to make begging God to return me home safely.

There was one day in particular that I will always remember. I had just finished school and began to tread home cautiously, my eyes wary of all that was around me. Then I heard it—the sound of an explosion setting off to the right of me. The building looked like Swiss cheese. I was only thirteen years of age when bombs rained from the heavens above and I was certain I would not see
my family ever again. I flitted from building to building; dodging as much debris as I possibly could and took cover inside buildings when needed. I thankfully arrived home unscathed.

One dreary morning, one of our neighbors, a close friend of the family, persuaded us to leave. It was no longer safe for us to stay in that neighborhood because most of the people were Amal supporters. Khalil-soldier in the Lebanese Army-left his family and risked his life, offered his help to drive us out the dangerous area, which meant leaving behind our belongings, the apartment, our good neighbors, friends, schools, and the new life we had set up for ourselves. Khalil left us in a safe place and went back to his family. We continued driving for an hour until we reached a small village far away from the city where my grandparents lived. My family lived there for about seven months. Throughout this time, we attended the schools there as what was designated, “audit” students. We used to go with our neighbors without book bags or any school supplies because we were just waiting to go back to our old school. We never knew that we would spend more than half of the school year waiting. We did not know whether we were going back to the apartment, or live in that village forever. My family lost everything all over again, and yet, through these trying times, I was so grateful for my father who always did his best and worked so hard to provide the best life for our family under those circumstances.

When the war ended and many years passed, we returned to our home in Beirut. Everything was different; bullet holes riddled the buildings and sad stories echoed throughout the city. We felt lucky enough to have, at the very least, a solid roof over our heads. However, the apartment was bare; only dust bunnies filled the corners of its vacancy. Malicious neighbors who lived across the street ransacked our apartment and stole all of our hard-earned personal belongings. With all of these assaults against our family, throughout the war, I became accustomed to a routine filled with bullet dodging and the feeling of uncertainty, as I never knew if I would live to see the next day.
Finally, the Civil War ended and a new one began less than a year later with the invasion of 1982 from a neighboring country. We had to leave our home and our schools again with nowhere to live and no one to rely on. Back then, we were a family of seven and it was very dangerous to be in cars or out in the public eye because we did not know when or where the airplanes would drop their missiles. Our fight for survival lasted until a friend of my father offered him a suite in a hotel in the middle of the city. As a teenager, I was ecstatic to live in the suite, as it was very nice and spacious. Then life started to get more difficult again as the days passed because there was never enough power or water. The planes would drop bombs for hours and hours nonstop. I remember we used to flee to the basement where the stench that permeated the air used to cling to our clothes for days on end. We huddled close for warmth and protection. Hundreds of displaced families used to sit together in this cramped area. Children cry’s and babies’ wails pierced the air, a sort of lullaby, and the building was constantly shaking because of the intensity of the bombing. We heard the bombs until the early hours of the morning and no one was able to sleep. When everything calmed down for a short period, people would check on relatives and their loved ones to see if they were still alive. I remember waiting in long lines to fill big gallons of water. My brothers and I used to stand for long hours just to fill few gallons that were not enough for the whole family to cook drink and shower. We used to carry the large receptacles five stories up to where we stayed, because the power was out at this point and the elevator was not working.

The next day my brothers and I would wait in line to get bread and other necessities, and I felt that the line just kept on growing with no apparent end in sight. The streets were dangerous, the food was very expensive, and nothing could be found. My dad was not able to go to the school where he worked and he had to wait for months to receive his paycheck. It was an extremely difficult life. I lived this harsh life in the small city of Beirut with my family and suffered for
twenty-one years as a “Palestinian born in Lebanon”. The plight of Palestinians in Lebanon never stopped after the civil war.

The successive governments of Lebanon passed aggressive and inhumane laws that took away every Palestinian basic civil right. As Paulo Freire observed, “No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so” (1970, p. 23). I believe that when people do not voice their concerns against oppression there will be no hope for the liberation of humanity on earth. This lack of open-mindedness affects people badly, especially children who were the major victims of the Lebanese civil war.

The Lebanese Civil War finally ended when I was in my fourth year of college. I was twenty-one years old when I graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in Accounting. Soon after, my life completely changed when I met my friend’s brother Kassem. He had been in the United States for a while, and was visiting his family. I was not planning to leave Lebanon, but after he proposed to me, I happily accepted. Soon after, we were married, and moved to the U.S. I had left everything and everyone that I had ever known to live in a strange country. It was very hard for me to leave my family, friends and neighbors behind.

Most things in my new life were different, and learning to adjust without the support of those I had relied on my entire life made me stronger, and more independent. My husband and I moved to a different state, so we only had ourselves to rely on. Language was another barrier that I encountered. Although I learned how to read and write in both English and French, our curriculum never included the speaking domain. This posed some challenges in my day-to-day activities, especially when it came to navigating the school system when I had my first child. Even though I did not have the full background and was not fluent in spoken English, I still managed to communicate with people around me as best as I could. As it is possible to argue that language is
bound to culture, through the improvement of my own language skills, I furthered my understanding of the new culture I was immersed in within everyday life. Making friends in my new home became easier with time. My neighbors began to visit me more often, and I started to volunteer at my son’s school. As a result, I made more friends with the parents in the same school. They were always there to lend a helping hand whenever it was needed.

As my thirst for knowledge was unending, I started thinking about a profession that would help those who have similar stories to mine. Albert Einstein once quipped, “Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile.” I knew that there was no better way to help others than by becoming a teacher, so I started to take prerequisite courses for an education major at the local community college. Later, I pursued a master’s degree in Education. For as long as I could remember, I have admired the role of teachers and the lasting impact they potentially have on their students’ lives. I became an ELL teacher where I believe that I am most able to influence others in a positive, unique, and personal way, which had been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. As William Doll (1980) states, “Knowledge is that which create-interactively, dialogically, conversationally-always within our culture and its language” (p. 136). My life experiences in Lebanon have inspired me to devote my professional life to others by becoming an educator.

As a teacher, I am always searching for successful, appropriate, and legitimate teaching methods that help ELL’s succeed in school. I can relate, with what I believe to be of great value, my vast and extensive experiences on the path to becoming a teacher to my students and their parents when they, much like me, attempt to begin a new life in a new country. Working with ELLs for more than a decade, I could identify the many challenges that these students face in the new school environment.
My life in Lebanon affected the way I think and feel toward other people, especially children of immigrants. I feel teachers who are not exposed to different cultures have a difficult time understanding immigrant children, and may not be fully equipped to teach them. The everyday suffering that I lived during the civil war made me think about what those young children have experienced growing up in their countries of origin and how I can be their best advocate and educator. My experiences shape my relationships with my students and their parents; it fuels my passion for teaching and nurtures the desire to provide the best possible education for them. My life-story made me compassionate about the fate of immigrant children and their education, however, this dissertation research is needed and very significant for the wider educational field, for the immigrant learners, their parents, their educators, and our democratic society.

Significance of the Study

It is my assumption that this study will lead to new awareness regarding the challenge of the increasing numbers of ELLs throughout the Elementary public schools in the Midwest. The school district administrators, public school teachers, parents, and the educational community as a whole, will acquire a greater understanding of the issues and challenges that deal with ELLs. In regards of the attempts to improve the achievement of ELLs, and given the various challenges these students and their teachers go through “policy and practice must be based on the evidence we have” (Goldberg, 20008, p. 43). More attention will be placed on ELL programs to provide special language instruction, as these programs are less valued compared to the others. This study will highlight and describe new perspective on how elementary school teachers are delivering instruction to their ELL students.

One intention of this study is to add to the ELL advocacy literature and to present findings that will provide guidance to future ELL education programs. In addition, this will aid teachers and the education community of ELLs to understand how they make informed decisions in teaching these
students and can help them to analyze the strategies and approaches they apply in the instruction of ELLs. This research study can also assist teachers to observe their practice from a different viewpoint and find ways to work collaboratively with their co-workers.

My hope is that this study will offer aspects and methods related to the professional development needs of ELL teachers. Some of these aspects will include: (a) using ELLs’ first language to acquire reading skills in English and teach language transfer; (b) implement strong academic English instruction for ELLs in different settings, such as push-in or pullout; (c) support instruction in the ELLs’ first language to help students’ bi-literacy objectives. Moreover (d) provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate in implementing language acquisition theories, and planning culturally relevant practices. I explained the importance of my research to the educational community and argued for the significance and relevance of the study. Now, I would like to proceed with my research question and sub questions.

**Research Question**

The primary research question that will be addressed through this case study:

- What are the features and characteristics that contribute to the academic success of English language learners from the perspective of teachers?

**Sub questions**

- What is the relevance, if any, of the socio-cultural contexts of ELLs to their academic performance?
- What are the effective strategies to deal with the challenges that ELLs confront in public schools?
- What is the parent’s role in bilingual students’ academic success?

The following information bring forth how this study has been organized.
Roadmap of the Study

The remainder of my dissertation research is organized into six chapters: Chapter II, Literature Review, begins with an explanation of the sociocultural theory, then a brief historical background of bilingual education, and the Dual Language laws and its policies in the United States. It also provides a review of the literature relating to the main contributors to Bilingual Education laws, goals and policies in educational practices. In addition, the chapter explains the strengths and weaknesses of the Bilingual Education law as well as the Dual Language program. It also talks about instruction and interventions for ELLs, vocabulary development and Language acquisition.

Chapter III provides an overview of the research design and methods for this descriptive single case study. I will begin with a restatement of the research purpose and research question of this study. Then, I will provide my rationale for choosing a case study methodology for this investigation and explain this methodology’s theoretical qualitative/interpretive research. Next, I will present information about the research site and participants. I will outline the collection strategies, as well as the data analysis and interpretation methods I used. Later, I will review the ethical considerations that will be followed during this study, as well as address the researcher’s subjectivity as related to my role as the researcher. Then I will provide evidence for ensuring the findings’ validity and trustworthiness. Finally, I will conclude by summarizing the methodology chapter.

Chapter IV begins with an imperative background information as it pertains to this qualitative research study. The chapter is divided into two parts: The first part, I describe a pilot study that served as a base in designing the current dissertation research. The second part of chapter four includes the background information of the dissertation research. I explain the implication of the pilot study, then, I restate the dissertation’s purpose statement and question. Next, I list the
sources of data, which include interviews, direct observations, documents, and physical artifacts related to the dissertation research. Finally, I provide information about the study setting, as well as a detailed description of the roles and responsibilities of the teachers who participated in this dissertation research. I conclude the description with a brief summary.

Chapter V presents the analysis of the data of this descriptive single-case study that provided information about the ELL program and the students at Midwestern school, as it pertained to this qualitative research study. I include the categories and themes that emerged from the interviews and summaries from the other sources of evidence.

In Chapter VI, I provide the findings, possible implications, recommendations, and insights for the field pertaining to this study. First, I restate the research purpose and question, and present a list of the findings, and how the findings contribute to the field of education specifically ELLs. Second, I discuss the implications and limitations of this study. Third, I provide recommendations for future research, and insights. Fourth, I provide a comprehensive summary of this study. Finally, this chapter provides a chance for me to share my personal experiences related to this research study.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bilingual Education Act and Policies

In Chapter II, I will provide a review of the literature for this descriptive single case study. For the past few decades, issues of bilingual education have gained particular attention in the United States public school system, with the goal of providing meaningful and equitable access for English language learners to the curriculum. The National Education Association (2015) expects that by 2025 English language learners will comprise one-fourth of the student population in the nation. This expands the need in many public schools to provide special language instruction programs that can contribute to constructive learning. According to Lipka, Siegel and Vukovic (2005), given this number of ELLs, it is significant to know whether their development of literacy skills differs in remarkable ways from children who are native speakers of English.

There are several issues surrounding bilingual education that I will discuss/explore in this chapter: (a) sociocultural theory, (b) historical overview of federal laws and policies, (c) major approaches to English Language acquisition, (d) teaching strategies. The literature will inform my data collection methods and help frame my analysis. It will also set the context for this research.

Sociocultural Theory

In chapter one, I briefly explained the sociocultural theory. However, in this chapter I will discuss this theory in more details. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory is an essential concept for learning and teaching methods especially for ELLs. It includes second language acquisition, and it focuses on giving directions for second language development. In addition, it improves L2 skills according to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1962) proclaims in his theory that, if a teacher directly teach the concept without clarification, then it would not be as
effective. He stressed that students should be taught by some instructions, rules, and achievements that are included in ZPD method. Wretch discusses that Vygotsky’s major contributions to educational research was the “claim that higher mental functioning in the individual derives from social life” (as cited in Mcvee, Brock, and Glazier, 2011). An example of this foundation can be found in ZPD, “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Sociocultural theory embraces cultural and educational methods. This theory is extremely valuable for ELLs because it teaches cultural involvement, social connection, and other components that are important in an effective teaching environment. Some of these elements are student-talk as well as teacher-talk that should be incorporated in an ELL classroom. In addition, the classroom activities should be organized to meet the challenges of ELLs, and to involve them in mental activities that require problem solving. Furthermore, the basic sociocultural perspective is the role that involves social interaction and culturally structured activities which affects psychological development. Skilton-Sylvester (2002) argue that ESL programs were created to act as a “bridge” in teaching students English while being culturally sensitive. Therefore, the sociocultural theory is beneficial to ELLs because it requires social interaction, cultural involvement, and all the elements of the teaching environment.

In their edited book, McVee, Brock, and Glazier (2011) write, positioning theory is compatible with Vygotskian approach of learning and teaching and it is relevant to educational studies with its focus on individual and social attributes. “Positioning is an important way to examine the individual in relation to the group and other groups or individuals” (McVee, Brock, and
The following statement by Carbaugh provide an explanation of social interaction between individuals:

Every social interaction presupposes and creatively invokes culture, intelligible forms of action and identity. Interacting through symbolic forms carries with its claims, tacitly or consciously, about the kind(s) of person one (and other) is, how one is (currently being) related to others, and what feelings are to be associated with the social arrangements (as cited in McVee, Brock, and Glazier, 2011, p. 13).

Social interaction is a crucial period for cognitive development, as it is related to another aspect of ZPD. By interaction with students in a kind and pleasant way will produce constructive results in their second language learning process. Therefore, the language that teacher uses plays an important role for generating social interaction. This notion correlates with the difference between what a student can accomplish from motivation and guidance from a reliable person.

Vygotsky argues about the significance of social communication for individual cognitive development and for individual psychological abilities “first on the social level, and later, on the individual level, first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the learner (intrapyschological)” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). According to Vygotsky, students learn from interaction with others and from their surroundings. In addition, society and students culture assist students to learn in an effective way. Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), state that Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory has two major principles. The first one is that cognitive development is conciliated by culture and social interaction. The second one of the Sociocultural Theory is the Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that, ZPD is the region where the most thoughtful instruction or direction should be given. Therefore, the cognitive development of a new language occurs as a product of the communication between teacher and student (Aljaafreh &
Lantolf, 1994). As reported by Vygotsky, the future of a learner depends on proper supervision, where he describes, “the distance between a child’s actual development level as determined by independent problem solving, and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Wertch 1985, p. 60).

The utilization of the ZPD is crucial in teaching because it integrates all features of the learning environment: the learner, the teacher, their relationship, shared experiences, and the resources used to facilitate learning (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). Students who goes through proximal development with the help of their teacher seemed to be more capable than who try to do their work on their own (Warford, 2011, p. 253). An instructor promoting the ZPD can set up a healthy learning environment and guide students to learn the new concepts by building relationships with them and employing effective learning material (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). Many researchers emphasize the effectiveness of ZPD in learning environment. Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) gave confirmation of the significance of the ZPD where error corrections with second language learners were dependent on the mediation process between student and teacher. As stated by the authors, the ZPD can be effective in language learning and easily applied because it can be implemented in adaptable formats and diverse learning environments.

Regardless of theories adopted to teach ELL students, Federal and State government policies have a direct impact on how to deliver education to ELLs.

**Historical Development of Bilingual Education Act**

The Bilingual Education Act, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1968 (or BEA), is noted as the first official federal recognition of the needs of students with limited English speaking ability (Gloria Stewner-Manzanares, 1988). According to Crawford (2004), this
Act has been considered the most important law in recognizing linguistic minority rights in the United States. The law encouraged school districts to experiment with new pedagogical approaches by funding programs that targeted low-income and non-English speaking students (as cited in Nieto, 2009).

Crawford (2004) states that “as the first federal law in the United States that dealt with issues of language, the passage of the Bilingual Educational Act provoked people to express language attitudes and beliefs that had little to do with instruction and lot to do with ideological position” (as cited in Nieto, 2009, p. 63). In the 1960s, ethno-linguistic minorities experienced a noticeable increase in numbers. The lack of access to a meaningful education crippled the possibility of full participation in society for these ELL students and blocked their upward mobility (Nieto, 2009).

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 incorporates provisions forbidding discrimination based on language. An important objective of this legislation has been to provide LEP students with meaningful instruction in the first language until they acquire English proficiency (Ochoa, Pacheco, & Omark, 1988). Delvalle, Urban, and Wagoner (2003) state that the social movement that began at this point would conclude with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, which prohibited discrimination. Title VI allowed funds to be withheld from school districts that maintained segregation (as cited in Nieto, 2009).

According to Wright (2010):

Federal policy was stipulated through the Title VII Bilingual Education Act, which was added as an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1968. It promoted, but did not require, transitional bilingual education, and provided funds for districts to implement such programs. (p. 6)
In 1974, two developments resulted in the passage of bilingual education legislation in many states. Bergin (1980) notes that “the Lau v. Nicholas Supreme Court Decision and the Equal Educational Opportunity Act affirmed the responsibility of state education agencies and school districts, to provide meaningful services to language minority students” (as cited in Ochoa, Pacheco & Omark, 1988, p. 258). To provide equal access to the Curriculum, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of a better design programs for language minority students. “The ruling mentioned bilingual programs as an option, but stopped short of requiring primary language instruction” (Wright, 2010, p. 6).

School districts had little choice but to adopt a meaningful instruction that would help move ELLs into mainstream. This pressure initiated by the office for Civil Rights who came up with Lau Remedies, which were guidelines that school districts had to implement with at least 20 ELLs who represented the same language. This federal requirement was to identify language minority students and to determine their English language proficiency. “The Lau Remedies specified sufficient pedagogical strategies, the importance of moving ELLs into mainstream classrooms” (Ovando, 2003, p. 10). The U.S. government approved the first bilingual and bicultural education program known as Title VII. It authorized resources to meet the needs of English Language Learners. Schmidt (2001) indicates that Title VII granted funding for planning and developing bilingual programs and for defraying the costs of training and operating those programs (as cited in Nieto, 2009).

On six occasions the US Congress passed specific legislation related to the education of language minority students in the years 1968, 1974, 1978, 1984, 1988, 1994 (Wiese & Garcia, 2010). Title VII was reauthorized in 1974, and this time schools receiving deferral grants were required to use the primary language of students and included the culture of the students in the
It also required them to spend at least 15 percent of their funds on training of bilingual teachers. “Finally, the new law expanded eligibility for participation in Title VII programs to all children of limited English-speaking ability, regardless of their family’s income or the dominant language of their homes” (Crawford, 2004, p. 114).

The BEA was reauthorized in 1978. This time it succeeded in explaining the law’s goals. The minority language would be used only when it is necessary to help the student achieve competence in English. Title VII programs would be strictly transitional; no funds would be available for language maintenance. At the same time, student eligibility for assistance was expanded to all children of limited English proficiency (Crawford, 2004). Title VII was up for reauthorization in 1983. Advocates of existing law postponed the reauthorization until the election year of 1984. For the first time, the compromise allowed a portion of Title VII funds to support alternative instructional programs that did not use minority students’ native language. The amendments also put a stronger stress on teacher training. Then in 1988, Congress reauthorized Title VII, diverting up to 25 percent of the budget for all English programs. While granting exceptions based on individual children evaluations, the new requirement intended that three years of bilingual or all English instruction was enough; that additional language support might prove harmful to the student (Crawford, 2004).

In 1994, the BEA was reauthorized to ensure equal educational opportunity and to promote educational excellence for all students and youth of limited English proficiency. “The reauthorization gave preference to programs that promoted bilingualism, introduced language enhancement of indigenous languages and new grant categories, and was part of a larger systematic effort” (Wiese & Garcia, 2010, p. 237). The following information will provide a current perspective of the English language acquisition in American Public Schools.
Major Approaches to English Language Acquisition

Language Acquisition

In 1981, Cummins presented the idea that “strength in the native language is essential for second-language learners and that the knowledge and skills that are learned in the native tongue provide the basis for a positive transfer of skills” (as cited in Palmer, El-Ashry, Lectere, & Chang, 2007, p. 11). Students who are proficient readers in their first language will have an easier time learning to read in a second language (L2), while it is quite the opposite among non-proficient readers.

Abu-Rabia, Shakkour and Siegel (2013) points out that the explanation offered by Cummins for the connection between L1 skills and L2 acquisition is that the metalinguistic skills used in reading and writing, such as phonological awareness, orthographic awareness, and morphological awareness, are common to all languages. According to the linguistic interdependence hypothesis developed by Cummins, “Children who have learning problems in their first language should show similar problems in their second language. Similarly, academic skills acquired successfully in the first language should be transferred to the second language” (as cited in Lipka, Siegel & Vukovic, 2005, p. 39). The assumption is that when students are exposed early to English language, the sooner they will be ready for mainstream. However, bilingual approaches emphasize the significance of building on the linguistic background that ELLs already have. Abu-Rabia et al., (2013), report that, the orthographic features of any language restrict reading development in all languages. Hence, the orthographic systems of L1 and L2 are different; this will affect the acquisition of reading skills in L2. The linguistic skills from L1 happens automatically, regardless of the type of orthography involved.

Dual Language Approaches in the United States
Christian, Montone, Lindholm, and Carranza (1997) mention that teaching students who speak English as their first language and students who speak English as their second language using two way bilingual immersion programs (TWBI)- also known as dual language programs- through two languages in a multicultural environment (as cited in Lindholm-Leary, 2004).

By definition, a two-way bilingual immersion program includes four important features:

- Instruction and class work take place in two languages, with the non-English language used for at least 50 percent of the student’s instructional day. The day includes periods of instruction during which students and teachers use only one language, with no translations or language mixing allowed. Both English language learners and native English speakers do work in both languages in a balanced proportion. English language learners and native English speakers are together for most content instruction. (Lindholm-Leary, 2004, p. 57)

- Dual language, two-way immersion and dual immersion are progressively used as safer terms for what was formerly known as “two-way bilingual education.” Along with its political and economic benefits such as interethnic and interracial interactions with other countries, there are some alluring pedagogical arguments for two-way bilingual education, starting with its unique use of peer models. Students of different background experiences learn from each other, a potentially powerful factor in second language acquisition (Crawford, 2004). “The two-way immersion approach is not a new one; in fact, some bilingual education programs operating in the 1960s shared many of the characteristics of what we know today as two-way immersion education” (Christian, 1996 p. 66).

Two-way programs have the demographics to invite native English speaking students to join their speakers of other languages and ELL peers in a combined bilingual classroom. Two-way classes can
and should include all students who wish to enroll, including those who have lost their first language and speak only English (Collier & Thomas, 2004).

Two major versions of Dual Language model exist usually referred to as the 90:10 and the 50:50 models. The primary factors distinguishing these two elementary program differences are the distribution of languages for instruction and the language in which reading is taught. “The amount of time spent in each language differs across the grade levels in the 90:10, but not 50:50, design” (Lindholm-Leary, 2012, p. 257). Crawford (2004) claims, “While there are several variations of two-way bilingual education, two are especially common. The 50:50 model, teaches all subjects in both languages, using more or less equal amounts of English and the minority tongue throughout the program” (p. 47). He also mentions that the 90:10 models are similar to the one-way form of development bilingual education. Beginning with 90 percent minority language instructions in the early years and phasing English in slowly. These bilingual classes do not demand enrollment to be exactly 50 percent of each minority group to be classified as two-way, but “it helps the process of L2 acquisition to have an approximate balance of students of each language background” (Collier & Thomas, 2004, p. 3). Two-way bilingual approach lead to grade-level and above grade-level acquirement in second language, the only approach that fully close the gap with the stimulus of native-English speaking peers in two-way bilingual classes, groups of English learners typically reach grade level acquirement in second language by beginning of middle school (Collier, & Thomas, 2004).

Design choices vary substantially. In some cases, the choices represent concessions to local conditions, such as demographics or community attitudes, for example, a neighborhood school with comparatively few native English speakers may choose to go forward with a two-way program without a balance of language backgrounds represented in each classroom (Christian, 1996). Gomez
reports, “dual-language programs enable children to communicate orally and in written forms in both their native languages and in English” (as cited in Alanis, 2011, p. 21). These models, most often implemented in Spanish and English, also grant extensive time for children to develop concepts in their first and second languages. The programs generally include students who are learning to speak at least one new language and learning academic content in a second language (Alanis, 2011).

**Main Contributors to Drafting Bilingual Education Laws**

The Bilingual Education Act introduced in 1967 by Texas senator Ralph Yarborough and later signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson on January 2, 1968. This was the first U.S. government policy devoted to assisting students with limited English language skills. Testifying before Yarborough’s special sub-committee on bilingual education, Commissioner of Education Harold Howe II was critical of instituting a new “title” of the ESEA (Crawford, 2004). Crawford notes that Secretary of Education Terrel Bell during president’s Reagan first term claimed that “one-third of ELL students aged 5 to 14 receive either bilingual instruction or instruction in English as a second language. In fact, Schools in general are not meeting the needs of ELL children” (as cited in Ovando, 2003, p. 12).

In an effort to roll back the clock on bilingual education, the Reagan administration moved in the direction of a *back to basics* education. Nieto (2009) pointed out that “in 1981, Senator S.I. Hayakawa introduced a constitutional amendment focused on the adoption of English as the official language of the U. S.”(p. 64). During Reagan’s presidency, the elimination of the US Department of Education funds was severe where he diminished the federal education budget by half during his eight years in office. The Secretary of Education at the time, William Bennet, roamed the country attacking all aspects of public education including teacher unions, and teacher certifications. He fought for no restriction on Title VII funding for English-only special alternative instructional
programs. The shift in funds for English-only programs reflected a growing political opposition to education through children’s native languages (Ovando, 2003).

According to Crawford, “in 1998, proposition 227, promoted by multi-millionaire Ron Unz, and was adopted in California. Proposition 227 ended the bilingual education programs throughout the state of California, which were substituted with English-only instruction models” (as cited in Nieto, 2009, p. 64). The Critics in the US congress were appeased when Representative Scheuer of New York “drafted a compromise extending the program to all children coming from homes where the native language is other than English, but giving preference to those from poor families” (Crawford, 2004).

Crawford reports that most of the cuts to Title VII that happened during President Reagan’s years were restored by the Clinton administration in 1999 (Ovando, 2003). Democrats had recaptured the Senate, restoring Senator Edward Kennedy, a devoted supporter of the program. As a chairman of the Labor and Human Resources committee, Chairman Augustus Hawkins lent his power to the cause by pushing to adopt legislation that would extend the BEA with some changes (Crawford, 2004). With the assault on bilingual education that never ceased, the Congress passed President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This law was merely a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that required a stringent testing system, which at its core adopts the English-only policy for instruction.

Two-way bilingual education is also difficult to fault at the level of public policy. It has the possibility to develop language skills that not only assist students but also meet important needs of government and business. Richard Riley, U.S. secretary of education during the Clinton administration, demanded that United States schools increase these programs to 1,000 by the year 2005 (Crawford, 2004). Crawford reminds us that Richard Ruiz, an expert in language planning,
offered another approach for analyzing and critiquing policy decisions in this area. He proposed the concept of orientations where they determine what is conceivable about language in our society. The three orientations to language planning that Ruiz set forth in 1984 were language as problem, language as right, and language as resource. Since then, the three orientations have become more known in the field of language policy and planning (Hult & Horberger, 2016, p. 30).

A major problem with the current federal legislation is that the premise is not based on research, but rather on political expediency. NCLB expect ELLs to be on grade level in three years (Collier & Wayne, 2004). Representative Toby Roth of Wisconsin, leader of the most extreme English-only faction, proposed to repeal Title VII. His mission was to make all Americans, including those with limited English language skills, homogeneous in regard to learning English at school. The Clinton administration, which generally favored a language-as-resource approach, never exploited this loophole (Crawford, 2004). Arizona’s superintendent of public instruction, who was against bilingual education claimed that “school districts were ‘abusing’ the Type One waiver by granting them to students who, based on their English proficiency test scores, were actually limited English proficient” (Combs, Evans, Fletcher & Jimenez, 2005, p. 704). Ron Unz, a former businessman who is anti-bilingual education, promoted English immersion education in California. He went on to finance successful anti-bilingual initiatives in Arizona (2000) and Massachusetts (2002). The one surprise in the 2002 election came in Colorado, where Unz’s Amendment 31 to the state constitution was defeated. Opponents hired professional campaign consultants, who conducted opinion research and recommended a strategy of diverting voters’ attention to issues other than bilingual education (Crawford, 2004, p. 329).

While the Republican Revolution on Capitol Hill brought some cuts in grants for Title VII, overall, federal spending raised for developmental and two-way bilingual education. “According to
Fred Genesee, a researcher who has specialized in immersion models: Including students from both language groups creates a learning environment that can be truly bilingual and bicultural” (Crawford, 2004, p. 290).

**Goals of the Laws and Policies in Educational Practices**

As stated, bilingual education was an effort that aimed at helping students overcome their language deficiencies, and the instructional methods that were used in the classroom was of high quality to ensure educational equality. In 1974, the Bilingual Education Act was amended to explicitly define bilingual educational programs, identify goals, and stipulate the requirement of feedback and progress reports from the programs (Nieto, 2009). August and Hakuta (1997) assert that “the primary aim of the BEA has been providing meaningful and equitable access for English language learners to the curriculum, rather than serving as an instrument of language policy for the nation through the development of their native languages” (as cited in Weise & Garcia, 2010, p. 233).

The Fifth Circuit court established the definition of what applicable action meant when implementing programs to help language minority students overcome language deficiencies: “The program must be based on sound educational theory, must have sufficient resources and personnel, and must prove to be effective in teaching students English” (as cited in Nieto, 2009, p. 64). The main goal of proposition 227 is to make English the leading common medium of instruction for native language students. This proposition threw bilingual programs throughout the state into chaos with English language learners receiving less help than ever before in their minority languages. Mora notes that “teachers, university professors, researchers, and program directors involved with bilingual education were now required to implement a program they cannot believe in because its
underlying assumptions violate the theories and principles of effective education for language minority students” (as cited in Ovando, 2003, p. 4).

An important objective of the BEA Act had been to provide Limited English Proficient students a meaningful instruction in their native language until they acquire English Language Proficiency. Since the inception of BEA in 1968, states and school districts struggled to find ways to give equal access to education for English language learners. One side of the debate is over how to educate language minority students. Many insist that attending to the linguistic and cultural diversity in our schools prevents efforts at social assimilation (Wiese & Garcia, 2010). The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which addressed social issues such as discrimination against race, color, and ethnicity. It prohibits discrimination in any programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. In addition to the ESEA Act of 1965, which addressed the academic needs of minority students, pushed the federal government to play an effective role in implementing these acts.

The BEA act aimed to address equal educational opportunity for speaker of other languages. “Still the role of language became a prominent marker as the legislation articulated the education of language minority students” (Weise & Garcia, 2010 p. 233). School programs funded under Title VII were required by law to spend 15 percent on training bilingual teachers. In addition, the school districts had to include instruction in students’ first language until they were able to progress effectively through the educational systems. In addition, it expanded the requirement to enroll all students from all different cultures or backgrounds regardless of the students’ socioeconomic status. “Finally the new law expanded eligibility for participation in Title VII programs to all children of limited English speaking ability, regardless of their family’s income or the dominant language of their homes”(Crawford, 2004, p. 114).
One of the goals in dual-language programs is for all students to become academically proficient in two languages. For both groups of students who study two languages at different ratios of the native language “the goals consisted of high levels of bilingualism and biliteracy, academic achievement, and cross-cultural competence for all students” (Lindholm-Leary, 2012, p. 256). Alanis (2011) states the following: “Children’s daily classroom experiences influence their development of bilingualism and biliteracy and impact the way they feel about themselves as successful learners” p. 21. There are three major goals for students in two-way bilingual immersion: develop high levels of oral language skills, academic achievement at or above grade level in the native language as well as English, and have positive attitudes towards learning. “These educational approaches do not emphasize language development over academic and social development; the goal is balanced development in all three areas” (Christian, 1996, p. 67).

Teachers in dual language program integrate instructional methods and strategies that can benefit both the English Language Learners and Native English Speakers. Specific instructional methods incorporated in the classroom prove to be better than other approaches, because of the special nature of these classes. “The community goal is to produce more student graduates who are academically proficient in both languages of the community for the economic revitalization of the region” (Collier & Thomas, 2004, p. 10). Such programs would create more jobs for our younger generation.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the Bilingual Education Law and the Dual Language Program: A Critical Analysis**

As mentioned before, there are two models in the dual language program: the 50/50 model teaches students in English and in their native language, equally throughout the year and the 90/10 model starts with 90 percent in the native-language throughout the elementary years and gradually
phasing English. As Crawford (2004) points out, “both models stress language separation, as opposed to concurrent translation, so that students will focus on lessons taught in their weaker language rather than wait for the mother-tongue version” (p. 47).

The success of these models depends on how well the school designs these programs and how effectively the teachers would implement these approaches in their classrooms. The administrators where I work push teachers to improve their students’ progress every quarter. By doing so, bilingual teachers focus on teaching the skills in English rather than the native language. The pressure for dual programs to add more instructional time in English would greatly influence the students’ success in school. Lindholm-Leary (2012) elaborates that “more exposure to, and instruction in English in school does not result in higher levels of proficiency” (p. 259). My extensive experience as a classroom teacher have taught me that mixing beginning students with native speakers of the target language can be very challenging for the teacher. For example, when I have a new student entering my bilingual classroom, I use more of the native language during instruction. This in comparison to using less while instructing students who have been living longer in the U.S.

According to Crawford (2004), bilingual education promoted as a model in the U.S. and stable enrollments in the program is necessary to ensure its success. Due to having, documented success in promoting the language proficiency and academic achievement of all student, many parents and educators believe that adopting the dual language Education (DLE) program and some of its components will automatically create student success (Lindholm-Leary, 2012). Furthermore, research by Thomas and Collier comparing a variety of instructional approaches that are given to ELLs, dual-language programs are the most effective to achieve successive academic education (Combs, Evans, Fletcher, Parra, & Jimenez, 2005). Collier and Thomas, define the four
developmental processes that students face during their school years that need to be supported at school for language acquisition and learning to occur as the Prism Model. This model can be used to anticipate the important school factors that help to close the academic achievement gap in L2.

The model has four main elements that drive language acquisition for school: linguistic, sociocultural, academic achievement gap in L2. For success to occur in L2 academic context, L2 students who are not proficient in English need a school context that brings the fundamental conditions and benefits that the English-speaking group experiences. This involves attention to the developmental processes that occur for any student through the school years. For ELLs, these interdependent processes must occur in a supportive sociocultural environment through their first language and English to enhance student learning. In addition, in their research they have found that “children in well-implemented one-way and two way bilingual classes outperform their counterparts being schooled in well-implemented monolingual classes as they reach the upper grades of elementary school” (p. 15). Lambert (1987) asserts that ELLs can benefit more in bilingual environments that use dual language models and consider their native language as a resource (as cited in Christian, 1996, p. 67).

Two-way bilingual classes, due to including both native English speakers and ELL students provide a solution for persistent sociocultural problems that have resulted from segregating native English speakers and ELLs. Sensitive teachers who teach two-way bilingual classes provide an environment where both groups of students learn to respect and treat one another as valued partners in the learning process (Collier & Thomas, 2004). “There are two major reasons for helping students become bilingual: First, the demographic landscape of the United States is changing, and second is the job outlook” (Lindholm-Leary, 2005, p. 56).
Research in DLE programs shows the following successes: both ELL and NES students perform at or above grade level on standardized reading and math tests in English. ELL students score similar to their statewide peers by about grades 5-7, ELL students demonstrate high level of knowledge in two languages, ELLs close the achievement gap with NES students in English only classrooms by about fifth grade, and DLE help students of diverse cultural, socioeconomic backgrounds.

With the above successes, there are also significant challenges in DLE that can influence the quality of these programs. Some of these challenges include: DLE program design which addresses the allocation of time given to each language, little accountability for indicating grade-level reading skills in the partner language, little research into the development of oral academic proficiency and literacy within the program, and developing high levels of bilingual proficiency across the grade (Lindholm-Leary, 2012). Based on my professional experience, I believe that finding enough native-English speakers who are willing to participate in the Dual language program could be very difficult. Another challenge is finding bilingual and well-trained teachers to teach the curriculum in two languages.

I believe that the NCLB Act of 2002 put more pressure on these programs due to its requirement for all students including minority groups to make adequate yearly progress on standardized tests in all subjects to meet standardized “achievement” levels.

One of the issues is the amount of time needed for native speakers of other languages to catch up to their native English speakers on achievement tests. “Studies of ELLs have shown that 5 to 8 years may be needed to close the gap between minority students and NES” (Crawford, 2004).

Although the research shows that, overtime, “Dual language Education students show comparable or higher achievement than their peers, they may demonstrate lower achievement and
progress in the early years of a program” (Lindholm-Leary, 2012, p. 259). I think that learning academic content in two different languages can be a challenge for students who come from monolingual backgrounds. Collier and Thomas (2004) note the following: “While dual language programs are successful in comparison to other bilingual/ ESL programs developed for English learners, variations in program design and the tests chosen to measure gap closure can produce different results in the program effectiveness” (p. 12).

While learning English is vital for students’ success in school, preserving their home language increases their self-esteem and help them learn both languages. “Researchers argue that proficiency in a second language is best acquired when the literacy in the first language is developed appropriately” (Nieto, 2009, p. 66). Slavin and Chaung (2005) report that a student’s level of literacy in the native language might be a strong predictor of student’s potential to achieve proficiency in the second language (as cited in Nieto, 2009, p. 66). In this regard, the students in the district that I work for are placed in bilingual programs, perform significantly better on Measure of Academic Program (MAP) and Access tests than those students whom their parents opted out of the program and kept their children in the general education classrooms. I believe that bilingual education will help reduce the achievement gap between English language learners and native-English speaking students.

Further studies show that providing instruction in the students’ native language does not only facilitate English acquisition but also strengthens content knowledge attainment (as cited in Nieto, 2009). As a bilingual educator I believe teaching the students in their native language is a “resource rather than a problem” in this diverse society; I feel a tremendous pressure to produce good results on standardized tests. Alanis (2011) asserts that, “young learners must understand what they hear from their teacher. They learn best when they hear language in rich and meaningful contexts that
help them connect what they are learning with their experiences” (p. 22). Combs contributes to this discussion by stating, “School districts that dismantle their bilingual programs in favor of structured English Immersion face the legal and curricular challenge of providing ELLs with full access to the academic core content areas” (Combs et. al. 2005, p. 722). In the 21st century, it is beneficial for teachers, parents, and community members to promote bilingual language education to both ELL and NES students to prepare them to function properly in our multicultural society. This information has been a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Bilingual Education Law and the Dual Language Program. Now I would like to present some of the appropriate instruction and interventions’ strategies for ELLs.

**Appropriate Instruction and Interventions’ Strategies for ELLS**

There has been a great dilemma of finding effective techniques for delivering reading comprehension to English language learners. One tailored approach to ELLs such as whole-group instruction has proved ineffective and there is a need to find a more pliable approach that would include various techniques, such as small-group reading instruction. Kamps, et al., (2007) study involve 318 first-and second-grade students from six elementary schools (170 ELL and 148 English-only students). The researchers used a three-tier model of reading instruction and second-tier model of reading intervention. The second-tier intervention model included the use of (a) evidence-based direct instruction reading curricula that explicitly target skills such as phonological/phonemic awareness, letter-sound recognition, alphabetic decoding, fluency building and comprehension skills, and (b) small groups of 3-6 students. The study found that second-tier small-group experimental interventions were more effective in delivering education to ELLs. This method, designed to target interventions that enable students to “catch up” on critical reading skills, can be provided by general educators and/or reading specialists.
Kamps, et al. test their hypothesis that predicted that ELLs enrolled in secondary interventions will perform at similar levels on measures of early literacy skills as English-only students enrolled in the same interventions. (Kamps, et al. (2007)) The researchers also noted that ELLs would progress at a faster rate of growth than students enrolled in ESL/balanced literacy interventions. Over all, results indicated better outcomes for ELLs who participated in interventions targeted for students who were identified as having difficulties (Tier 2 in the Response to Intervention system). Haager and Windmueller (2001) studied student and teacher outcomes with ELL learners in a high-risk school. They concluded that in addition to using evidence-based reading practices, ongoing teacher support with student monitoring, while challenging, is essential for improving student outcomes. In my teaching experience, our Reading Specialist teachers explained that when working with small groups of ELLs on letter-sound recognition and different reading strategies skills they noticed significant improvement within the mixed groups.

Research done by Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes and Moody, 2000; Juel, 1996; Morrow and Woo, 2001; and Wasik, 1998 has found that “tutoring is most effective under the following conditions, (a) the tutoring program is consistent with classroom reading instruction. (b) Tutors are well trained, (c) tutoring is conducted a minimum of three times per week, and (d) programs are well implemented” (as cited in Al Otaiba & Pappamihel, 2005, p. 6). Teachers are advised to choose reading tutoring materials that are persistent with their general classroom-reading program, but also with reading goals on participating students’ individualized education program (IEPs) (Al Otaiba & Pappamihiel 2005). In addition, they state that teachers could turn to volunteer literacy tutors as one means of providing much needed additional support for ELLs because research has shown powerful effects of literacy tutoring. During Assets - an after school program that is designed to help below grade level students in Reading- literacy tutors discuss students’ levels and needs with classroom
teachers before planning their individualized lessons which is an effective strategy in helping below level ELLs.

Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) suggest that reading development depends on the level of language development (as cited in Al Otaiba & Pappamihiel, 2005). Therefore, it is normal that English Language Learners would require more time to read English than native English speakers would. They also mentioned that literacy volunteers would help support differentiated instruction. Al Otaiba and Papamihiel point out, “instruction in one-on-one setting can extend and reinforce ELLs’ core reading program in a more relaxed manner, away from the potentially stressful whole group environment” (p. 11). In my teaching experience, I have found that teachers in my school help ELL students move through the many different stages of language acquisition with the support of America Reads tutors—students who come from a nearby junior college to work with kindergarten students—where teachers prepare activities for individualized instruction. Another technique I have found to be very effective in promoting successful reading comprehension, especially during the primary grades, is using one-on-one tutoring within inclusive general education classroom to provide individualized instruction.

In 2003, Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, -Davis and Kouzankanani examined the effects of a supplemental reading intervention that included the elements of effective reading instruction and the strategies for teaching ELLs with reading problems. Linan-Thompson et al. found that most of the ELLs who participated in this study made gains on outcome measures from pretest to posttest, especially on passage comprehension and segmentation fluency. The implication of this study is that a supplemental reading intervention that includes the critical elements of reading instruction may provide the additional support some students may need to expand understanding the comprehension of text.
I believe that providing appropriate educational services is critical in order to meet the needs of students whose English language is limited. In addition, bilingual students may not be exposed to the full range of literacy experiences of both languages nor have the benefits of smooth transition from mother tongue language to a more familiar literacy school programs.

Similarly, Santoro, Jitenda, Starosta, and Sacks, (2006) conducted a study on the effectiveness of a commercial reading curriculum (Read Well) on the reading performance of four-second grade ELL students who were poor readers. The program was designed for Kindergarten to third grade who were learning to read at the first grade level. It contained 38 instructional units, including phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. In addition to placement tests, unit plans, end of unit assessments and teaching materials.

In Santoro et al.’s., (2006) study, the passage comprehension subtest assessed children’s reading and comprehension skills. It required children to read a short passage, usually two or three sentences long, and then to identify a key word missing from the passage. Overall, the children must not only understand the sentence containing the blank, but the other sentences in the passage as well. The results of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of the Read Well intervention for improving the reading performance of ELLs. The conclusions of this study imply that the Read Well intervention, with its emphasis on content knowledge in reading and language through vocabulary and comprehension, helped ELLs not only to acquire reading skills but also to maintain the taught skill. Before implementation of common core standards, I used a program called “Treasure Chest” for ELLs, which is very similar to the “Read Well” intervention. It helped my students acquire different reading comprehension skills throughout the years. In addition, it contained unit plans, teaching materials, and end- of- unit assessments that helped ELLs to retain the skills taught and
learned. During guided reading, I give my ELL students opportunities to draw from their background knowledge prior to, during, and after reading which helped them comprehend the text.

**Vocabulary Development**

English language learners cannot understand the content of what they are reading unless they understand the meaning of the majority of words in the text. Therefore, it is important to note that vocabulary development is a primary determinant of reading comprehension. Bus, et al. (1995) have found that teaching (children) vocabulary through storybook reading is an effective way to promote their exposure to and learning of new words (as cited in Silverman, 2007, p. 98). Silverman (2007) compared three approaches to teaching vocabulary during storybook reading: (a) contextual instruction, based on connecting words to their use in books and to children’s personal experience; (b) analytical instruction, which enhances contextual instruction with semantic analysis of words in contexts; and (c) anchored instruction, which augments analytical instruction with attention to the spoken and written forms of words.

Silverman’s findings indicate that, to teach children sophisticated words; teachers should use activities that structure students’ opportunities to analyze and use those words in many contexts. Additionally, her studies suggested that teachers should consider using storybook reading time to target childrens’ decoding skills and vocabulary knowledge. For example, as a culminating activity, for every unit I teach at school, I ask my kindergarten students to write a story related to the theme discussed during the previous 2-3 weeks in their own language, draw pictures and then translate it to English. In addition, when I relate new vocabulary words to the students’ personal experiences, they are able to understand the text better.

Similarly, Biemiller and Slonim (2001) find that teaching students vocabulary that provides access to text content is essential when students’ vocabulary knowledge differs from the particular
words under study (as cited by Walker-Dalhouse, Risko, Lathrop & Porter 2010). Moreover, Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) state that teaching vocabulary “is highly effective when taught in a way that established relationships among new and previously known words” (as cited by Walker-Dalhouse, Risko, Lathrop & Porter 2010, p. 71). In my experience teaching kindergarten children, before reading a new story I would pick new vocabulary words. I call these words “interesting words”, then I write those words on index cards and play a game during center time. I have found that these activities help my students practice and use the new vocabulary words related to the new reading material.

Vaughn, et al., (2006) examined language development intervention for first grade English language learners at risk for reading difficulties. They chose key vocabulary words every day that were related with the text. Teachers explained the meaning of the words and used them in sentences. Students discussed the story with the teacher using complete sentences and new vocabulary terms.

They argued that reading comprehension could be improved by including prior knowledge and more vocabulary words. I agree with Vaughn, et al. about including more vocabulary and prior experiences, which I believe would improve word knowledge. In summary, I will explore the important issues pertaining bilingual education in the public schools.

Summary

The growing population of English language learners bring many challenges to teachers who do not have the appropriate methods to deal with ELLs and their parents. Therefore, poor communication is one of the many issues that teachers and parents face because of language barriers. In order to achieve success in the classroom, teachers need to be familiar with the diverse cultures of their students, and need the right professional development.
Many researchers suggest that ELLs need five to seven years to reach English proficiency. It is important to value and honor the students’ native language, so this can empower ELLs who are identified as a problematic group of students. Another challenge that ELLs have in common, is their parents’ involvement in school. The assumption of teachers that parents who are learning English as a second language have “nothing of value to offer” is a wrong one because many parents have discussed with me their interest in understanding all aspects of their children’s schooling.

History shows that the United States has experienced a phenomenal growth in the number of English language learners. The Bilingual Education Act was the first federal legislation that recognized the needs of the bilingual students, and dealt with issues of language. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act integrated provisions banning injustice based on language. One of the important objectives of this legislation is to grant LEP students with essential instruction in the first language until they achieve English proficiency. Soon thereafter, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of improved programs for language minority students. Later, school districts had to approve meaningful instruction that help move ELLs to mainstream. The bilingual Act was reauthorized in 1974, and the schools were obligated to incorporate the culture of the students along with the students’ primary language. In 1978, the BEA reauthorized again, and this time the minority language use, only to help students achieve proficiency in English. The Act was reauthorized in 1984, and it allowed part of the funds to support different programs that did not use minority students’ native language. The final reauthorization was in 1994, it assured equal educational opportunity for all students of limited English proficiency.

The dual language program or Two-Way Bilingual Immersion (TWBI) Program instruct both native English Speaking students and ELLs in two languages. Students of different cultures learn
from each other experiences that could be an important factor of language acquisition. The two major versions of Dual Language model usually referred to as 90:10 and the 50:50 models.

In 50:50 model, teachers teach all subjects in two languages, however the 90:10 model begins with 90 percent of the minority language instructions in the early grades and gradually introduce English. Studies indicate that, Two-Way bilingual approach help in achieving above grade-level in second language acquisition.

No Child Left Behind was passed during President George W. Bush’s administration and it expects ELLs to be on grade level in just three years. Over all, federal spending increased for Two-way bilingual education.

One of the goals of the BEA Act has been to provide limited English proficient students an essential instruction in their native language until they acquire English language proficiency. An important objective of the Dual-Language programs is for all students to become academically proficient in two languages. The three major goals for students in Two-Way Bilingual Immersion are development of oral language skills, academic achievement at or above grade level in the native language and English, in addition to having positive attitudes towards learning. Crawford (2004) highlight that many parents and educators believe in supporting the Dual Language Education Program due to the evidence of success. Another research show that Dual-Language programs are the most adequate to attain successful academic education. On the other hand, Lindholm-Leary (2012) mentioned some challenges in Dual Language Education related to program design, accountability, and bilingual language development. Further studies show that teaching students in their native language strengthens content knowledge attainment and promote English acquisition. One of the studies affirms that children must understand what they hear from their teachers so they can connect what they are learning with their experiences.
There has been great difficulty finding useful and effective techniques for teaching reading comprehension to ELLs. Many studies showed that whole group instruction has proved inadequate and there is a demand to find a flexible approach that include different techniques, such as small-group instruction. Research has found that tutoring is sufficient under few conditions, e.g., when the tutoring program is consistent with classroom reading instruction. Another research pointed out that instruction in one-on-one setting could increase ELL’s core reading program in a more relaxed manner. Researchers also suggested that literacy volunteers would help support differentiated instruction.

Several studies that examined the effects of a supplemental reading intervention that includes the critical elements of reading instruction helped ELLs not only to acquire reading skills but also to maintain the taught skill and provide the additional support some students may need to expand understanding the comprehension of the text. One of the studies found that teaching vocabulary through storybook is a powerfully effective way to promote their learning of new words. Therefore, vocabulary is a fundamental, determining factor in reading comprehension. Silverman suggested that teachers should acknowledge using storybook reading time to target children’s vocabulary knowledge. Several researchers found that students would learn vocabulary better when taught in a way where relationships are established among new and previously known words. They also argue that choosing key vocabulary words related to the text has helped at risk ELLs. In 1981, Cummings presented the idea that strength in the native language is essential for second-language learners, and the skills that are learned in the first language provide the basis for a positive transfer. Researchers agree with the idea that the metalinguistic skills used in reading and writing are common to all languages.
Although prior research has explored issues surrounding bilingual education related to teachers and students in schools, not enough is known about the factors that contribute to the academic success of English Language Learners. My research design throw spotlight on how I will refer to the literature discussed to direct my findings of this study through qualitative inquiry. Therefore, this phenomenological study will explore the factors that contribute to the academic success of English language learners. The goals of the study are to examine the socio-cultural contexts of ELLs to their academic performance in school, and to explore the effective strategies to deal with the challenges that ELLs confront in public schools. This is an important topic because very little attention has been given to Arabic bilingual students, and it is necessary to address their needs because teachers are becoming aware that the available programs often fail to successfully provide them with the appropriate instruction.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this Chapter, I will provide an overview of the research design and methods for this descriptive single case study. I will begin with a restatement of the research purpose and research question of this study. Then, I will provide my rationale for choosing a case study methodology for this investigation and explain this methodology’s theoretical qualitative/interpretive research. Next, I will present information about the research site and participants. I will outline the collection strategies, as well as the data analysis and interpretation methods I used. Later, I will review the ethical considerations that will be followed during this study, as well as, address the researcher’s subjectivity as related to my role as the researcher. Then I will provide evidence for ensuring the findings’ validity and trustworthiness. Finally, I will conclude by summarizing the methodology chapter.

Statement of the Research Purpose

The purpose of this case study is to find out from the perspective of public school teachers, how their ideas and teaching strategies are applied to foster the academic success of their ELLs and the social challenges these students face in school. Most of these students are first generation Americans from a Middle -Eastern background. This is a descriptive single case study that is focused on a public school, pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, located in a middle class suburb in a metropolitan area in the Midwest.

Research Question

The primary research question that will be addressed through this case study:
• What are the characteristics that contribute to the academic success of English language learners in a Midwestern suburban elementary public school, pre-kindergarten through fifth grade?

Sub questions

• What is the relevance, if any, of the socio-cultural contexts of ELLs to their academic performance?

• What are the effective strategies to deal with the challenges that ELLs confront in public schools?

Theoretical Positioning of the Study

Case Study as a Methodology and Research Design

Case study is one of the options used in qualitative research inquiry across numerous disciplines. Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the researcher explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) through detailed, in-depth data collection including multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2013). This research strategy allows the researcher to address the lived experiences of ELLs in the public school system. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive practices that shed light on individual or groups’ lived experiences. These practices turn the perception of the social reality into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self (Creswell, 2013, p. 43). Furthermore, qualitative research focuses on the interpretation of a phenomenon that occurs in a natural setting. Interpretive research focuses on subjective experience, small-scale interactions, and understanding (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Therefore, meaning is constructed through the interaction between humans or between humans and objects. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) assert
that researchers working from interpretive traditions value experience and perspective as important source of knowledge.

This study is positioned within the interpretive paradigm of inquiry that “assumes the social world is consistently being constructed through group interactions, and thus, social reality can be understood via the perspectives of social actors enmeshed in meaning-making activities” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 5). In this regard, interpretive inquiry fits this study best because of its interest in the individual lived experiences of English language learners and their teachers and ways in which they ascribe meaning to their social practices. Additionally the terms, interpretive research and qualitative research are often used interchangeably.

Creswell (2007) identifies interpretive research as an approach to qualitative research. It recognizes the self-reflective nature of qualitative research and emphasizes the role of the researcher as an interpreter of the data and an individual who represents information (p. 248). In this framework, "researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they 'position themselves' in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural and historical experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 25).

The interpretation of the findings reflects both the experience and background of the participants and the experience and background of the researcher. By interpreting the lived experiences of ELLs through their teachers’ future interviews, a dense description will likely be provided. Furthermore, phenomenological and hermeneutic are the historical terms associated with the interpretive paradigm, which has roots in several traditional arts and sciences (Lukenchuk, 2013, p. 69).

As reported by van Manen (1990), “Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 9). According to Lukenchuck,
Phenomenology means the study of appearances as perceived subjectively by individuals. Therefore, through Phenomenology, one studies appearances that are structured or interpreted by our consciousness (Lukenchuk, 2013), and one aims to uncover the meaningful structures that are taken for granted in everyday experience, which Husserl referred to as the “life-world,” the Lebenswelt (Lukenchuk, 2013). Gray (2004) notes:

Phenomenology holds that any attempt to understand social reality has to be grounded in people’s experiences of that social reality. Hence, phenomenology insists that we must lay aside our prevailing understanding of phenomena and revisit our immediate experience of them in order that new meanings may emerge (p. 21).

Gray (2004) further points out that “current understandings have to be ‘bracketed’ to the best of our ability to allow the phenomena to ‘speak for themselves’, unadulterated by our preconceptions. The result will be new meaning, fuller meaning or renewed meaning” (p. 21).

The purpose of phenomenology is to describe phenomena as they appear to our perception and examine them for meaning. Therefore, phenomenology seeks to describe how an aspect of the world is experienced. The purpose is to understand what lies behind a phenomenon, not just describing it. Van Manen (1990) states, “we want “raw” lived experience descriptions, not perceptions, views, beliefs, or interpretations” (p. 62). This is what sets phenomenology apart from other approaches of qualitative research.

This study is also informed by pragmatism, the philosophy founded by Charles S. Peirce (1830-1914) and William James (1842-1910). Later, John Dewey (1859-1952) expanded the notion of pragmatism and developed his philosophy of education that includes a problem-solving method widely used in the American education system. This research project seeks to find solutions to the problems of low academic performance of English language learners.
The methodological approach I use for this research dissertation is a qualitative case study, as I plan to find out from the perspective of public school teachers, how their ideas and teaching strategies are applied to foster the academic success of their ELLs and the social challenges these students face in school. This approach also allows for flexibility I wish to have as the researcher. As I am unsure what will emerge from my findings during the study. I want to remain open to the need to adjust or revise my initial research questions. In a qualitative case study, the researcher seeks a greater understanding of the case (Stake, 1995). “We want to appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of the case, its embeddedness and interaction with its contexts” (Stake, 1995, p. 16).

Case studies “can be conducted and written in many different motives, including the simple presentation of individual cases or the desire to arrive at broad generalization based on case study evidence” (Yin, 1994, p. 15).

This descriptive single case study is one of the choices used in qualitative research inquiry across several fields. Merriam (1998) notes that case study is an examination of a specific “thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 27). Stake (2009) indicates that the use of a case study is to understand something else, and that researchers might call the inquiry an instrumental case study. According to Nassagi (2015), a descriptive research, “is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics” (p. 129). Lastly, case studies require multiple sources of evidence to develop an in-depth description of the phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

This study serves as an example of a “bounded system” using people (teachers) and the ELL program as a case. The system is bounded, and it allows for an in-depth understanding of the surroundings, its conditions, the context, and the situation. Creswell (2013) went on to point out, that the key is to “define a case that can be bounded or described within certain parameters, such as a specific place and time” (p. 98). The aim of this study is to investigate the experiences of English
language learners (ELLs) at the elementary level in one of the Midwest public schools. Specifically, I intend to explore how these students’ cultural background and their home culture may be relevant to their academic performance and the effective teaching strategies that can assist these students in succeeding in school. Applying a descriptive single case study design will enable me to document and analyze a program that is considered rich in information and unique in the educational setting.

Case study design is applicable for this research study based on the gathering of evidence from many sources. According to Yin (2003), “evidence for case studies may come from six sources: documents, archival, records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts” (p. 85). The evidence will be gathered in this research from observations, archival documents and physical artifacts, in addition to interviews. Individuals from whom data will be collected includes the general education teachers, as well as the ELL team, and myself.

To present a comprehensive picture of ELLs, a case study approach will be employed in this study as the most effective way of investigation. Accordingly, I intend to develop a holistic understanding of English language learners’ experiences in elementary classrooms. The bounded system in this case will be several classrooms in a suburban public school. Qualitative research collects data (perceptions, observations and, documents) in a natural setting where the issue or problem is under study with no manipulations of variables by the researcher. In addition, the case study aspect of this design is that it provides the researcher with the opportunity to explore the whole experience of the participants within the social context.

**Research Participants**

Hesse- Biber & Leavy (2011) discuss that the logic of qualitative research is concerned with in-depth understanding, usually working with small samples of participants; and it aims to look at a process or the meanings that these individuals attribute to their given situations. In addition, Patton
(1990) states that information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (p. 46). In this way, the selected teachers should be able to provide sufficient and meaningful information as a form of data collection about this descriptive case study.

The research participants for this descriptive case study are selected as experienced teachers who are working with English Language Learners. There are plans for 10-12 teachers to participate in this study. The selection of the participants was based on having information regarding the research purpose and questions. I selected general education teachers, as well as ELL teachers, because they have experience working with ELLs, making this a criterion sample. All the participants are public school teachers between the ages of 33-53. Each of the participants is a college-graduate with master’s degree in ESL/ bilingual endorsements and beyond. Their teaching experiences at the public school where this case study will take place varies from 5-15 years. Most of the teachers identify themselves as whites and one of them identifies herself as African American who learned the Arabic language at age 15. Twelve teachers agreed to participate in this case study. I will include additional description of each of the teacher participants in chapter four.

The above criteria is used to select research participants to sensibly answer the research questions and specific interview questions, and to provide details about their work with ELLs. The group of the experienced teachers is a purposeful sample since I chose them because they could purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem in the study (Cresswell, 2013; Efron& Ravid, 2013). They also constituted a convenience sample since I work and communicate with them (Creswell, 2013; Efron& Ravid, 2013). I considered my research questions to select potential participants that would allow me to go in depth, into the particular, rather than to try to cover breadth with a bigger sample. Patton (1990) states that “Information-rich cases are those from which one
can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 46).

According to Creswell (2013) in the qualitative research process, the researchers keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the issue or problem, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research.

**Research Site and Background**

Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as "real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2001, p. 39). As part of this descriptive single case study, I will provide information about the research site. The public, elementary school district in which this study takes place resides in a middle class suburb of a major metropolitan area in the Midwest.

Total population of the school site where this study takes place is about 54,615. Ethnicity includes White-Caucasian 87.18%, African American 5.48%, Native Americans 0.11%, Asian 2.67%, Hispanic-Latino 0.83%, and racially mixed 5.66%. The median household income is $52,164, and living in poverty 4.4%.

According to the 2017 Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC.NIU.EDU), the school district for this study consists of five schools- two pre-kindergarten through first grade, two second through fifth, and one middle school with a total enrollment of 3,329 students. The district has an average per-pupil instructional spending of $ 7,284, and an average per pupil operational spending of $12,604. The district has a 6.9% student mobility rate and serves low-income students at 9.1% of its student body. The demographics of the school district are as follows: 76.4% White; 5.1% Black; 12.9% Hispanic; 2.3% Asian; 0.6% American Indian; 2.5% two or more races; and 0.2% Pacific Islander.
There are 189 certified teachers with an average class size of 21 students. Of those students, 32% are identified as English Learners, and 11% have documented disabilities. Parental involvement is at 96.8% and student attendance is at 95%. The district shows that for Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) in 2018, 45% of students “meets or exceeds” in reading, and 45% “meets or exceeds” in mathematics.

As this study is examining a school English Language Program and the bilingual students, it is important to include information about the program in the school district. When parents register their students, they fill out a Home Language Survey. If a language other than English is spoken with the student, a bilingual or an ESL teacher will assess the academic English of the child, using the WIDA assessment tools (WIDA Consortium, 2012). Students are assessed on listening, speaking, reading, and writing. If the student qualifies for the program, the family will be notified and the child will be placed in an appropriate program.

According to the public school district where the study is taking place, the goal of the English Language program is to maintain grade-level content expectations for students while they are building their skills in English. The district want them to be able to make a successful transition when they no longer need support. Annually, a standardized language assessment, ACCESS, is given to all students who qualify for services. If their score meets the Illinois State expectations in the domains of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, they will transition out of the program. District teachers and administrators do their best to offer students the best program possible. The programs in this district are as follows:

- English learners are expected to master grade level standards at their language level
- Students are grouped for support based on language and language level
- Students are provided instruction in groups smaller than regular class sizes
• Literacy skills are taught through the content areas
• Instruction includes the language domains of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing
• Students are included in the regular education classrooms as much as possible
• Language support is provided in the home language when possible (WIDA Consortium)

When initially screened for services, teachers provide parents with information on a student’s language level. ACCESS scores, which indicate language levels, are also reported to parents annually until the student reaches proficiency. This information helps teachers know how to best provide services for each student.

**Methods and Sources of Data**

Qualitative data analysis is an *iterative process* of data collection along with data analysis. These two processes almost proceed simultaneously (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 123). To find out which data collection tools I will use to gain insight of this study, I need to consider which will produce sufficient information and help me discover answers to my research question. Yin (2009) recommends six sources of evidence: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. The data collection for my case study is based on interviews, documentation, observation and physical artifacts.

Maintaining both descriptive and reflective field notes while interacting with the participants offered further data “without inferring feelings or responses” about what was happening during the research process (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 88). Although interviews are one of the most essential sources of evidence in case studies as Yin notes, evidence from observation is useful in giving supplementary information about the study. Each interview will last approximately an hour and a half, as is recommended by most qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2012).
In-depth interview questions, “allow[ed] the words of the respondent, and his or her experiences and perspectives, to shine through” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 102). In addition, another important component in presenting an overall picture of the case is artifacts, as Yin indicated. For the purposes of this study, I considered several sources of data: including individual in-depth semi-structured interview, my own observations of bilingual students, documentation, archival records, physical artifacts, and my personal experience with and reflection on bilingual education.

**Interviews**

This study utilizes qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews as major source for data collection and analysis. Semi-structured interviews rely on a certain set of questions that allow individual respondents some latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest or importance to them (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 102). Unlike the symbolized design of quantitative research, the design of qualitative research is emergent and evolving, according to Creswell, 2013 and Efron & Ravid, 2013. Qualitative research can give more insight because it focuses on the specific lived experiences of the students, their feelings, social interactions, and people’s perceptions rather than focusing on standardized data. It also relies more heavily on interviews as a strategy for data collection than quantitative.

Qualitative interviews emerge from broad open-ended questions. The researcher aims to gain rich narrative description of the subjective meanings the participants ascribe to their experiences, and focus on a holistic understanding of the complex interdependencies that distinguish the environment being examined (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 41). This is applicable for my research since the focus is on the meanings, perspectives, and views of the participants. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings
people bring to them (Efron & Ravid, 2013). It uses the assumption of a theoretical or an interpretative framework to address the meaning people give to a human or social problem.

Furthermore, while quantitative research aims to present fixed cause-effect relationships through its findings, qualitative research “involves closer attention to the interpretive nature of inquiry and situating the study within the political, social, and cultural context of the researchers, and the reflexivity or ‘presence’ of the researchers in the accounts they present” (Creswell, 2013, p.45). Although qualitative research allows for interpretation and reflection of the data by the researcher, it requires a great deal of objectivity on her or his part. This is cultivated through allowing the researcher to position herself or himself in relation to the study through reflexivity. Reflexivity is the process through which researchers recognize, examine, and understand how their own social background and assumptions can intervene in the research process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 120).

In the course of this study, I practice reflexivity by sharing my own personal connections to the research topic. Creswell (2013) states, how we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research. All writing is ‘positioned’ and within a stance. All researchers shape the writing that emerges (p. 215). The open-ended interview questions will be based on the purpose of the study; and guided by the research question. The following are sample questions that the teachers will be asked during the interviews. The full list of questions is included in the Appendix (see Appendix B).

1. How would you describe your role and responsibilities as a teacher in this school district? Can you provide some specific examples to illustrate your role and responsibilities?

2. What experiences have shaped the qualities that you now possess as an educator? Please give examples.
3. How do these qualities manifest in your work? Please provide specific examples that illustrate these characteristics.

4. What skills and qualities do you consider effective for an education setting that you can transfer from your previous working experience? Please elaborate on your answer.

5. In what ways have you changed your practice throughout the years. What made you change? Give specific examples to demonstrate the process of change.

6. What challenges do you face as an EL teacher? Can you please share them?

7. How different is it teaching various grade level ELL students, and what are some effective teaching strategies that you currently use in your classroom? Please give specific examples.

8. How do schoolteachers and administrators take into consideration students’ diverse cultures in the classroom? Please give specific examples.

9. When you consider your students’ cultural backgrounds in developing class homework/projects, how does this practice strengthen relationships with their parents?

10. How does your curriculum reflect a culturally diverse student body? Please give specific examples.

These questions have been constructed to allow the elementary teachers to inform me about their teaching strategies used in their classrooms. The teachers are part of this district and have knowledge and experience teaching ELLs. Furthermore, depending on each teacher participant, I expect additional questions to be emerged as the interviews progress.

After each interview, I will listen to the audio recordings for the purpose of reflecting on the teachers’ answers to my interview questions as they correlate with the purpose of the study and my research question. I will then transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews. Later, the
transcriptions will be given to the experienced teachers for their approval and after that will be returned to the researcher. This process is called member-checking, which is used for validation and accuracy.

**Observations and Field Notes**

Observations are one of the methods of collecting data that give the researcher a chance to observe a phenomenon. Case studies are considered observational research, they provide the researcher a first-hand experience with the participants and the opportunity to record information as it occurs (Creswell, 2009). They can also add new aspects for understanding the context or phenomenon being studied.

According to Yin (2009), observations are beneficial as they may be helpful in supplying additional information about the topic being researched. As a participant observer, during push-in time, I will participate in class activities, offer suggestions about how to provide instruction for ELLs, and interact with the students. I will take observational notes of the students and their teachers over a period of time in order to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the ELL program where learning is taking place.

The discoveries from these observations will provide information for my research study and aid in answering my research question. I will follow the guidelines summarized by Efron and Ravid (2013) to advise me to look, ponder, listen, and write both descriptive and reflective notes. Some of these guidelines are, finding a place that provides a good view of the classroom; identifying the activities and interactions of participants that are subject to researcher’s interest, recording the behavioral descriptions in the descriptive field notes.

My descriptive notes include the site, participants involved, and the purpose of the event. In addition, the notes will include informal notes about how students are working in discussion groups;
notes about student incidents occurring during my observations; notes about individual student participants; things that occur during student interactions; and, other observations related to classroom dynamics. After my observations, I will review the field notes, and compare them with other data sources to discover similarities and differences as it relates to my study and research questions.

**Documents and Physical Artifacts**

Efron and Ravid (2013) recommend that documents as well as artifacts are not difficult to get and allow the researcher “to construct a layered and contextual understanding of their topics” (p. 39). In this regard, documents are important tools for providing relevant information within a descriptive case study. I plan to acquire different documents related to the ELL program in this district, such as students’ requirements for student registration, newsletters from the school and classrooms, as well as program descriptions. These documents will help me examine the information against other sources and making further discoveries about the ELL program.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Qualitative data analysis consists of “preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, or a discussion” (Creswell, 2012, p. 180). Yin suggests that computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software may be helpful in the codification and categorization of data collected during interviews. “Computer analysis software available these days can be highly effective, especially when organizing, sorting, and analyzing a significant amount of data” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 319). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) both advised that, “One must be open to discovery” (p. 36). I will make an effort to interpret the viewpoints of the teachers as they work with English Language Learners. They further comment, “analysis usually begins with
looking for descriptive codes within one’s data, eventually hoping to generate a set of key concepts (categories), which are much more analytical” (p. 310). The analysis for this study will be revealed from the data collected from many sources, such as, interviews with teachers, observations of ELLs, and documents. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), the process by which the researcher sifts through the data to find meaning is a “dynamic dance,” (p. 36).

The five techniques for analysis that Yin (1990) proposes are; matching themes, building an explanation, time-series analysis, a model of logic and accuracy, and a cross-case synthesis. The preparation for analysis includes transforming the data, sorting the data, creating a data file organizer, and getting a complete sense of the information and ideas by immersing yourself in the data (Efron & Ravid, 2013). My plan is to begin with transcribing the data, which will include the observation notes, documents, and the interviews audiotapes. I will store all the forms into my computer database. I will sort the data into files and organize it by type and source, as qualitative research allows for different ways to interpret the data and present its findings. Patton (1990) notes that the challenge of qualitative research lies in the fact that there is no formula for transforming data into findings and therefore differs for every researcher. The more transparent you are with your reader as to how you did your analysis, the more trustworthiness and credibility you will have with your reader (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 339). The results of the data analysis will be discussed in details in the next chapter of this research study. I will begin by addressing the ethical consideration that will be followed during this study.

**Ethical Consideration of the Study**

I will follow the ethical considerations with great attentiveness as set by the Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB) at National Louis University, which involves human participants. To insure no one is harmed as a result of the way the research is conducted, I completed IRRB
training on 5/27/18, and I passed it (see Appendix A). My research is described as a single case study. Throughout the case study, the well-being of the participants must be a top priority, as outlined by the IRRB.

The participants will be informed about the risks and benefits, confidentiality, final consideration, participation questions, research subjects’ Bill of Rights. They will be asked to sign an informed consent, and their participation will be entirely voluntary (see informed consent letter, Appendix A). The document contains information about the researcher, research advisors, affiliate institution, and other identifying pieces of information that will be shared during interviews. The participation in this study is voluntary and all participant will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. I will obtain a verbal and signed consent agreement from the participants. They will be informed that the interviews will be audiotaped. While implementing the ethical consideration as it relates to my study, I will take proper actions to insure that safety and confidentiality issues have been addressed to do no harm. For the participants who chose anonymity, a pseudonym will be given to protect their confidentiality. A pseudonym will be used for the site as well. The data will be handled appropriately by keeping all data collected in a secure place. The IRRB ethical consideration and the issue of subjectivity were addressed by presenting my role as the researcher, as well as trustworthiness and validity.

**Researcher Subjectivity**

As an ESL/bilingual teacher, I am a first generation American; and I experienced the challenge of adjusting to new language and culture. My three children were born here in the United States and had to learn two languages Arabic and English. My experiences and background have influenced my perspectives of the importance and positive role of ELL education programs. I am an advocate for including these programs in the public school system. I believe that EL students should
have the chance to be part of these programs. I work in the community in which this study takes place, and have colleagues in the district in which it is conducted. Patton (2002) indicates that with a qualitative inquiry, as the human being is the instrument of data collection, there is an assumption that the researcher states possible sources of bias or error as a way to obtain a position of neutrality in order to present findings that are relevant and trustworthy. In this framework, "researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they 'position themselves' in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural and historical experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 25).

As far as the role of the researcher, I will remain subjective or objective when collecting and interpreting the data. I will strive for a disciplined subjectivity, accepting the following considerations: (1) my own beliefs, values, and commitments that are related to my study, (2) my previous experiences and involvement with the topic, and (3) my relationship with the participants (Efron & Ravid, 2013 p. 57). I will acknowledge my interpretation as part of the procedure used in qualitative research design.

Although my subjectivity may raise some questions, my personal and educational background, teaching experiences, and my passion for good EL programs, better prepare me to conduct this research. Merriam (1998) suggests that the researcher should have an understanding of the issues relevant to the question at the core of their study because it will allow them to interpret and sift through the information. I think this gives me an advantage over a researcher with less experience in the field, as it will help me interpret the data precisely. I am assertive that I am prepared to conduct this study and will be able to remain truthful to the study throughout the entire process.

**Validity and Trustworthiness Strategies**
One of the important parts of conducting a case study in qualitative research is the concern for Trustworthiness and validity. “Validity is a process whereby the researcher earns the confidence of the reader that he or she has “gotten it right” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 48). In quantitative research, Heale and Twycross (2015) defines validity as the extent in which the concept is accurately measured. In contrast to quantitative research that uses scientific methods to measure validity, Creswell (2013) defines validity in qualitative research as an attempt to assess the “accuracy” of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) went on to point out that “trustworthiness takes the place of truth”. It is my hope to persuade my audience that the findings of my research project are worth paying attention to. To recognize validity of my research findings means to apply the method of triangulation. “Researchers often use triangulation with the goal of validating their research by employing a second method of validity that studies the same phenomenon with the goal of confirming research results” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 56). The data collection from this case study will come from several sources of evidence such as, interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts to insure that validity and accuracy of the research findings are addressed through the method of triangulation. In addition, to strengthen the trustworthiness and validity of the research findings, I will implement a member checking strategy, where participants are provided copies of transcripts to check for accuracy after the initial interview. Furthermore, I will include the use of thick description in the data analysis to enhance the validity and trustworthiness of my findings. Stake (2005) states, “Case study aims to build understanding by addressing research questions and triangulating “thick description” with interpretations of those descriptions in an ongoing iterative process” (as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 302).

Pilot Study
In May 2018, I conducted a pilot study to find answers to the following main research questions:

- Do you think that some of the qualities that you now possess have been cultivated early in your career or in your educational or other experiences? If so, then how?
- Are there any skills and qualities that you consider effective for an education setting that you can transfer from your previous working experience? Please elaborate on your answer.
- What characteristics, personality traits, or skills have been most beneficial in your role as an ESL teacher?
- How different is it teaching various grade level ELL students, and what are some effective teaching strategies that you currently use in your classroom?
- Do you think that it is important for schoolteachers and administrators to take into account diverse students’ cultures? If so, how can this be done?

Based on the analysis of the interview, several themes emerged:

1. Moving Towards the Teaching Profession
2. Beneficial Work Experiences
3. Cultural Awareness
4. Academic Success
5. Effective Teaching Instruction for ELLs

The results of the pilot interview with Mrs. B helped me to understand how to structure the research questions. It was important for me to let go of any preconceived notions of what ELL teachers’ experiences are, and to acknowledge that everyone’s story is unique. Yin (2009) suggests a pilot study to refine data collection plans and develop relevant lines of questions. The pilot study
that I conducted will help refine my research questions, data collection including background information, and other procedures such as research design. My research study will include expanded version of the pilot study, and it will provide a guiding direction for the development of this proposed study.
Summary of Methodology

This chapter explored the qualitative research design and methods used to investigate the statement of the research purpose and research questions for this descriptive single case study of ELLs in a Midwestern suburban elementary public school district, Kindergarten through fifth grade. This chapter presented clarification of case study methodology and a rationale for selecting case study as a method to find out, from public school teachers, how their ideas and teaching strategies are applied to foster the academic success of their ELLs. In addition, it addressed the issue of subjectivity and IRRB consideration by providing my role as the researcher, as well as validity and trustworthiness, and ethical consideration. Information was given regarding the research site and participants, including selection process, as well as demographics of the community.

This chapter explained the process of data collection and analysis regarding the use of interviews, observations, documents, and physical artifacts as sources of evidence and for the purpose of triangulation. The data will be collected from a sample of ten to twelve participants, and will be analyzed.
CHAPTER FOUR

FUNDAMENTAL BACKGROUND FOR UNDERSTANDING THE CASE

In this chapter, I provide imperative background information as it pertains to this qualitative research study. The chapter is divided into two parts: In the first part, I describe a pilot study that served as a base in designing the current dissertation research. As part of the description, I state the research purpose, research question, information about the pilot’s study participant, and the data analysis related to the pilot study. The second part of chapter four includes the background information of the dissertation research. I explain the implication of the pilot study, then, I restate the dissertation’s purpose statement and question. Next, I list the sources of data, which include interviews, direct observations, documents, and physical artifacts related to the dissertation research. Finally, I provide information about the study setting, as well as a detailed description of the roles and responsibilities of the teachers who participated in this dissertation research. I conclude the description with a brief summary.

The following section explains the pilot study with Mrs. B and its implication on my dissertation research. This pilot study was conducted at Midwestern elementary school located in a big metropolitan city in the Midwest, where my dissertation research was done as well. I included the description of the pilot study so the reader would gain knowledge about the motivation, and the driving force behind conducting my research the way I did. The pilot study assisted me in designing my dissertation research, refining my research questions, improving my interview techniques, and the collection and analysis of my data.

Pilot Study

Statement of Research Purpose related to Pilot Study
The purpose of this pilot study was to find out from the perspective of a public school teacher, how her ideas and teaching strategies were applied to foster the academic success of her ELLs and the social challenges these students face in school. This study was focused on a public school, pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade, located in a middle-class suburb in a metropolitan area in the Midwest.

**Research Question related to Pilot Study**

The primary research question that I explored in the pilot study was; what are the characteristics that contribute to the academic success of English language learners in a Midwestern suburban elementary public school pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade?

The pilot study was conducted in a public elementary Midwestern (pseudonym) located in the south suburbs of Chicago that served as a base in designing my dissertation research. I teach in this school, and it concentrates on the ESL program within the bilingual department. There were over twenty-five different languages or dialects are spoken among the students in the districts’ five unique educational institutions. Midwestern Elementary School had three pre-K classrooms, four general education kindergarten classrooms, four first-grade classrooms, four second-grade classrooms, three third-grade classrooms, three four-grade classrooms, and three fifth-grade classrooms. This School accommodates a high level of diversity. The school currently has an enrollment of about 528 students of whom are 200 English language learners. These students come from many different countries and speak various languages.

This pilot study was conducted with Mrs. B, one of the ESL teachers in this school district. The focus was to find out, from Mrs. B’s perspective, how her ideas and teaching strategies were applied to foster the academic success of her ELLs. The aim of this pilot study was to help me refine my research questions, collect data including background information, and other procedures.
that were related to my dissertation. In addition, the pilot study assisted me in understanding not only the academic but also the social challenges the EL students face in school.

The main data for analysis was obtained from the interview with Mrs. B. The interview took place in the school where we work. It lasted about forty-five minutes. The interview was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim, and then data was coded to figure out themes. Themes were arranged into categories after they were classified. By using the process of ‘direct interpretation’ I pulled the data apart and put them back together in more meaningful ways (Creswell, 2013, p. 199).

The pilot interview transcription unveiled a sequence of themes organized by phrases and keywords resulting in a description of Mrs. B’s teaching strategies and her perspective on teaching bilingual students. Through coding the data, a process that consists of “creating a label or title for a chunk of text that captures its meaning” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 270). The comments Mrs. B made about how her ideas and teaching strategies of ELLs were grouped into five themes. The themes were Beneficial Work Experiences, Cultural Awareness, Academic Success Factors, and Effective Teaching Instructions for ELLs. For the purpose of my research study, I focused only on the themes that were relevant to my dissertation research. The emergent themes from the data analysis are illustrated in Figure 1.
Figure 1 Themes derived from Mrs. B’s interview

Pilot’s Study Participant

Mrs. B attended the University of Illinois at Chicago and received a bachelor’s degree in Political Science and minor in Spanish. After graduation, she worked at the City of Chicago Department of Revenue as an administrative assistant. Although she enjoyed her job, however, in the back of her mind she always thought she would like to go back to school for a teaching degree. When her children were in grade school, she volunteered at their school in the computer lab and she enjoyed the experience.

In 1996, she received her Master of Arts in teaching. She mentioned, “I started my teaching career as a first-grade teacher at a private school for nine years” (Mrs. B, personal communication, May 20, 2018). Before taking that position, she worked part-time for six months teaching pre-school as she was covering for someone who took a maternity leave. While she was there, she had to go to
a luncheon at the end of the school year and someone has told her about a first-grade position at a private school. Her relationship with her friend has helped her in getting the job. In seeking a public school teaching position, she thought an ESL endorsement would open the doors to a new position.

Mrs. B. received her ESL endorsement from National Liberty University (pseudonym) in June 2007. She did an interview at a public school, and was offered a teaching job. Currently, she is working as an ESL teacher at Midwestern Metropolitan school District teaching first-grade and second-grade students. She found out that she likes to teach K-3 students. This experience has helped Mrs. B’s career goals. She explained that she is always interested in learning about other cultures. I wonder how her life would have been if she had a political science related job.

Pilot Study Data Analysis

The following is a description of the themes that are relevant to my dissertation research.

Beneficial Work Experiences. Mrs. B had lots of experience teaching students, she has shown flexibility in her position with teaching at two different schools in first and second-grades. Therefore, she had to learn two different curriculums and handle more responsibilities as the requirements of her position increase year by year. When I asked her about the effective qualities that can transfer from previous working experience, she replied, “People who came into our office were from different nationalities” (Mrs. B, personal communication, May 20, 2018).

As an ESL teacher, she worked with children of different nationalities. As an ESL teacher, she had to complete report cards, progress reports, and ELL progress reports every quarter in a timely manner. I believe that in both jobs, she had shown that she is a hard worker. Mrs. B has excellent interpersonal communication skills. When teaching her lessons she showed enthusiasm and excitement. Her lessons were meaningful and appealed to students’ interests. She maintained appropriate classroom management and she was well organized and dependable.
Cultural Awareness. At a big metropolitan city in the Midwest that is distinguished by its ethnic diversity, Mrs. B worked with people from all different ethnic groups. She explained, “ESL teachers should maintain cultural awareness by learning about the culture and traditions of their students”. She used multicultural literature in her classroom. During the holidays, she discussed how other cultures celebrate special events as well as their family traditions. Her class visited another bilingual class and they read together. Her class also listened to songs from other cultures and performed dances of different cultures. They did that so the students learn their sight words. She said, “We do all kinds of dances like the Irish Jig, Mexican Hat Dance, and the Macarena, all those are really fun songs”.

By doing those activities, the students knew that the teacher respected their culture. She went on to explain that the “school provided parent meetings to teach parents English. In addition, parents were given ideas on how to help their children be successful.” During conferences, interpreters were provided for those who do not speak English. Mrs. B feels that the school system treated ELLs fairly, except when giving assessments.

With the implementation of the Common Core, all students must read the materials and answer questions on their own without any help from the teacher. This is very difficult for students with limited language. “We cannot help them at all with any of the assessments,” she said, “so if they cannot understand the question, their answer is not going to be very good.” I believe that this kind of assessment will put ELLs at a disadvantage because it will not reflect the knowledge they know and it is very hard for the teacher not to help them in any way.

Academic Success. Mrs. B believed that the current curriculum is based on common core standards and is very difficult for ELLs. She explained, “Teachers are not allowed to read the test questions. Students who are unable to read at grade level have difficulty understanding the
question”. She went on to say that, the curriculum is easier for general education students and not for ELLs. English Language Learners need a simple language not complicated texts. Besides, standardized testing is not given in the students’ home language, which is a disadvantage.

When I asked her about the factors that contribute to ELL’s success, she replied, “It takes three to seven years for ELLs to become English proficient. ELLs who have formal schooling in their first language are more successful academically.” She believes that teaching ELLs should include some first language instruction. Other factors are, “attending pre-school, parent involvement with reading at home, using technology, reading sites like Raz-Kids and educational games”. I think that the bilingual program at our school is very helpful for ELLs, especially for newcomers who needs the most support in their native language. Another factor that contributed to ELL’s success is using talking pens, which is a device where students can hear books in their native language.

**Effective Teaching Instruction for ELLs.** After decades of teaching, Mrs. B made it clear that teaching various grade levels is not any different except that there were higher academic expectations for higher grades. She talked about how graphic organizers and visual aids are effective teaching strategies for ELLs. Since ELLs are visual learners, this strategy makes it easier to understand the content and improves comprehension. Another teaching method that she believes in is “Realia” which is a term used to describe actual objects that are used in the classroom to enhance vocabulary and background concepts. For example, if she is teaching a unit about animals, someone could bring in a pet to the classroom if the school allows it. From my experience, using visual aids is very useful to elicit rich oral language and students would be more at ease to respond with much confidence.

Mrs. B also invited parents into the classroom to read a book in their native language. Children loved to have parents visit their classroom and found it interesting to hear books read in
other languages. Furthermore, Mrs. B believes in “Partner Work” which is a form of cooperative learning that is particularly effective with ELLs because of verbal interaction and the support it provided. She said, “If you do not know what a word is, maybe someone that you are working with might know and help you understand the meaning.” (Mrs. B, personal communication, May 20, 2018).

When I asked Mrs. B about her philosophy regarding push-in / pull-out programs, she stated that there is an advantage for push-in program because the students remain with their peers and their homeroom teacher. Besides, the students would not feel different and be accepted for their individuality. Then she talked about the disadvantages of the push-in model. She mentioned that the ESL teacher had to follow the strategies of the homeroom teacher and could distract other students in the classroom.

According to Mrs. B, the pull out program is beneficial and could be differentiated to meet the individual needs of the students. “She believes that the small group setting allows the students to be more comfortable and more engaging with their peers”. From my experience, I think the pull-out program where I work does not provide enough time for the ESL teacher to spend with her students, since too many students enrolled in the program. I think another disadvantage to the pull out program is that the ESL teacher cannot communicate with the regular classroom teacher on a daily basis.

The aim of this pilot study was to help me refine my research questions, data collection including background information, and other procedures that were related to my research. In addition, I gained the following insights:

- I learned so much about ELL experiences, and what it meant to be in a classroom not understanding the subjects taught or the language spoken.
• I learned that students came to school without doing their homework and without studying for their tests.

• I learned about the challenges that existed in the school such as the cultural differences of the ELL students and their teacher.

• I learned that the school system treated ELLs fairly, except when giving assessments.

• I learned that the curriculum was easier for general education students and not for ELLs.

• I learned that children loved to have parents visit their classroom and found it interesting to hear books read in other languages.

From the Pilot Study to the Dissertation Research: The Implication of the Pilot Study for my Dissertation Research

Yin (2009) suggested a pilot study to refine data collection plans and develop relevant lines of questions. My dissertation research included an expanded version of the pilot study that I conducted. It was important for me to let go of any preconceived notions of what ELL teachers’ experiences are, and to acknowledge that everyone’s story is unique. Conducting a limited pilot study on the issue that was similar to my current research was very helpful. First, the pilot study helped me design this dissertation research. Second, it assisted me to recognize how to be a good listener during the participant interviews. Third, it aided me in structuring questions that are more open-ended with more examples that illustrate what my questions mean. Fourth, the findings of the pilot study greatly contributed to the planning of the research study, in which the pilot study has a huge role in understanding the dissertation research. Furthermore, the pilot study assisted me in understanding not only the academic but also the challenges the EL students face in school. Once I related the Pilot Study and its advantages for the current research, I am ready to refocus on the
Dissertation research and describe its sources of data, study setting, and a complete description of the teachers who participated in the study.

**Dissertation Research**

**Dissertation’s Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study is to find out from the perspective of public school teachers, how their ideas and teaching strategies are applied to foster the academic success of their ELLs and the challenges these students face in school. Most of these students are first-generation Americans from a Middle-Eastern background. This is a descriptive single case study that is focused on a public school, pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade, located in a middle-class suburb in a metropolitan area in the Midwest.

**Dissertation’s Research Questions**

The primary research question that will be addressed through this case study:

What are the characteristics that contribute to the academic success of English language learners in a Midwestern suburban elementary public school, pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade? The following details provide information about the sources of evidence related to my guiding methodology, the case study.

**Sources of Data**

The five sources of data, such as interviews, direct observations, documents, archival records, and physical artifacts (Yin 2009), offered a basis for collecting and presenting the different information related to answering my research question. The data collected from several sources of evidence give more insight into this case study, and enhance the trustworthiness of it. Data for this study were collected from an initial face-to-face semi-structured interview, from documents obtained from the school’s website, and a follow-up phone interviews with some of the participants.
Interviews

The interviews were carried out with ten teachers (five general education teachers, four bilingual teachers, and one reading specialist teacher). Those ten teachers have experience and direct involvement with English language learners. My interview data was collected in a semi-structured process, as well as phone interviews as needed. Such an interview process is based on open-ended questions that were prepared prior to the interview (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Most of the questions for the participant teachers were the same; however, I modified a few questions during the course of the interview for several teachers.

My questions, my wonderings, my reflections began to intermingle with the experiences of each of the teachers I interviewed (Creswell, 2013). The open-ended interviews provided me insight into the academics and ELL programs at the Midwestern elementary Public school. These interviews were the basis of my research; they contained between 14 and 16 questions (Appendix B) and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes long. The interview questions were written to obtain responses that will allow me to answer the research questions about the characteristics that contribute to the academic success of English language learners.

As a novice interviewer, I felt more comfortable reading the questions during the pilot study interview rather than memorizing them. However, when I conducted the interviews with the participants for my dissertation research I felt more at ease and was more familiar with the questions, asking them from memory during the interviews. From the start, I tried to follow the questions in the order I planned, however, I changed my questions according to the participant teachers’ answers. I also followed up with different questions that were not among the pre-planned interview questions.

I met the teachers during our common lunch periods and after school in my previous classroom. The classroom was average-sized and had three big windows that made it very bright. In
front of us, there was a smartboard, to the right of us, there were two big cabinets, and three bookshelves stood to the left. The wall behind us was comprised of a big word wall for the students to refer to during writing. The other walls were adorned with different posters, such as decoding strategies, compare and contrast, verbs, nouns, short a, long a, and colorful story elements posters.

Our other meeting location was sometimes in the conference room after school. The conference room was remodeled in the previous year, and it has a nice, big grey table, and ten black comfortable chairs. It also has a big window that made the room look spacious, and it overlooks a beautiful playground.

Before starting the interview, the teachers and I were speaking casually, and made jokes at times, creating a comfortable and welcoming setting for the meeting. However, when I pulled out the recording device, I noticed some of the teachers became a bit nervous. Once I reassured them that their identity would not be shared with anyone, they visibly relaxed and began the interview. Since I worked with the teachers on a daily basis, the interviews went smoothly and the participants shared their experiences with me and answered the questions to the best of their abilities.

**Direct Observations**

I conducted fourteen observations to gain a comprehensive understanding of English language learners’ experiences in Midwestern public elementary school. Each qualitative observation lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. In order not to disturb instruction, during the observations, I sat down in the back of the classrooms. However, my ELL students would wave to me or come to hug me when they noticed me in the room. I noticed that the ELL students’ behavior was different in most of the general education classrooms, compared to their behavior in the bilingual/ ELL classes. For example, they do not raise their hands when the teacher asked questions, and they do not participate as much.
These direct observations helped me understand how ELLs were learning in their classrooms. Furthermore, they assisted me to recognize how the ELL program was implemented in the school. I collected information about the ELL’s behavior and their engagement in each classroom. Other activities and events that I observed were the EL Night, BPAC meeting, Board Meeting, and assemblies of different sorts. Attending various school events and observing general education classrooms were very insightful in gaining an understanding of the ELL students and their program. In addition, it provided me with an opportunity to see the students outside my classroom.

**Documents and Physical Artifacts**

Documents were collected to provide relevant information about this descriptive case study. These documents were essential in learning about the ELL program in this district; they include information about student’s registration, newsletters about school and classrooms, as well as program description. Samples of these documents are included in Appendix E. The next section presents the study setting and a description of the teacher participants in this case study.

**Study Setting**

The site for this research, which I called Midwestern School (pseudonym), is located in the southwest suburb of the city of Chicago. Midwestern School is one of the schools in the district that serves the community. The demographics of the school are 80% white, 10% Hispanic, 5% different races that are primarily (Arab and Polish), 2% African American, and 2% Asian, the ethnic makeup of the school’s surrounding community is mostly whites, Hispanics and Arabs. The population of the area that the school district serves is 26,468, and there are 18.15% of immigrant origins. Ethnicity included White-Caucasian 87.18%, African American 5.48%, Native Americans 0.11%, Asian 2.67%, Hispanic-Latino 0.83%, and racially mixed 5.66%. The median household income is $57,956.00 and living in poverty 4.4%.
The school currently has an enrollment of about 428 students of whom are 200 English language learners. These students come from many different countries and speak various languages. According to the school district website, roughly 46% of the students at Midwestern School are considered English Language Learners or limited English proficient and therefore qualifying for language support services. In spite of the large percentage of English Language Learners in the school, most of the students at Midwestern School are U.S. born, and only some are recent immigrants.

Midwestern Elementary School has four pre-K classrooms, four general education kindergarten classrooms, four first-grade classrooms, four second-grade classrooms, three third-grade classrooms, three fourth-grade classrooms, three fifth-grade classrooms and two bilingual/ESL classrooms. This School accommodates a high level of diversity.

According to the 2017 Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC.NIU.EDU), the school district for this study consists of five schools- two pre-kindergarten through first-grade, two second through fifth, and one middle school with a total enrollment of 3,329 students. The district has an average per-pupil instructional spending of $7,284, and an average per pupil operational spending of $12,604. Of those students, 32% were identified as English Learners, and 11% have documented disabilities. The district has a 6.9% student mobility rate and serves low-income students at 9.1% of its student body. The demographics of the school district were as follows: 76.4% White; 5.1% Black; 12.9% Hispanic; 2.3% Asian; 0.6% American Indian; 2.5% two or more races; and 0.2% Pacific Islander.

There were 189 certified teachers with an average class size of 21 students. Parental involvement is at 92.8% and student attendance is at 95%. The district showed that for Partnership
for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) in 2017, 45% of students “meets or exceeds” in reading, and 45% “meets or exceeds” in mathematics.

Data Collection Experience

Before starting my data collection, I felt carried away with anticipation, wonder, and curiosity. What will the teacher participants share? How reflective and thoughtful will their answers be? Will their engagements, experiences teaching ELL students, and the student’s inquisitions be empowering? I feel that with all the learning and understanding I gained during the data collection has left me with more questions than solutions. Sometimes, I felt more like a student in those teachers’ classrooms.

I learned so much about ELL experiences, and what it means for students to be in a classroom, not understanding the subjects taught or the language spoken. Teachers shared information about their ELL students coming to school without doing their homework and without studying for their tests. They also shared information about the cultural differences of the ELL students and their families. I can see more clearly the problems and challenges that exist in the school. With that acknowledgment, a vision for what I should strive for as an ELL advocate and educator becomes more vivid each day.

Participants

Demographics of the Participants

This study relied on what Creswell (2012) called a “convenience” sampling. In a convenience sampling “the researcher selected participants because they were willing and available to be studied” (Creswell, 2012, p. 145.). The participants for this study included 10 teachers: four bilingual teachers (one teaches kindergarten to fourth-grade, two teach kindergarten to fifth-grade, and one teaches kindergarten to first-grade). Five general education teachers (one teaches third-
grade, two teach kindergarten, one teaches pre-k, and one teaches fourth-grade), and one reading specialist teacher who teaches kindergarten to first-grade.

The teachers that were interviewed had an interest and direct knowledge about the ELL students and the ELL program. The teachers who were interviewed and observed included 10 women ranging from 30 years old to 55 years old. Out of the ten participants, nine of them were white women while one was an African American woman. Six of them were married, and the others were single. An in-depth description was provided in chapter four for each of the participants.

Now, let us meet the teachers of this research study. In this section, I present a complete description of those who participated in the study. All of the ten participants were teachers between the ages of 32-50. They were participants of convenience since they were accessible and ready to participate in the study, mostly because I work with all of them. In the interest of complete transparency, I have known most of the teachers for a long time and have been working in the same school district for many years. All the teacher-participants are well-educated, working professionals: five are general education teachers, the other four are bilingual teachers, and one is a reading specialist teacher. At the time of the interviews, all lived in the Chicagoland area. All participants except for one identify as white, and one participant identifies as African American. Below is a brief description of each of the teacher participants.

**Description of the Participants**

This section provides a detailed description of those who participated in the study. Table 1 presents an overview of the participants with their pseudonyms, the number of years they have been in the teaching profession, the number of years teaching at this Midwestern School, and the grade level they have been teaching ELL students.
During the interviews, I created a sense of openness and trust with each of the participants by using pseudonyms in place of their real names. A pseudonym was given to protect their anonymity. I recorded all ten interviews on my phone, and then I transcribed the interviews. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. The following is a detailed description of all the ten teachers that I interviewed at Midwestern School.

**Mrs. S.** Mrs. S. is one of the bilingual teachers in this school and she serves as an advocate for the students she works with. She attended Illinois State University and graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Special Education. In May 2017, she completed her Master's degree in English as a Second Language with an endorsement in Bilingual Education through Concordia University.

She has been teaching for thirteen years at two different districts. She began her career at the Nepal school district, where she worked as a special education teacher. Later, she started a new journey at Midwestern school as the Primary Instructional teacher. She taught Special education in this district for six years, and then made the switch to bilingual education. She has been a K-5th grade bilingual teacher for four years.

I have known Mrs. S. since she started working as a bilingual teacher, and we work very closely together in the same school. We plan our weekly lessons together every Friday for the following week. During the interview, she was open, earnest, and answered my questions without hesitation. She was very energetic and gestured as she spoke. When I asked her about her birthplace, she said, “I was born in another country and came to the US when I was 8; I can speak, read and write fluently in Polish”. Mrs. S’s ethnic background is the same as some of her students and that gave her the ability to teach them in their native language when needed.
Mrs. S responsibilities in this school is to support students in their English language-learning journey. She provides support for the students’ in their native language and modifies activities and lessons to meet the needs of her students. She also pushes in classrooms and helps newcomer ELLs by translating, modeling and modifying activities as well as lessons, as needed. She also services other students who speak different languages such as Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Spanish and Albanian. For these students, she supports them by modifying activities, using visuals and Google translate to ensure understanding and continued learning. When I asked about her teaching qualities, she replied, “After 13 years of teaching experience, I have seen my teaching qualities have grown tremendously compared to my earlier years of teaching in my career. I always try to learn new teaching strategies and try to incorporate new technologies into my lessons”.

Mrs. C. Mrs. C is another bilingual specialist at Midwestern Elementary School. This is her fourth year in this school and her eleventh year teaching. I have known her since she started working at this school; we work together to provide lessons to the Arabic bilingual students. She worked at other districts as a bilingual teacher before joining this school district. She mentioned, “I am passionate about language learning and have been assisting students in acquiring English since 1998”. In addition, this year she became the sponsor of the Student Council for this school.

I met Mrs. C at the end of the school day in the conference room; the atmosphere was pleasant and relaxing. During the interview, Mrs. C was sitting in an executive black chair with her legs crossed. She seemed confident and self-assured. I was very impressed when she told me how she learned the Arabic language. She said, “I learned to speak Arabic from my mother in-law before I started taking Arabic language classes in college.” Today, she speaks it fluently and is very comfortable with her student’s mother tongue.
She is responsible for screening students for English as a Second Language and bilingual services. She is also responsible for instructing students who qualify for services until they attain English Language proficiency by meeting the exit criteria as outlined by the Illinois Board of Education guidelines. She translates at IEP meetings and parent-teacher conferences for non-English speaking families who request translation. She also assists in coordinating Bilingual Parent Advisor Council meetings four times a year.

Mrs. C said that she got her experience through trial and error. As the saying goes, “Experience is the best teacher.” She continually tries new methods and strategies to see how they work for her students. She used to think that the teacher’s manual was her guidebook. However, she quickly learned that problem-solving skills are a much more valuable asset because the learning cycle requires the teacher to reevaluate the students’ needs as they acquire new skills. When an idea or method fails, she has to go back to the drawing board and reevaluate what she needs to do in order to meet her objectives. She explained, “Collaborating and good relationships with coworkers make teaching much more manageable”. She loved obtaining and sharing ideas with her colleagues. She also thought that patience and flexibility are necessary as each day can bring new challenges.

Mrs. L. Mrs. L is a KG and first grade teacher; we met twelve years ago when we started working at Midwestern school. We meet every week during our Professional Learning Committee to discuss students’ progress. She was very relaxed and confident during the interview. She answered my questions without any hesitation, but I noticed that she touched her hair very often as she spoke with me. I wondered if she was nervous at all, because she seemed to hide it very well. She stated that she learned Spanish when she was in high school. In college, she took a year off to travel to Spain in order to enhance her Spanish language.
Mrs. L has been teaching for sixteen years. Her major in college was Spanish with a Latin American studies minor and education. She taught a high school language class for two years; during that period, she took the bilingual certification test. She then began taking the coursework for her EL/bilingual certificate. Later, she taught middle school for two years. After that, she took a break from teaching for six months and worked full time at Weight Watchers, where she drove all over the city for five hundred dollars, every two weeks. Then she decided to go back to teaching as an EL teacher. She felt challenged to find her place in the field of education. She shared with me in our conversation that she has been teaching bilingual students for 12 years, and she loves teaching children how to read and write. She has even motivated children to start their own small library at home. She has also been teaching college-level courses for the past eight years. She shared that she enjoys working with high as well as low-level students.

Mrs. L believes that many of her ideas about education were instilled in her at a young age. Both of her parents were teachers and she always knew that acquiring an education was very important. She thought that many of her ideas on education are modeled after her favorite teachers that she had in school. She had a teacher in fifth-grade who used “teachable moments”. In high school, she had a great teacher who made learning fun and interesting by doing projects. She felt that as she grew older and wiser, she became a better educator. In her words, “I learned many different tricks in teaching that helps children learn reading and writing in English”. She also learned to establish good relationships with students and their families.

Mrs. W. Mrs. W is the ESL teacher at Midwestern School; we meet weekly during PLC meetings and we work very closely together. For the purpose of the interview, we met in her classroom, during our shared plan period. She was very friendly, humorous, and her answers to the questions were straight to the point. She impressed me with her knowledge about her students and
their parents. Although, her ethnic background is different from her students, she is very familiar and respectful of their culture.

Mrs. W earned her B.S. degree in Education from UW-Oshkosh. She received her M.S. degree in Curriculum and Instruction from National Louis University with a concentration on ELL education. She has been part of this school district since 1998 serving the district’s ELL students. Her 20 plus years of teaching experience includes that of being a fifth-grade teacher and a team leader in a suburb just northwest of Milwaukee. As an EL teacher, she administers support to both children and families of second language learners, as well as support for the students’ teachers. She mentioned, “Interaction with people, whether verbal or non-verbal, is of the utmost importance, both in educational settings as well as in everyday life”. She elaborated that encouraging children to share experiences improves their communication skills especially for the new ELL students.

Mrs. W. also worked with migrant students who joined her fifth-grade class when she taught in Hartford. She always had a keen interest in the history/development of the English language. Mrs. W. stated that her interest in English literature started when she studied English as a minor in her undergraduate study. She was able to connect her past interests and knowledge to second language development.

Ms. N. Ms. N is one of the reading specialists at Midwestern school, and she teaches ESL students. Ms. N is a cheerful person and she views her students’ mistakes as learning opportunities. For the interview, we met in my classroom where the environment is inviting and cozy. She sat on my chair holding her notebook with her left hand. She answered my interview questions with ease. I was impressed with the way she learned about her students’ cultures just by conversing with her students. She mentioned that she had a doctor’s appointment after school, but still took her time to answer all my questions.
Ms. N graduated from the University of Illinois in 2003 with a Bachelor’s Degree in Early Childhood Education that included a Special Education certificate. She taught preschool for nine years in a suburban school district. During that time, she obtained a Master’s Degree from Olivet Nazarene University as a Reading Specialist and an ELL Endorsement from National Louis University. For the past six years, she has been working as a Reading Specialist in the same district. She works primarily with first graders and some kindergarteners. She became Wilson certified during that time,

Ms. N started teaching right out of college, she worked at a daycare during high school and through college, and her job was to entertain the children. She expressed, “Working at the daycare center helped me making the decision to become a teacher”. Her passion for teaching started back then and has continued to today. She articulated, “Having a passion for this profession is what keeps me motivated, learning to improve myself and striving to be the best that I can be” She is always trying to give her best to her students. She believes that teaching preschool for nine years definitely helped her to become a Reading Specialist. She uses all the effective teaching strategies she cultivated as a preschool teacher in her classroom.

Ms. H. Ms. H. is a Kindergarten teacher at Midwestern School; she is a very easygoing person. We see each other daily when I pullout my students from her classroom. For the interview, we met at the end of the school day in her well-organized class. She cleared her desk quickly before we started, then she sat on her brown chair and asked if I did not mind her drinking her ice tea. She was a very welcoming, compassionate person and she answered my questions very openly.

Ms. H. received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education from St. Norbert College in DePere, Wisconsin. Since graduation, she spent the past twenty-one years teaching kindergarten through third grade. In addition to her teaching experience, she spent a few years
working as an editor for an educational publishing company. She recently completed her Masters in Reading through Olivet Nazarene University.

Her role as a classroom teacher is quite extensive. She is responsible for covering all subject areas of the curriculum. Ms. H said, “I am constantly doing formal and informal assessments to ensure that I am scaffolding the children’s learning to meet the differentiated needs in my classroom”. She regularly communicates with the parents about her concerns regarding individual students, whether these concerns are behavioral or academic. She keeps the parents abreast of concepts she is covering in class. She reminds them about important events that are taking place in her classroom or district-sponsored initiatives, and she contacts them trying to resolve issues they might have. Another critical role she plays is making sure the children’s emotional intelligence is secure. She has classroom meetings, has a calm down corner, and uses mindfulness strategies to address their emotional needs. She mentioned, “The needs of the “whole” child are related to academic instruction achievement”.

I think most of the qualities she possesses have come from her teaching experiences throughout the years. Those years of experience have enabled her to continue refining her practices to meet the children’s needs. She has grown not only in her ability to effectively deliver her instructional content, but she has also grown in her ability to facilitate classroom management and oversee daily five centers while engaged in the literacy block of her instruction and that was very impressive.

Ms. G. Ms. G is an energetic and warm-hearted third grade teacher. Before we started the interview, she was putting away the students’ worksheets in their mailboxes. She sat down in a light brown chair behind her big kidney table and grabbed her light blue mug. Her ethnicity is different
from some of her students. She impressed me with the positive notes that she sends to the parents on a weekly basis.

This is Ms. G’s sixth year of teaching and her second year at Midwestern school. She has taught both second and third grade level classes. This year she is a third grade general education classroom teacher with many EL students, four of those students with an IEP plan. She works closely with her grade level team: administrators, and support staff. She grew up in one of the suburbs of Chicago and after graduating from high school, she continued her education at Augustana College in Rock Island, IL. Ms. G. shared with me in our conversation, “While at Augie, I interned at the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind in St. Augustine, FL, and I studied abroad in Norway to learn about different cultures and diversity”. She also did her Master’s degree in educational leadership and administration with a special education endorsement from North Central College.

She thought that the experiences she gained growing up have helped develop her current qualities. She grew up with friends from various backgrounds, and went to a large high school with over 5,000 students that allowed her get exposed to different cultures. There are many clubs, programs, and events in the high school, which enabled students to display their cultures. These experiences helped her appreciate and respect students from different backgrounds and cultures. She also has been working with kids with special needs since seventh grade. She explained, “Working with immigrant families made me recognize that parents and their children require varying support systems and that language barrier can influence learning”.

As a current educator, she thinks her biases have been checked and reevaluated. She is more mindful of her thoughts since she works with students from all backgrounds who speak different languages. Last year, out of her classroom of 21 students, 18 students spoke different languages
other than English. This melting pot of a classroom was an amazing learning experience for her and her students. She can tailor activities to students that allow them to highlight their cultures. She provides visuals and support for all students knowing that there is a need for them. She also put herself in a vulnerable spot by asking questions to get to know and better understand the students. She takes time to eat lunch with students, plays with them at recess, reads with them, and just takes time to sit and talk to them. She said, “All of these non-academic settings really allows me to develop better strategies to help my students be successful”.

Ms. J. Ms. J is a good-humored and very dedicated Pre-K teacher; her ethnic background is similar to many of her students. During the interview, we sat on small chairs in her colorful classroom. Although Ms. J was born in the US, she learned spoken Arabic from her parents; however, she does not write or read the language. Her students’ work showed her excellent dedication towards her students and that impressed me the most.

Ms. J has a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education from Saint Xavier University, and a Master's Degree in English as a Second Language (ESL) from The American College of Education. This is Ms. J’s third year at Midwestern; she also taught preschool at CPS school district. She is an Arab American born and raised in Chicago. Both of her grandparents came to the United States on student visas back in 1940. Her grandparents from both sides of her family met in college, and soon after, they got married. Her grandmother worked at Nabisco, and her parents are both college graduates. She mentioned, “Education is very important to my family as well as extended family, my uncles, aunts, and immediate family members having either high education or perusing one”. Their field of studies varies from Law, Engineering, Education, Business, to Pharmacy.

She attended Chicago Public Schools from kindergarten to Eighth-grade. She has been in school with many different ethnicities from Hispanic, Arabic, African American, and Polish. Her
neighbors are from many different cultures and ethnicities as well. She has neighbors from Greece, Bosnia, Croatia, Ireland, Mexico, and from Africa.

She stated, “Teaching is a big part of my family. My mother, two aunts, and older cousins are teachers. They had a positive influence on since she decided to go into education at a young age”. She ended up in the Early Childhood field in college, because she had an amazing second grade teacher, and she wanted to be just like her. In high school, her counselor signed her up to volunteer in the early childhood rooms during her free period four days a week because she showed interest in pursuing education in college. She has been working with ELLs since she graduated from college.

She graduated in the winter, and from winter until spring, she worked as a tutor for ELLs at her old school. The following year, she got her own kindergarten classroom in the UNO Charter School Network, where she worked with ELLs for three years. At UNO, all students were Hispanic; their parents did not speak English; many families just moved to Chicago. Almost all Hispanic parents needed assistance when communicating with the school. In the next five years, she went to Chicago Public Schools, where she taught preschool to a predominantly Hispanic Community as well. She made learning a fun experience, and she never wanted to miss any days of school so she can stay with her students.

Mrs. T. Mrs. T is a welcoming second grade teacher. She was sitting on a comfortable old chair when I stopped by her class for the interview. She was so excited to answer my questions, sharing what she has learned from her many years of experience. I have two students in her class and I see her daily when I pullout my students.

Mrs. T cannot believe that this will be her 25th year teaching at Midwestern School. She received her Bachelor's Degree from St. Xavier University, her Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Olivet Nazarene, and her ESL endorsement from St. Francis. Mrs. T. said, “I
started in this district, right out of college as a permanent sub for all grade levels (K-8). I joined the teaching staff the following school year, and taught K-3 grade levels”.

A couple of years ago, she did her ELL endorsement through St. Francis University, because she wanted to teach ELL students. When she wanted to switch grade levels, she was told she would need to get an ELL certificate, so she got one through St. Francis University, and she ended up teaching second grade. In her words, “I learned to be flexible early in my career”.

Mrs. Z. Mrs. Z is a fourth grade teacher; she is very easy to get along with, and works very hard. We met in the conference room at the end of the school day. When she entered the room, she was holding a stack of worksheets for the following day’s class in one hand, while in the other hand; she held her pink floral coffee mug. She answered all my questions openly and said that she is willing to help in any way she can.

This is Mrs. Z’s eighth year teaching kindergarten at Midwestern. Mrs. Z graduated from Eastern Illinois University with a Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education, a Middle School Endorsement, and a minor in Science. She also has earned a Reading Specialist Degree from Olivet Nazarene University. She had also completed course work to obtain her ESL endorsement. Currently, she is working on becoming a National Board Certified Teacher. She shared with me in our conversation, “I have always had a passion for working with children and encouraging them to be the best they can be”.

Table 4.1 Overview of Participants, summarizes the following details of the participants: Participants’ pseudonym, age, their total years of teaching experience, their educational degrees, their certification in ELL education, and the grade level they taught at the time of the interviews.
Table 4.1: Overview of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total years of teaching experience</th>
<th>Educational Degree</th>
<th>Certification in ELL Education</th>
<th>Grade level Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. S</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>M.S. Degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>KG-5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. C</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>M.S. Degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>KG-5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. L</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>M.S. Degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>KG-1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. W</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>M.S. Degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>KG-5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. N</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>M.S. Degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>KG-1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. H</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>M.S. Degree</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>KG-3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. G</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>M.S. Degree</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2nd-3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. J</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>M.S. Degree</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Pre-K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. T</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>M.S. Degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>KG-3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Z</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>M.S. Degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I will conclude this chapter with a brief summary of the main details.

Summary

This chapter provided a holistic picture of the teachers’ participants, study setting, and the pilot study in this district. The pilot study was discussed in details, including the themes that has emerged, as well as its implications. Next, this chapter restated the purpose and question of this research case study. It explained the data collection process and details about the sources of
evidence from interviews, direct observations, documents, and physical artifacts: in addition, a
detailed description of the study setting. Finally, the roles and responsibilities of the participants
were presented in detail.

Table 4.1 displays an overview of the teachers’ participants related to the guiding research
questions that emerged in the interviews of each of my participants. The visual chart I designed was
divided into columns presenting each participant’s response to the years of teaching experience as
expressed by their interview answers.

In chapter five, I discuss the in-depth findings, themes, and subthemes emerging from the
data and a cross-case analysis of the teachers teaching experiences. In chapter six, I concentrate on
the conclusion, triangulation, interpretation as well as implications of the findings to the education
field, and conclusions and provide a comprehensive summary of this case study.
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

As Paulo Freire states “No one is born fully formed: it is through self-experience in the world that we become what we are (1921-1997).”

In this chapter, I present the analysis of the data collected through interviews, observations, and documents for this descriptive single-case study. It provided information about the ELL program and the students at Midwestern school, as it pertained to this qualitative research study. I included the categories and themes that emerged from the interviews and summaries from the other sources of evidence.

Qualitative data was gathered in this study to address the primary question: What are the characteristics that contribute to the academic success of English language learners in a Midwestern suburban elementary public school, pre-kindergarten through fifth grade? Qualitative data was derived from interviews, classroom observations, and notes made by the researcher during observations. Data gathered during the interviews and classroom observations were used to “dive deeper” to better understand and interpret the findings of data which were presented by themes.

Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis Process of Interviews’ Data

The participants were given letter codes, based on first letter of their names to maintain anonymity throughout the study. The codes were assigned to the four bilingual teachers, five general education teachers, and to the reading specialist teacher. The data analysis procedures included creating and maintaining a sequence of evidence. The process of analysis is defined as breaking down the whole into elements in order to discover its essential features (Efron & Ravid,
The data analysis process started with coding data from the multiple sources of evidence, which included interviews, direct observations, documents, records, and physical artifacts.

I conducted ten interviews between May and October of 2019, and then I transcribed the interviews using double space for easier reading. (A sample of two interviews was provided in Appendix D.) Hatch (2002) and Shank (2006) pointed out that the goal of qualitative data analysis is to bring meaning and order to the mass of collected data by looking for recurring themes, categories, and patterns (as cited in Efron & Ravid, 2020). Later on, I coded the ten interviews, and the dialogue was indicated as researcher (R), bilingual teacher (BT), general education teacher (GT), and reading specialist teacher (RT), throughout the transcript.

To take care of the coding process, I completed multiple readings of the transcripts, in addition to reviewing notes taken during the interviews and listening to the audio recordings to come up with a clear understanding of the teachers’ perspectives. Then, with each transcript, I assigned meaning units to the individual points or ideas made by the teachers in their own words. These meaning units were color coded on the transcripts. Later, the core of the meaning units were put into short phrases as themes, to provide the background and overall nature of what was being transferred. These themes were labeled as nomothetic themes, if recurring more than one time (Vogt & Johnson, 2016). Marshall and Rosssman (2011) stated that the process of analyzing data is based on categorizing and coding procedures that identify units of meaning within the data. Then these units of meaning can be organized into thematic clusters so patterns can be discovered.

To organize the themes, I used category spreadsheets to record and meaningfully organized all the collected information. Then I created columns for theme numbers, theme names, and initial codes for each of the teachers. I also included page and line numbers for the themes to assist with future referencing. The themes or categories were deduced from coded
data and developed clusters of meaning based on my own "insight, intuition and impression" (Creswell, 2013, p. 182). I highlighted significant statements and quotes that described how the participants’ daily experience working with ELL students at school.

The themes were transferred from the transcripts to the category spreadsheets for each of the teachers. Every new theme was combined with the previously identified themes in a new column at the end. If the theme was previously labeled, only the page and line number were added in the column under the teachers’ codes. This process provided a way to discover those themes that were recurring two or more times across the category spreadsheet. Patton (2002) noted that the analysis process aims is to build on these patterns to develop a holistic story and interpret the data’s meaning.

**Analysis Process of Observations’ Data**

I completed thirteen direct observations of this case study from June 2019 to December 2019. These events included classroom observations, school events such as the author’s visit, movie night, and other school activities such as beginning of the school year picnic, Halloween Parade, etc. While attending these events, I took notes that were relevant to the study, and unique insights and understandings were discovered. The reason for conducting qualitative observations during these events was for achieving a triangulation of multiple sources of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

I also collected many documents related to ELL issues from a variety of sources related to this case study from August 2019 to February 2020. These documents included ACCESS testing, BPAC (Bilingual Parent Advocacy Committee) note in Arabic and English, ELL meeting minutes, parent letters, parent handouts, registration, school coordinator responsibilities, and information related to ELL program on district website. These documents were examined and marked (DOC 1–10) in Appendix E. Some important points were identified relevant to this study. In addition,
themes were assigned to each idea. I also collected some physical artifacts (Students’ work) for this study from August 2019 to February 2020 (Appendix C). These projects/journals were collected while attending classroom observations, and from the ELL classes. These documents highlighted the ELLs’ capabilities and performances.

I took notes during the interviews, and sought circumstances to ask for explanation and interpretation by asking the teachers follow-up questions. In member checking, the researcher devises a way to ask the participants whether he got it right (Marshall& Rossman, 2016, p. 230). To reinforce the validity of the findings, I used member checks and made the interview transcripts feasible for the teachers to review, edit (if needed), and approve the transcripts from the interviews.

Since data was collected from different sources of evidence, the data analysis procedures integrated the use of triangulation method. This was done through comparing and contrasting the information obtained from the different sources of data. This step of the analysis was vital because it helped validate the data and strengthen its validity and trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that to corroborate your intuitive insights, crosscheck different sources, situations, or points of view to see if the same patterns keep occurring (as cited in Efron & Ravid, 2020).

**Emergent Categories and Themes**

The themes emerged from coded data and developing clusters of meaning based on my own “insight, intuition and impression” (Creswell, 2013, 182). The meaning units were the verbatim words of the teachers. I highlighted significant statements and quotes that described how the participants experienced working with ELLs at Midwestern school. Each theme was explored in detail throughout this chapter. When presenting the findings, I included a sample of the meaning units from each of these clusters to represent a variety of perspectives.
Although each category was populated by comments from all the ten teachers, some of what the teachers described regarding their experiences with ELLs differed from the ideas about ELLs I described in the literature review. I also did not anticipate some of the teachers’ reflected responses, which were new to me. Some of the categories and themes that emerged echoed the practices described in the literature review and connected with my own perceptions.

The data I gathered proved to be interesting and rich, and the task of refining it was challenging. Based on the analysis of these interviews, several themes emerged: (1) the impact of parental involvement (2) Considering cultural background when teaching ELLs (3) Effective Instruction/ Strategies that contribute to ELLs’ Academic Success (4) Challenges that weaken ELLs’ motivation and success, (5) School Curriculum related to ELLs (6) Policies and standardized tests.

The following figure, Figure 5.1: Emerging Themes summarizes the categories extracted from the data.
Emerging Themes:

- Impact of Parental Involvement
- Considering Cultural Background when Teaching ELLs
- Effective Instruction/Strategies that contribute to ELLs Academic Success
- Challenges that Weaken ELLs Motivation and Success
- School Curriculum Related to ELLs
- School Policies and Standardized Tests

Figure 5.1: Emergent Themes
Theme I: Impact of Parental Involvement

The participants expressed satisfaction with the wonderful relationships made with parents and their students during the interview process. The participants mentioned that they often communicate with parents about their concerns they have in regard to their children’s behavior or academic work. They also stated that they often hold training sessions for parents to be engaged in their kids’ education at Midwestern School.

Mrs. W.: Mrs. W., an ESL teacher, noted that pertaining to the parental involvement in this school district, “It is essential to be approachable and communicate with parents as often as possible, utilizing research projects and sharing such things, and is an all-inclusive way to do so.” She began the event, Celebration of Culture, 10 years ago at Midwestern school as a family event and it was always well received.

From Mrs. W’s perspective, a huge contributor to student success is parent involvement. She felt that it is essential to have a great parent/teacher communication and make parents feel that they are an important part of their child’s education. She expressed “an ESL teacher should make phone calls to parents in their native language, write newsletters and e-mails and just have a constant and ongoing communication. A Student’s attitude towards school is also an important factor.”

Mrs. S.: As a bilingual teacher, Mrs. S. concurred with Mrs. W. She provided the following example in regards to parental involvement, “I have sent home activities and homework packets that were translated into the native language of the students I work with, which is Polish.” Upon doing this, she found that the number of completed assignments increased. In her words, “the reason for this was very simply that the parents were able to understand the directions and
what was being asked of their child on the assignment, and were able to help their child with it.”

She further elaborated,

They [parents] felt like they were finally able to be a part of their child’s education and to help support their learning. Some of the parents of the students I work with expressed this to me, and it was very eye opening to me to see how much of an impact this made on their lives. Something so small and so simple meant so much to them. This is something that I will continue doing in my classroom.

Ms. G.: A third grade teacher, to continue explaining how other teachers involved parents in their classrooms, Ms. G. took into consideration the projects within her classroom. She articulated, “One of my favorites is talking about diversity and having a family interview. Students have the opportunity to interview their families about their culture and heritage. They then create a postcard representative of themselves.” To provide an example of the activity, she related,

I hang these around a world map and connect strings from the students’ postcards to the countries of their heritage. It is a huge success and very visually eye opening for everyone to see commonalities but also differences. The activity opens great discussions and learning moments from all students. Parents enjoy this activity as they come into the building for conferences, etc.

In closing, Mrs. G. remarked, “I am very open with parents and build the communication lines with families early on. I send home weekly Friday notes with all students that highlight the positive things from the week for their student specifically.”

Ms. J.: Ms. J., a Pre-K teacher could not stress enough the importance of parental involvement. She remarked, “Parents are the first teachers to these students. Coming to school
should be a two way street when it comes to helping the child.” She believed that teacher and parents should be working hand in hand to helping the child learn best. She also stated,

Now, I understand that many parents do not come to school. It may be that they have had bad experiences at school, and are afraid to come. It may be that they do not realize that in America, parents are encouraged to come to school. It may also be that they just believe it is a teacher’s job to teach a child. All of these excuses, in my opinion, need to be corrected.

She tried so hard in the beginning of the year, no matter which school she was in, to make the parents feel welcome, and tries to inform them that their involvement is so important. Similar to Ms. N., she came up with different home projects for them to do with their child monthly. She mentioned:

I send home notes, and call them [parents] throughout the year (in my old school, I had daily face to face communication because each child needed to be picked up and signed out in my room), to keep the communication open with us.

Mrs. T.: As a general education second grade teacher with many years of experience, Mrs. T. provided the following examples in describing parental involvement at school. She noted,

Our grade level has the children make a heritage doll and do a mini-report on the country or culture it is from. We also do a continent and ocean program where we learn songs and dances from all different cultures and areas. Moreover, we talk about the many different kinds of celebrations and customs people have.

Ms. H.: Similar to the other teachers, Ms. H., a KG teacher, regularly communicated with the parents about concerns she had in regard to individual students, whether these concerns were related to behavior or academics. In her words:
I keep the parents abreast of concepts they are covering in class, I remind them about important events that are taking place in my classroom or district-sponsored initiatives, and I contact them when they reach out with questions or concerns they may not have been aware of.

To continue explaining, she noted:

This can be done by asking your students’ questions about special days they celebrate in their culture, you can share literature that addresses cultural diversity, and you can show you respect their differences. You can invite parents in to share informative presentations about their heritage.

She continued to explain that, “I think having an EL night, which happens to be hosted by our district is another meaningful way to educate others about food, music, practices, and holidays that make their culture so unique.” Lastly, she elaborated:

I have invited parents into the classroom. They were able to bring in props that represented important aspects of their culture. I felt it strengthened relationships with parents because it showed I valued their culture enough to take time away from the curriculum to educate the children and myself about differences that made them special.

Mrs. N.: As a reading specialist, Mrs. N. believed that inviting parents into the classroom for meaningful experiences was a good practice. Mrs. N. Suggested, “Reading to the students in their native language, listening to students read, playing games with the students, and asking parents for feedback.”

In her opinion, she said, “teachers that successfully help ELL parents navigate school challenges offer both two-way communication and parental guidance to help increase positive home support of school. Parental involvement is one of the key drivers of student success.”
Mrs. L.: As a KG and first grade teacher with ample years of experience, Mrs. L. shared, “Parents are always excited to help with projects from sharing their stories with the students or to come and volunteer, or to cook their favorite culture dishes. . . . Parents appreciate that we help students connected with their roots and embracing each culture.” To provide some example, she stated,

During social studies curriculum, during cultural events and projects, and during some school shows and plays that students perform for their parents. In addition, our reading curriculum mentor texts have plenty of main characters representing different culture groups from all around the world.

Summary of Theme I:

It is invigorating to learn that teachers were committed to developing wonderful relationships with both the parents and their students. The educators stated that they often communicate with parents about concerns they have in regard to their children behavior or academic work. From the data, it is clear that the teachers involved in the study believed that the job of the teachers includes educating the parents about how to be engaged in their student’s education. However, some teachers felt that not all parents participated in their children’s education as much as they should due to different school expectations based on culture. Engaging homework and projects help the students navigate school challenges and encourage them to increase their motivation in which it involves parents. From the participants’ perspective, parental involvement plays a significant role in efficiently promoting students interactivity with homework and projects.

Theme II: Considering Cultural Background when Teaching ELLs

The Midwestern elementary school has a student population from many different countries, bringing with them their own cultural backgrounds. Some of the participants noted that the school
does an excellent job of addressing the cultural diversities that exist in the school, which, in turn, helps the teachers connect with all their students. Midwestern elementary school holds a variety of school activities to expose the students to different cultures.

**Ms. G.:** As a third grade teacher, Ms. G. believed that the experiences she had growing up have helped develop the qualities she has now. She grew up with a wide range of friends from various backgrounds. She went to a huge high school of over 5,000 students so was surrounded by many cultures different from hers. She proclaimed that, “within the high school, many programs and clubs existed and put on events that showcased their [students] cultures. These experiences, I think, helped my appreciation for all backgrounds and cultures.” She provided the following examples:

- I think my biases have been checked and reevaluated. I am more mindful of my thoughts and myself especially as I work with students from all backgrounds and speaking different languages. Last year, my classroom of 21 students had 18 different languages spoken! This melting pot of a classroom was an amazing learning experience for my students and myself!
- I can cater activities to students that allow them to highlight and showcase their cultures.

In Ms. G.’s words, “I do not think I have really changed my practices all that much. I think the largest change came when I learned more about what families of various cultures value in regards to education.” In addition, she stated, I learned more about the role of genders within some cultures and roles of their communication as well. These, I think, shifted my approach, but made me more aware and culturally responsive. She further elaborated that:

- I think that it is critical that teachers and administrators take into account diverse cultures.
- Together, celebrating the cultures, providing opportunities for students to share their cultures, asking questions, removing and being aware of biases, translating papers going home into languages that families need.
Next, she remarked,

I had training at my previous district about better understanding families from various cultures (i.e. Japanese and Indian) as they communicate about their child’s success at school, but also how to best communicate with these families at conferences. The “oreo” approach that so many U.S. teachers use at conferences confuse Japanese families, as they are accustomed to the blunt “how is my kid doing”. Having an awareness of the importance of specific areas within cultures when it relates to school is huge for administrators and teachers.

**Mrs. L.:** Similarly, Mrs. L., a KG and first grade teacher, believed that the school should take into account a student’s cultural background. She thought that it all starts with modeling. She suggested, “The teachers need to model a love for all people and cultures. Sometimes when people feel they are being respectful of cultures, it feels forced or they are celebrating only surface culture (food, holidays, and words)”. She also thought that it all comes down to the fact that we are all-human and have similar needs.

To provide an example, she stated,

I always consider my students’ cultural backgrounds while teaching. I try to be respectful of all students and families. I take into consideration cultural norms that are related to school (like many Latinos leave the job of teaching to the teachers, lack of education in certain parts of Latin America, not understanding the US school system).

In closing, Mrs. L remarked, “I had a student who did not celebrate holidays so I tried not to read texts about holidays. I try to find texts that are culturally relevant to my students. Then, they can see themselves in texts they are reading.”
Mrs. S.: As a bilingual teacher, Mrs. S. definitely thought that considering cultural backgrounds was very important to take into account. She shared that,

A child’s culture and cultural background may have a very large impact on their learning. Depending on what their native country is, may depend on the level of academics this child received. We should understand this and consider it when planning school wide activities, rewards and motivational opportunities. Maybe allowing students from diverse cultures to share important details or facts about their native country would educate everyone in the school including, peers, teachers and administrators.

Similar to Ms. G., she noted that,

We [teachers] use the American culture’s curriculum and not any other cultures’. This curriculum is written by US educators and is focused on American traditions, and cultural experiences. As an EL teacher, I try my best to support cultural diversity by including information and activities from other resources. I use Twinkl [website] as a main resource to support my student’s learning of cultural diversity. I also read stories related to the student’s native culture and background.

Ms. J.: Ms. J., a Pre-K teacher, believed that starting school at a young age was already a difficult experience. She expressed, “when you add that many students are coming to America for the first time, and may not know our culture, it adds a whole new dynamic that needs to be taught as well.” She shared in our conversation:

One way is to send home a questionnaire that asks questions about such things as languages spoken at home, dietary restrictions, etc. This can help teachers to learn about their students and their families. Another way, could be to hold cultural events. For example, a couple of weeks ago we had a “Cultural Day” where our preschool students came dressed in their
cultural clothing and brought in cultural food dishes to share with their classmates. We also had a cultural parade.

Next, she elaborated on taking into consideration cultural background:

It helps parents become involved in their child’s education. Parents feel like they are contributing to their child’s success. It also helps students bond with their parents because their best source for learning about their cultural background is their parents.

She also remarked:

Hearing stories from their experiences has been eye opening, and very rewarding. I love hearing how passionate they are when they talk to me in their own language as well! I learn new words from them, and it is like they are teaching me, like I am teaching them!

Mrs. T.: Mrs. T., a second grade teacher, felt that learning about their [students] cultures had made quite a difference. She provided the following example, “I have had students fast, and I take that into consideration when they are in my room and I know they are thirsty from recess or really hungry at the end of the day.”

She continued to explain by providing the following examples,

We have the language survey parents fill out for the district, but I also send home my own survey to parents at the beginning of every year to learn about the students. Our principal does a wonderful job helping to create a welcoming atmosphere by greeting students in different languages on the morning announcements. Our school offers regular meetings for parents of different languages to discuss school events. There have also been workshops/presentations to inform teachers about different cultures.

She believed that diversity should be viewed as a positive component within the classroom and that it is our duty to foster respect, acceptance and support the various cultures that are
represented within our classroom. To provide a solution, she suggested, “This can be done by involving the families in their child’s education, creating an open-door policy that includes and supports all cultures and fostering an atmosphere that encourages respect and tolerance for those whose background may be different from their own.”

**Ms. N.:** As a KG and first grade reading specialist teacher, Ms. N. tried to express interest in the ethnic background of her ELL students, shared information about their backgrounds, and kept a level of sensitivity to their language concerns. To provide some examples, she stated:

Some ways this can be done are:

a. Be aware of your personal beliefs about other cultures and why you believe them. Are they based on experience? Stereotypes? What biases might you have? What message are your words/actions/expectations giving to others?

b. Get to know students and their families individually.

c. Invite parents into the classroom for meaningful experiences read to the students in their native language, listen to students read, play games with the students, etc.

d. Have books representing different cultures and languages.

e. Have things labeled in different languages.

f. Try to learn words in different languages.

g. Host parent workshops to help them know/become aware/understand our curriculum and expectations. Ask parents for feedback.

h. Host teacher workshops to educate them about different cultures. Ask parents from the community to talk with the teachers about their culture.

i. Choose quality literature that represents diverse cultures in a non-stereotype way
j. Express interest in their cultures. To provide an example she stated, “I ask students to teach me how to say different things in their native language. I ask questions about holidays they celebrate.”

In closing, Ms. N. remarked, “Educating ourselves about other cultures helps us understand our students better.”

**Mrs. C.** As a bilingual specialist, Mrs. C. shared in our conversation that, “The teachers and administrators make efforts to have students to share information about their cultures.” She provided the following examples:

They [teachers] teach units on cultures and traditions and students share cultural artifacts and pictures with the class. We also have a “Celebration of Cultures” night in which students give presentations and the teachers and families do gallery walks from presentation to presentation. Additionally, teachers and administrators reach out to teachers from diverse backgrounds to ask questions to ensure that they are being culturally sensitive.

She further explained,

This practice strengthens relationships with parents because it empowers the parents to help and support their children’s education. It also sends a message that we care about their children and want students to feel a sense of pride and confidence about themselves.

**Summary of Theme II:**

The teachers’ responses to Theme II, Considering Cultural Background when Teaching ELLs, indicated that it is very important to consider cultural backgrounds when working with students, and it does not matter if they are ELLs or not. From the data, it was clear that it has been most beneficial having an awareness of students’ backgrounds and one’s personal biases, understanding the different cultures they have, knowing their language levels, home life, strengths
and weaknesses, etc. Some teachers noted that they used the American culture’s curriculum, which does not always support ELLs, while others felt that it did.

In addition, teachers and administrators were encouraged to consider students’ cultures and it was done through incorporating diverse literature, bringing in guest speakers, watching videos about different cultures, taking part in various celebrations, etc. It was apparent that teachers consider cultural backgrounds when developing weekly homework and yearly projects by incorporating relevant reading, writing, and math assignments that relate to students’ interests.

**Theme III: Effective Instruction/ Strategies that contribute to ELLs’ Academic Success**

As the participants were answering the questions posed to them, it became clear that they possessed an intrinsic drive to grow as educators. This process involved applying different teaching strategies they had learned through their years of experience, utilizing a variety of resources, in characterizing their instruction with empathy.

**Ms. G.:** Ms. G., a third grade teacher, believed that a variety of characteristics contributed to English learners’ academic success. She provided the following example, “One is the support and patience within the school from their EL teachers, classroom teachers, peers, etc.” She believed that the resources used to play a large role. She mentioned, “I use a lot of visual cards for vocabulary and content in all subject areas to support my students, including EL.” She noted, “Believing in the students and providing them with the positivity that they can succeed!” She thought the mindset and awareness of biases we have could also contribute to their success.

She also provided sentence starters for writing responses. She shared, “accountable talk posters are hung up in the classroom to provide all students with sentence starters as they discuss with their partners or table groups, but also these are utilized in writing.” She continued to explain,
“Visual schedules are used daily. Manipulatives and whiteboards are provided for math to again assist.”

Mrs. S.: As a bilingual teacher, Mrs. S. remarked,

I worked as a Special education for the first 6 years of my career, and then changed to EL; I found that many of the experiences and resources I used within the Special education setting related very closely to what I can use in the EL classroom to support my students. Since I myself was an EL student, having immigrated to the US at the age of eight from Poland, I can relate to what my students are going through in their English language-learning journey. I can relate to how they are feeling, their frustrations and their sense of pride when they finally grasp a concept because they can finally understand it.

In addition to the points mentioned by Ms. G. about ELLs, Ms. S. addressed the qualities that she considers effective for ELLs. She remarked,

Flexibility is the main skill that is needed in any classroom, especially in one like mine where I have students coming in and out all day. Groups get cancelled, sometimes-extra push-in time is requested, and if time allows, I try to fit everything in. Patience is also very important as all students learn at different paces and have different learning styles. Being creative is also very important since modifications needs to be made on a daily basis to ensure that all students are learning and are receiving the proper support needed for their level of skills. She further explained,

Many of the strategies and techniques that are used in the lower grades can also be used in the upper grades. All students benefit from modeling and visuals, the use of their native language to increase comprehension and vocabulary is also something that can be used across all grade levels.
Mrs. W.: Similarly, Mrs. W., an ESL teacher, believed that all children learn whether age five or thirteen. She acknowledged, “Empathy, compassion, flexibility, organization, and consistency, are all characteristics that are important in my role as an ESL teacher.”

To provide an example she stated, “Some effective teaching strategies that I use with ELL students are providing them with many visuals, modeling, simplifying language, providing sentence starters, scaffolding, using TPR and being as animated as possible.”

In addition, she noted that, “Academic and linguistic backgrounds as well as work ethic are the major characteristics to academic success for a second language learner.”

Ms. J.: Ms. J., a pre-K teacher, concurred with Ms. G. Ms. J. shared in our conversation, “I have learned that students need patience and care. For example, I have had students who come into my classroom with no previous school experience. They are not used to a classroom setting, working with others, and following routines.” She further explained, “It takes weeks to teach these qualities to them and constant repetition. If students do not feel that you genuinely care for them and are not patient, they will fight you every step of way.”

Similar to Mrs. W., she proclaimed, “I have found that organization in an education setting, or any job setting for that matter, is extremely important.” She provided the following example, “I have a storage closet that has all my teaching resources and supplies labeled and in clear storage boxes. This way I do not have to stress over looking for supplies or resources, I need.” In addition, she stated, “I always try to prepare for the following week’s lessons the Friday before. This way lessons run smoothly and I can focus on classroom management.”

She believed, when teaching ELL students, physical movement with verbal directions is important. She mentioned, “If you want to do a cutting activity you should model the activity while giving verbal directions. This should be done consistently for ELL to make the connection.”
Another example she provided was, “The use of realia because it helps students make a mental and physical connection to new vocabulary.” She commented, “Providing ELL with peer interaction opportunities is very important because it gives them a chance to practice speaking. We do this during ‘Center Time’, recess, etc.”

Mrs. T.: As a second grade, general education teacher, Mrs. T. felt that she was able to differentiate instruction to meet her students’ various needs. She commented, “This is critical when working with ELL students. They all come to me with varying language levels, cultural backgrounds and outlooks on what an appropriate educational experience means to them.” She expressed that, “I feel very comfortable meeting my students’ needs at the level they are currently at because of my experience. I am able to create a learning experience that will help them progress.”

In her words, “I feel that in the primary grades we have an advantage over teaching ELL students in the older grades because at this stage many of our approaches to teaching benefit both ELL and non-ELL.” To provide an example she stated, “We use lots of visuals, games, songs, manipulatives, and repetition.” She further elaborated, “I try to provide as many visuals as possible to support language, learn as much about their individual backgrounds, as I possibly can, and differentiate to meet their individual needs.” She believed that students learn best when they have a clear idea of routines and expectations. In addition, she went on to say,

I have always been a firm believer in structure within the classroom. The educational setting that you present for your students should be consistent, reliable and equitable. I am extremely organized, and have my plans, copies, materials ready to go well in advance. I utilize technology to eliminate reinventing the wheel year after year. My plans are organized in such a way that I can feel confident that a sub could walk in my room at any second and be ready to execute my plans and teach.
Ms. H.: In Ms. H.’s opinion, a KG teacher, there were varying factors that contribute to EL students’ academic success. She articulated, “It is important to ensure you have the appropriate resources in place. For instance, it is imperative to have EL staff who can strengthen their language skills outside the classroom setting.” She shared in our conversation, “It is critical you create a safe space and respectful environment where EL students are comfortable asking questions to clarify any confusion they may have about the designated expectations.”

In addition, she further elaborated,

I have found it is effective to instill the support of peers to buddy up and heighten the EL students’ confidence, as it can be less intimidating to approach a fellow peer vs the teacher. Another critical component is to have differentiated instruction in your classroom. By facilitating center rotations, she is able to meet with individualized learning groups to address the varying needs of students.

She continued to explain, “I use a lot of visuals and kinesthetic experiences to reinforce concepts we are covering, so the EL learners have concrete experiences that enable them to successfully comprehend the subject matter we are covering in class.”

In addition, she remarked, “I take more of a child-centered approach. I put a great deal of ownership in the children’s hands because I know they are capable of handling the responsibilities and they are more invested in their learning if the environment promotes respect, responsibility, and community.”

Ms. N.: To describe the characteristics/personality traits that have been most beneficial in her role as an ELL teacher, Ms. N. responded, “patience, compassion, positivity/encouraging, and Growth Mindset.” She noted, “Reading to students daily in hopes of helping them develop a better understanding of the English language, and promoting cooperative learning, and allowing students to...
assist and learn from one another.” She further elaborated that, “Each one of my students comes to school, not only with unique academic needs, but also with unique background experiences, culture, language, personality, interests, and attitudes toward learning.”

She believed that effective instruction must recognize that all of these factors affect how students learn in the classroom and that instruction and interactions are differentiated to meet students’ needs. Making content comprehensible is an absolute must! Students need to be engaged and be able to digest the information. Students need to use a wide range of strategies and variables to grasp the content such as reminder cards, charts, drawings, graphic organizers and so on.

She posited, “I know with my own students, sometimes I can try the most bizarre methods of either getting the student to comprehend or correct behavior. My motto is... "You never know until you try". What may not work for one... may work for another!”

In addition, she stated that some of the effective teaching strategies are, visuals, repetition, wait time, explicit instruction, concise direction/explanations, and consistent routine, hands-on experiences, build background knowledge, many opportunities to talk and work together, and set purpose for learning.

**Mrs. C.:** Unlike the other teachers, Mrs. C. who is a bilingual teacher that speaks two languages, believed that English learners do best when they are in a supportive learning environment where they can be uninhibited from asking questions and speaking in their native language when they feel the need to. She shyly explained, “the students need a teacher who demonstrates that s/he cares about their well-being academically as well as socially.” She suggested that,

English learners need to be given adequate time and opportunities to practice and develop their language skills. They need to be given time to learn at their own pace, and not to feel overwhelmed with learning a language as well as content simultaneously. English learners
need to be given purposeful, engaging tasks and rich vocabulary that will help them academically.

She felt that teaching various grade levels allows her to work with all age levels, which makes teaching less monotonous. It also allows her to see the progression of skills that students need at each level, which is very useful for planning instruction. She shared in our conversation, 

In my classroom, I have decided to teach thematically so that all of the grade levels are working on the same topic but at different levels. Teaching this way is helpful because I can easily differentiate for students’ different language levels by using materials that I have selected for lower grade levels. 

She found that quality instruction is much more beneficial than the quantity of tasks the students complete. She commented, 

It is more effective to take your time and teach to mastery that constantly reteach the same material. I have also found that hand on activities and group work are more effective than direct teacher instruction. The students learn from each other as they work together. 

Mrs. L.: As an ESL teacher, Mrs. L. had opportunities to work with the general education teachers, and felt that all ELLs need a welcoming environment where they are able to try new things. She also found that all ELLs needed vocabulary and practice while learning English. She mentioned, “They need comprehensible input (gestures, pictures and language just slightly above their ability level). I also build a background very strongly. I think that all of these strategies work regardless of age.” She expressed that: 

Being knowledgeable in the subject areas, rules, and students’ needs are very important in any educational setting. In addition, communication and having an open mind without judging people will help into having open communication between teachers and parents or
administration. Sincerity in your work and actions will make people trust you and believe that you are caring for the best benefits for their child.

To provide some examples, she stated:

I also learned that all good things take work. These have been very beneficial in the educational setting. I work hard, help students to set goals for themselves, and I develop strong relationships with school staff, families, and students. I also have found that my ability to be flexible and caring are two of my most beneficial traits that help ELLs.

She is flexible in ways to teach students. She understands that all students learn differently and at different paces. She also cares so much for all of her students and their families, as she wants them to have success and she empathize with their bilingual/bicultural journeys.

**Summary of Theme III:**

The teachers’ responses from Theme III, Effective Instruction/Strategies that contribute to ELL’s Academic Success, validated that the ability to be flexible, caring and patient are beneficial traits that help ELLs succeed in school. From the viewpoint of all the teachers interviewed, they believed that the resources used in the classroom such as visuals, gestures, differentiated instruction, sentence starters, modeling, pictures and hands-on experiences, play a significant role as well. However, it was evident that the bilingual teachers were better trained in teaching ELLs. The teachers also acknowledged that active students’ participation in school programs and active involvement of parents in English language learners’ education contributes to their academic success.

The teachers were perceived as being extremely talented and strongly dedicated to their work, as they provided supportive learning environments, had appropriate resources in place, and helped students to set goals for themselves. Several examples previously stated that support.
Students need the right support at home and at school. Parents also require translation to know what is happening in the classroom and the right tools to understand how to help their child succeed.

**Theme IV: Challenges that Weaken ELLs Motivation and Success**

As the interviews progressed, discussions expanded to the challenges that weaken ELL’s motivation and success. Some of the participants noted that sometimes the school’s environment was not culturally sensitive, and the expectations placed on ELLs were unrealistic. However, most participants noted that they work with a supportive EL group of teachers who are always willing to help keep the lines of communication open with parents.

**Ms. G.:** Pertaining to the challenges that affected ELLs’ success, Ms. G., a third grade teacher, responded, “I think not providing the support from teachers, and the resources used to play a large role.” She elaborated, “By assuming students don’t understand English, though they may not, the assumption can hinder their motivation. Showing bias towards students can also weaken their success.”

She believed that a challenge for her was just ensuring she was matching the support needed for each of her students. To provide an example she stated,

It would be great to have more collaboration time with the EL teachers in the building and the grade level team to best ensure we are meeting the needs of our EL students and if not, how we can alter our instruction or materials to help them.

**Mrs. S.:** As a bilingual teacher, Mrs. S. acknowledged that one of the biggest challenges that she had experienced as an EL teacher had been the level of expectations that are set for EL teachers by General education teachers. She believed some of the expectations they have of EL students are not always realistic. She commented,
We have to explain to them, repeatedly, that learning English is a lengthy and rigorous process, there are varieties of stages that students go through while learning the language. . . .

We need to be positive, supportive and patient. . . .Another challenge would also be that the accuracy of our placement tests are not the strongest.

To continue explaining about the challenges, Mrs. S. stated, “sometimes students score very low on these tests due to other factors, rather than inability to speak English, and unfortunately, they qualify for our program, when they really do not need it.” She mentioned,

This is something that becomes frustrating to us as educators because we have students qualifying for our program that does not need the help of this program and are mixed with students who are newcomers and really do need our support.

Mrs. W.: Unlike Mrs. S., one of the biggest challenges that Mrs. W., an ESL teacher, mentioned was differentiating instruction for children of various ability levels. She remarked,

I try incorporating technology, art, music, and the use of manipulatives, to make instruction meaningful to all students, but sometimes the greatest thing that is playing against us teachers is TIME. . . . There just is not enough time to fit in all the wonderful teaching tools that I would like to. . . . Lack of parental support as well as lack of a strong work ethic, can weaken motivation and success for our second language learners.

Ms. J.: Ms. J., a Pre-K teacher, felt similarly to Ms. G., in that one of the challenges she faced was finding appropriate teaching resources to assist her ELLs. She shared, “there are many resources I have had to research for or make. Being creative is helpful.” She also noted,

Another challenge is communicating with parents of ELL parents. I speak Arabic and English, and luckily, most of my parents can speak either language, but recently I had a parent whose English skills were very weak and spoke Uzbek fluently. With the mom’s
Permission, I was able to find another parent translate for me. Language barriers are difficult, especially if I do not speak the language.

Mrs. T.: Mrs. T., a second grade teacher, concurred with Ms. G. and Mrs. S. in that there are many challenges including communication with parents, having ELL students pass the same assessments at the same level as non-ELL students, and determining if a student’s struggles are due to language or another issue. To give an example she stated, “Many times, the parents do not speak the language the children are instructed in at school. That can inhibit a parent’s ability to read notes from the teacher, or assist in homework completion.”

She further explained, “This can be especially tricky when a student is at a language level where they have social speech, but the academic language is not there yet – it can make them seem like they understand more than they really do.”

Ms. H.: A KG teacher with a great deal of seniority, Ms. H., commented, “ELL students’ academic motivation and success can be impacted negatively by many factors.” She remarked, Some factors that may contribute are a parents’ attitude towards learning English. If a parent recognizes the importance of acquiring the language, they will instill this priority to their child, and the child will be more motivated to work to his/her fullest potential to learn the language.

She believed the classroom environment plays a key role in determining whether a child succeeds or fails. She explained, “If the environment is too stringent or uninviting, the child won’t feel comfortable enough to take risks or ask questions that are necessary in strengthening his/her language skills.” She further stated,

The child should feel secure and respected, so anxiety is not impeding him/her from making mistakes and continuing to blossom when acquiring language skills. It is important to tap
into the varying learning modalities visual, kinesthetic, auditory, etc. to ensure you are meeting all learners’ needs.

Ms. N.: Ms. N., a reading specialist, believed that one of the challenges was ensuring that her ELL students make adequate progress throughout the school year. She provided the following examples,

As a teacher, I find that I am constantly working against the clock. . . . Language acquisition does not happen overnight. . . . In learning English, what happens outside of class matters most? In too many cases, my EL students only make an effort to speak proper English in the classroom when they are under supervision. My students do not always hear people around them speaking proper English. . . . As a result, it becomes more difficult to learn correct English.

She further explained,

I work with struggling readers. There have been numerous times where I have found it difficult to determine whether the ELL student is struggling because of low language and/or because of other reasons like a potential learning disability or lack of exposure/practice.

Fortunately, we have wonderful bilingual teachers who help with translating.

She revealed in our interview that her ELL students are held to the same academic expectations as English-only speaking students and that she finds it challenging to get her students to where they are expected to be by the end of the year.

Mrs.: C. Unlike the other teachers, Mrs. C., a bilingual specialist, believed the main challenges she faced were related to teachers from outside the field as well as parents of students who may be second or third generation immigrants who do not understand the purposes and benefits of English as a Second Language/Bilingual instruction. She stated, “It can be difficult to find native-
language materials when teaching students who are new to the country. . . . Native language materials ensure that students continue to receive academic content while they are acquiring English.”

In addition, she remarked, “another difficulty I face are students who have had interrupted schooling. . . . Sometimes these students are several grade levels behind, but are not candidates for academic support because they know very little English.”

Mrs. C. felt that elements that weaken English learners’ success include a school environment that is not culturally sensitive and does not hold high standards for all students. She proclaimed, “Teachers who are not dedicated to teaching English learners are often not effective at motivating them and making them successful.”

To elaborate, she stated, “Teachers who are not willing to be flexible and creative can negatively impact English learners’ progress because they are not able to design instruction to match the individual, specific needs of their students.” In closing, Mrs. C. remarked, “lack of funding for materials and qualified teachers can also be detrimental to English learners’ success.”

Mrs. L.: Mrs. L., a KG and first grade teacher, noticed that vocabulary is lacking with all ELL students, including those who are avid readers. She mentioned, “They [students] are just reading fast without stopping and asking themselves about the meaning or figuring it out from content text clues.” She also noted, “Another issue with ELL students and regular ones is their writing. They are having hard time composing a paragraph that contains seven sentences. One barrier is the language, but the lack of patience is another one.”

Summary of Theme IV:

The teachers’ responses from Theme IV, Challenges that Weaken ELL’s Motivation and Success shared concerns about issues such as communicating with parents of ELLs, the lack of
resources and professional support, unrealistic expectations of ELLs, in addition to a school environment that is not culturally sensitive, and ensuring that ELL students make adequate progress throughout the school year. Some teachers work with a supportive group of bilingual teachers who are always willing to help keep the lines of communication open with parents. For example, one teacher felt it was challenging to teach when children were not able to use their native language. Other teachers mentioned that ELLs’ difficulties may stem from issues not related to language barriers. Even though many challenges existed, solutions were found because of collaboration among all teachers. I found it impressive that even under these circumstances, the teachers remained positive and everyone worked to create a better learning environment for their students.

Theme V: School Curriculum Related to ELLs

Although the participants noted that the curriculum lacked instruction related explicitly to ELL students, the participants commented positively regarding learning about different customs and traditions. Some of the participants thought that providing culturally diverse materials and differentiation skills that they learned assisted them in being able to teach ELL students.

Ms. G.: Ms. G., a third grade general education teacher, expressed,

I think the curriculum does a bare minimum job of providing culturally diverse materials. The names within the Envisions math curriculum are names of children that are various cultures (i.e. Mohammad, Sarah, Yuko) and the stories within Wonders literacy are representative of various cultures (i.e. Puerto Rican folk tale, Japanese characters, etc.). Lastly, she noted, “I think that curriculums could include more supports for EL students within the texts and materials. Our science STEM Scopes does include visual cards for us to use, but the material and readings are not written for EL students.”
Mrs. W.: Mrs. W., a bilingual teacher for more than two decades, stated, “We learn about various ethnic groups through the stories that we read, learn about different customs and traditions and holidays around the world.”

Ms. J.: Similarly, Ms. J. expressed that “Our curriculum involves thematic units. Throughout the units there are many lessons that teach about diversity.” She provided the following example, “one of the themes is about families. Throughout the unit, we learn about where our families come from, how we have similarities and differences, etc. The kids enjoy talking about their families and which country they come from.” To continue explaining, she stated,

I learned from teaching ELLs to slow down when I talk; use pictures when I explain things, and to repeat things over and over. One tip that I use when I’m teaching, is using my body when explaining things, such as holding up fingers when explaining three step directions--or when teaching about sink and float, showing up is float, down is sink.

Mrs. T.: Unlike Mrs. W., Mrs. T., a second grade teacher, mentioned, “The ELL students follow the same curriculum and take the same assessments as non-ELL students (if they have been in the country for at least a year.” She continued to explain that ELL students in our building get extra support in the form of extra language arts time with an ELL certified teacher.

However, she believed that the school district goes to great lengths to provide a curriculum that supports a culturally diverse student body. Furthermore, she remarked, “I also feel that as with many school districts, we sometimes focus too much on test scores and forget that the greatest gift we can give our young ELL students is time.”

Ms. H.: As one of the veteran teachers, Ms. H., believed that it is up to teachers to determine how they can integrate cultural differences in the curriculum. She shared in our conversation; “I do
not necessarily think the curriculum addresses the cultural diverse population we have in our
district.”

**Ms. N.** As a reading specialist with many years of experience, Ms. N. stated,

Our school currently uses the Schoolwide Reading and Writing Fundamentals Units of Study
in reading and writing. These units have been designed to include supports to help Limited
English Proficiency students attain English language proficiency so that they are able to
obtain the knowledge and skills to meet academic standards.

She provided the following example, “the units of study include mentor texts and picture
books that support English Language Learners build vocabulary and content knowledge.”

**Mrs. C.** Another bilingual teacher, Mrs. C., mentioned, “My curriculum reflects a culturally
diverse student body because I design my instruction to include culturally relevant practices as well
as the students’ native language.”

To provide an example, she stated, “We read, write, and discuss holidays such as Eid and
how it is celebrated around the world. We do research about the students’ countries and share our
projects with the rest of the school.” In closing, Mrs. C. remarked, “We share cultural experiences
and try to relate cultural relevant information into the general curriculum for all students to benefit
from.”

**Mrs. L.** Unlike the other teachers, Mrs. L., a KG and first grade teacher proclaimed, “Our
reading curriculum needs work to be appropriate for a cultural diverse student body.” She provided
the following example, “the nursery rhyme unit is very appropriate to teach rhyme and poems to
English only students. Many ELLs do not understand nursery rhymes. This is when the teacher can
find examples in the students own culture and language.” She further acknowledged, “That students
need to know some English to learn letter names and sounds. They need to have vocabulary to attach the letters to.”

Mrs. Z.: As a general education teacher, she expressed, “Potential benefits towards our school ensuring cultural diversity within curriculum exists on every level by ensuring diverse enrollment, integrating classrooms, and implementing curricula which reflects the history and culture of students of all backgrounds.”

She further elaborated, “Supporting school integration of cultural diversity within curriculum efficiently enhances diverse enrollments within the school.” In closing, Mrs. Z. remarked, “this allows opportunities for schools to hold accountability approaches that allow educators to tap into the multiple educational benefits of diversity within the classroom and school culture.”

Summary of Theme V:

The teachers’ responses from Theme V, School Curriculum Related to ELLs, indicated that some teachers were using culturally sensitive curriculum when teaching, while others believed that the current curriculum was not appropriate for a diverse student body. Furthermore, some participants felt that it is up to them to include culturally appropriate resources, while others felt that it was up to the school. Every student would benefit from implementing culturally relevant information, which reflects the history and culture of all students’ backgrounds.

I was compassionate to the fact that some students were not introduced to culturally diverse material, which is important to all students. In addition, I appreciated how the bilingual teachers designed their instruction to include culturally relevant practices.

Theme VI: School Policies and Standardized Tests

Data analysis showed that the majority of the teachers’ instructional practices were focused on strengthening the students’ foundational literacy skills and mathematical skills.
before taking the standardized tests. Some participants expressed gratitude towards the school’s administration for all of their support.

**Ms. G.:** As one of the general education third grade teachers, Ms. G., utilized the common core state standards in most subject areas, except for social studies. She commented, “Because the current expectations of social studies from our district does not follow the standards, I do what our district administrators ask.” To provide an example, she stated, “In math, I teach daily using the mathematical practice standards, though I know this is not an expectation of either school or district. Within the state, the mathematical practice standards are criteria for success for students, so I use them.”

Ms. G. recognized that students have a variety of methods to show their learning, so planning was based on how she was going to assess and what resources she was going to use. Standardized tests can be a variety of things. She shared in our conversation, “We use MAP and IAR from the state and national level. . . . but we also utilize standardized tests from within the district level and building level. Regardless of the test, I teach and plan with each in mind.”

She added, “I know what I want my students to learn and how they will be assessed, and what will be assessed, so I can then teach in a way to help them be successful.” She further elaborated,

When thinking about MAP and IAR, since those are out of my control as far as what will be asked, I know that to plan and assess students throughout the year, and teaching to the standards, I am helping them to be successful. I try to use a variety of assessments like written in different formats (writing brochures, essays, extended response, etc.), multiple choice, matching, etc. I also use Plickers and Kahoot to assess as formative assessments.
Mrs. S.: In regard to the practices that she implemented in class, Ms. S. mentioned, “ACCESS testing is state testing that is mandated for English Learners in our program. We use the data from this assessment to guide our teaching and to best support the needs of the students we service.” She commented,

Based on the results of each of the four domains (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) on the assessment, we can meet the students where their weaknesses are, and help support and strengthen their English skills. Starting next school year we will begin to follow the Common Core Professional Learning Committees to focus on the learning standards for each grade. Regarding the standardized test, and how she plan her instruction, she further explained,

Using ACCESS scores to guide my instruction, I also use information from this assessment to focus on Can Do Descriptors from the WIDA model; specifically I look at each domain (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing), and base my instruction on the specific Can Do statements under each domain.

She further elaborated, “As students show that they are making progress throughout the year, they can move up levels- ex: Level 1: Beginning; Level 2: Entering; Level 3: Developing; Level 4: Bridging; Level 5: Exceeding; Level 6: Reaching.” She provided the following example, “Student A might start on Level 1 based on his/her ACCESS score, but may end the year on Level 3 or 4, depending on the progress they are able to make during the school year.”

Ms. J.: Ms. J., a Pre-K teacher, felt that her ELL students grow so much academically each year. She explained, “The expectation of our school administration is that students excel and show improvement.” To provide an example, she stated, “I provide my students with differentiation. This
is important because the expectation is that they will be ready for the next grade level. Children learn in different ways so you have to provide lessons that reach all students.”

She further explained, “Another expectation that our admin has is implementing a classroom management plan. This is done by establishing rules and expectations with students and sharing them with parents.”

In addition, Ms. J. provided the following example, “I take an assessment on letters, numbers, and name writing. I give this assessment four times a year, starting from the first week of school. I do a lot of repetition and daily practice with letters and numbers.” She also stated,

I start daily small groups in the third week of school, where we reinforce the letters, numbers, and name writing. When we are learning different vocabulary, I teach in English, and we always translate the words as well. That way we learn the words in different languages!

**Ms. H.:** Unlike the other teachers, one of the practices Ms. H., a KG teacher, implemented was ensuring that her students know their letter names and letter sounds with accuracy and speed. She noted,

After they [students] complete their daily name writing pages, they turn the paper over and practice naming as many letters as they can in one minute. . . . Once they secure the letter names in one minute, they proceed to name as many letters sounds as they can in one minute.

She continued to explain, “The final step is reading as many CVC words as they can in one minute. These weekly sheets go home with the children, so they have ample opportunities to strengthen their alphabet knowledge.”

She shared in our conversation, “The children take the AIMS web assessment, which is a timed assessment on letter naming and letter sounds.” She believed that this practice helped heighten their confidence and strengthen their reading readiness skills. . . . Another practice she
implemented was the children having R.E.D folders (Read Every Day), which contained a book that correlates with the child’s instructional reading level. She explained, “Since we are implementing the Fountas and Pinnell program, I think it’s critical to scaffold each child’s learning at his/her level.” She further elaborated,

The more opportunities they [students] have to work with readers that enable them to implement reading strategies, the more likely they are to become successful readers. With children’s progress being monitored, I feel confident knowing I am providing them with the materials they need to continue growing as readers.

In closing, Ms. H. remarked,

Through daily jolly phonics flash card reviews, Michael Heggerty phonemic awareness activities, sight word reviews, and leveled readers, I’m able to support the students’ emergent literacy skills. This, in turn, strengthens their confidence when engaged in the AIMS web testing and the Fountas and Pinnell benchmarking assessments.

Mrs. C.: From a bilingual teacher perspective, Mrs. C. commented, “The practices that I implement that are influenced by school and state laws are mostly related to standardized testing.”

She remarked,

I try to ensure that my students can attain their targeted amount of growth on standardized tests. This means that I do have to spend time doing test practice with students and modeling how to use testing equipment so that the computer can correctly score their responses.

She also stated, “Other than that, I just try to be as effective as I can when designing and delivering instruction so that they can perform to the best of their ability when taking tests.”

She believed that standardized tests cause them to make sure that they were teaching certain topics, skills, and test-taking strategies before the test window. She commented, “It [standardized
test] influences how we formatively and formally assess students because we want to assess them in a way that will help them perform to the best of their abilities on the standardized tests.”

In closing, Mrs. C. remarked, “we also want to ensure that we do not overload the students with assignments during the days that they are taking the standardized tests so that they can devote their energy and focus to performing their best.”

Mrs. L.: Mrs. L., a KG and first grade teacher acknowledged that the policy and expectations of school administrators and state laws are to help students close the gaps in their academic learning as soon as possible and to help students become proficient in English. She articulated, “As teachers, we have to do our best to get to these results.” She further commented,

Once I see the results, I put my students in groups depending on the skills they need to master before moving to the next grade level. Next, I put a plan correlating the skills with the time we meet during the school year.

In closing, Mrs. L. remarked, “During small group time or tutoring time, we work on these skills with the students to help them achieve the results expected or at least to meet grade level.”

Ms. Z.: Similar to Ms. G., Ms. Z., a fourth grade teacher, noted, “Standardized testing affects how I plan my lessons on a weekly basis. My planning has to revolve around Reading, Writing, and Math, since these are the three IAR, tested subjects.”

She shared in our conversation, “Collecting data based on my formal and informal assessments throughout the units is key to adjusting my plans in order to effect students academically on getting them to reach target scores and approaches, meets, or masters on IAR.”

Next, she elaborated, “Based on state law, I implement accommodations for LEP, SPED, and 504 students.”

Summary of Theme VI:
The teachers’ responses gathered under the theme VI, School Policies and Standardized Tests, provided evidence that the majority of the teachers’ instructional practices were focused on strengthening the students’ foundational literacy skills and mathematical skills before taking the standardized tests. For example, some teachers mentioned that standardized testing affects how they plan their lessons on a weekly basis.

Another example illustrated that the teachers work very hard to help students close the gaps in their academic learning as soon as possible, and to help them become proficient in English. It was wonderful to learn how teachers contributed to the successful outcome of their students.

**Summary of the Interviews**

The ten interviews portrayed the teachers’ dedication to providing the best educational experiences for their ELL students. I was impressed with how all the teachers involved the parents in different ways. Many teachers kept parents updated about concepts covered in class, sent home culture and heritage projects, and invited parents into the classroom. Other teachers held “EL night,” made phone calls in their native language, and found that translating documents increased their involvement. However, some teachers felt that not all parents were as involved in their children’s education as they should be. The teachers discussed that it was imperative to consider the ELLs’ cultural background when teaching. Although some teachers taught units on culture, had “Celebration of Cultures Night,” and found culturally relevant texts, other teachers sent home surveys, and had books in other languages in their classrooms’ libraries. Concerning the effective strategies that contribute to ELLs’ academic success, the general education teachers used resources such as visual cards, realia, manipulatives, differentiated instruction, cooperative learning and hands-on experiences.
On the other hand, the bilingual teachers allowed students to express themselves in their native language when needed, built a strong background knowledge, used simplified English, and used many visuals. The teachers discussed many challenges that weaken ELL’s motivation and support ranging from unrealistic expectations to finding appropriate teaching resources. The teachers had different opinions about the curriculum, some teachers mentioned that the curriculum was not inclusive enough and did a bare minimum job of including the ELLs within the texts and materials. Other teachers felt that the curriculum tailored to meet the needs of the ELLs as well because it included units that supported ELLs in attaining English. In addition, a few teachers discussed how they follow the standardized testing without questioning it, while others planned their own assessments, in addition to the standardized tests required by the school.

Additionally, they discussed planning their lessons so their students could be successful when taking the standardized test. I will expand further on these points when I interpret and triangulate the different sources of data. The following section will shed light on the ELLs’ behavior and participation in the classroom. Moreover, it illuminates how their teachers related to their cultural backgrounds.

**Observations**

I attended fourteen observations during the school year 2019-20 to gain a comprehensive understanding of English language learners’ experiences at Midwestern Elementary School. While observing meetings and events such as BPAC (Bilingual Parent Advocacy Committee), Board Meeting Observation, EL Night, Fall Registration Event, and Classroom Observation, etc., I remained attentive to details while taking observational notes on topics such as the number of people, behavior/engagement of students, atmosphere, topics covered, and location. I was able to observe the teachers and students in a variety of settings. Furthermore, these observations provided
opportunities for me to experience the students’ behaviors in ELL general education classes, bilingual/ESL classes and a variety of other events. These observations shed light on how ELL students are engaged in learning during the school day. Besides, to support the findings from the educators, the following summaries of various observations will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

**BPAC (Bilingual Parent Advocacy Committee) Observation**

I attended the first BPAC meeting to gain an understanding of the work of this committee. In addition, the parents of the bilingual students attended the meeting. The meeting was designed to provide an overview of the bilingual program, the focus was to explain Map Tests, Access Tests, Report Cards, and offered tailored communication for their ELL families.

The meeting took place in the media center at one of the elementary schools in the district. The coordinator and the bilingual teachers were ready to greet the parents. They indicated that handouts were available on the counter. One of the teachers showed the parents the rooms that were available for babysitting. Popcorn and juice boxes were provided for the children. However, many other refreshments and appetizers such as coffee, juice, and different fruits were on one of the big tables in the media center. On one of the other tables, I saw big bags filled with games and books to be distributed to the bilingual families who were attending the meeting.

After looking around to see if the parents were seated and ready, the bilingual coordinator warmly welcomed the parents. She thanked them for attending and provided an overview of the meeting. She was delighted to refer to the handouts because they would be a helpful resource throughout the year. They also provided important test dates and schedule information. For example, when referring to it, she noted that the dates and locations for future BPAC meetings were listed in the handouts.
I observed the presentation made for the parents by the coordinator and the bilingual teachers who explained the common practices that are used in this program. The coordinator explained the approach is based on communication between the bilingual teacher, the parents, and students all working together to help them succeed in school. Through this, she indicated that parents should be involved in their students’ education because it is essential to help their students at home. The coordinator stated, “The bilingual teachers of this program believe that by providing support to both the students and parents, the students will have a more positive and successful experience at school.”

The coordinator explained that acquiring a new language is the same as learning the home language. She remarked, “A child learns how to speak by listening over and over to their parents. Therefore, it is built on repetition and practice.” She stated, “Students become familiar with the language as they listen and imitate because this is an important process at an early age.”

The final part of the presentation involved having the parents practice some of the Access Test questions on the I Pads. One of the teachers commented, “It’s good if you are familiar with this test, so you can help your child.” The teachers had the parents practice questions while walking around the room, assisting many of them. During this presentation, it was interesting to notice the parents were helping and were encouraging each other. Some of them were also exchanging phone numbers.

The observation of this meeting reinforced the importance of having the parents be a vital part of the students’ learning process. The coordinator indicated that parents attending the meeting should assist their students at home with language acquisition, reading, and any additional support they require. I believe it was valuable for the parents to practice one of the tests that their children would be taking, so they have the opportunity to experience what their child is learning. Moreover, I felt the meeting helped the parents become more familiar with the bilingual program and establish
relationships with the bilingual teachers and other parents from the district. Furthermore, this observation provided support for the student’s cultural background by explaining Map Tests, Access Tests, Report Cards, and other concerns the parents have.

**Board Meeting Observation**

I attended a “Board Meeting” at the beginning of the school year to gain an understanding of the relationships between administrators and educators. The board members meet on a monthly basis to discuss all business aspects related to the school district. The following is an account of the board meeting.

The meeting took place in the red gymnasium at Midwestern School. As soon as I entered the gym, I sensed that it was a calm environment. The six members entered the gym and started greeting one another, and then they took their seats after reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. On the right side, there was a table with some refreshments, such as cookies and different beverages. Although this was the first meeting of the upcoming school year, the teachers and community members did not seem nervous and were comfortable as they found their seats. Then, one of the members passed around the meeting agenda, where the names of the new teachers were listed in one column while the other column held the names of the teachers receiving awards.

There was a high level of confidence in the meeting, especially noted when the president started to announce the names of the teachers who earned tenure-ship, then he announced the names of teachers who earned their master's degrees before the school year started. For example, Mrs. C., one of the bilingual teachers whom I interviewed, had earned her second master’s degree and was attending the board meeting to receive her recognition. She had a big smile on her face and was engaged with all attendees as she received her award. The president continued calling the names of teachers, including the new hires. After that portion of the meeting, one of the teachers started
taking pictures of the new teachers and the ones who earned awards. The room was filled with joy and excitement. In addition, I noticed that the secretary had taken minutes throughout the meeting. Before the meeting adjourned, the chairperson reviewed the dates and locations for the future meetings. The board meeting clearly illustrated how the members of the board effectively worked together to support all the teachers.

**English Learners Night**

I attended an EL fundraising night in the beginning of the school year. The ELL program needed additional monetary funding and sources. I noticed that general education teacher and the bilingual teachers worked together collaboratively, along with members of the community, to achieve a successful fundraising night. The members of the board as well as teacher volunteers, were instrumental in raising money for the EL program and its students. The donors were from the community and that made the fundraising night more excitable. These additional sources of funding assisted in providing financial support for the bilingual program.

At the “EL Night”, long tables were nicely set up with raffle items and food from many donors. These raffle items included photographs taken by one of the bilingual teachers, gift cards from local businesses such as sweets shops, pizza shops, fruit baskets, and tickets for sporting events. Many people were checking the raffle items that were placed on the long tables; a young woman was placing her ticket in the container said: “I hope I win this beautiful basket.” Teachers and parent volunteers were busy selling tickets. I heard a teacher volunteer saying to another, “This event was a lot of work, but it is so worth it because of all the money we raised for the program and the kids get so excited.”

The event was popular because it not only generated money for the program but also brought happiness to all those attended. Later on, one of the bilingual teachers announced the winning raffle
tickets. Just before ending the event, teachers and parent volunteers were busy distributing the raffle items to the winners. I heard one winner say, “My daughter is going to love going to the game. It was worth all the tickets I bought.”

This observation of the “EL Night” provided me with information about the different avenues that communities have to obtain extra financial support for their educational programs, such as the EL program. Moreover, this observation provided an example of the collaborative efforts among parent volunteers, bilingual teachers, general education teachers, and the community to support their cultural background when at school.

**ELL Registration Event**

I observed an EL Fall Registration Event to gain an understanding of how effectively the general education teachers and the bilingual teachers worked together. The observation served as an example of how teachers accomplished the organizational features of the ELL registration and testing process. This event was organized for the bilingual families (Arabic and Polish) interested in registering their kids in the Pre-K Program. The parents who attended the event would learn about the school, the Bilingual program, meet with both the general education and bilingual teachers, and register their kids. In addition, the parents would meet and discuss carpooling with other parents.

I observed the setup and activities at the school prior to the registration event. The front room was set up for teachers to meet the students and parents. There were chairs and big plastic bins in the room filled with different toys for the students and their siblings waiting to be tested. Another long table was in the back of the room for registering and meeting the EL program organizer. The teachers were busy preparing and arranging the students for the test. Some teachers were at the entrance of the school greeting people, answering questions from parents, and passing information related to the bilingual program.
Once the meeting commenced, I felt a sense of excitement from the parents, as many activities were happening at the same time. In front of the room, parents were having conversations with each other. For example, one parent waiting for his student to be tested said to another, “I can’t wait for my kid to begin the program. He has been excited to start going to school.” The other parent responded, “My kid is a third grader. He has been in the bilingual program for many years”. She also mentioned, “He loves learning English and has a great time finding friends who speak his language.” While the students were tested one by one, the parents were sitting patiently waiting to get the results of their child from the ELL organizer.

It was obvious that the ELL organizer was busy attending to multiple tasks. I observed her conveying program information to the teachers, checking in with other teachers, and calling on students to be tested. Although she had many tasks to accomplish, she walked around to converse with the parents. When each student finished testing, she had two reminders for the parents: The first note was to set up a meeting with the school secretary to finalize the registration process, and the second was for parents to expect a letter from the school to sign up for volunteering.

Additionally, the teachers were very complimentary to the students. One teacher remarked, “Excellent, great job” after completing the assessment, while another teacher commented in Polish, “Good job, hope to see you soon.”

The ELL organizer thanked the families for their patience while testing their children. After testing, families asked more questions about the program. During this time, one bilingual teacher explained to a parent the importance of the relationship between the teachers, parents, and students. The teacher emphasized the importance of parental involvement through volunteering in their child’s class and assisting them at home as much as possible.
The observation of the “Fall Registration Event” illustrated how parents and children who were interested in the bilingual program attended this event to be tested for the program and learn more about it. The teachers worked well together to organize the day and provide extensive information about the program to new families. Furthermore, there was an opportunity for the parents and children to meet the general education and the bilingual teachers and ask questions if needed. This well-organized event displayed the Midwestern teachers’ dedication to providing support for their students’ cultural backgrounds. The following observations provide evidence to support the interview responses from the teachers.

**Classroom Observations**

*Mrs. S.:* Mrs. S. is a bilingual teacher with a well-organized classroom. All eight students in this classroom were ELLs. As soon as I entered the room, I sensed that it was a lively environment. On one of the walls in her class, she had a word wall made for the sight words, and on the adjacent wall, I noticed that she had set up a stoplight system for positive reinforcement. Her room had a large kidney table and three other round tables. In one of the corners, there was a classroom library filled with many books in both English and Polish. I observed that she had her students sit at the round tables in groups of four.

She appeared calm as she started the lesson. She asked the students to spell-out words such as into, because, and like. The students all seemed to enjoy spelling the words and the teacher walked around the classroom and engaged individually with those who struggled more. Once that task was completed, the teacher opened a tiny book called, “Dinosaur days.” She had a smile on her face as she showed them pictures from that book and then, asked questions such as, “What animals do you think were around when dinosaurs were alive?” As she was instructing them, I noticed that she used their native language to repeat some of the questions. Most of the students were excited to
share their predictions; however, two of the students were shy to speak. I wondered if they were the newcomers, while those who were more excited to share their predictions were in the ELL program for some time now. After that, the teacher read two pages of the book and asked the students to choose a buddy-reader in order to read together, as they only had six books. The students started to read their books aloud, and the teacher walked around, checked their pronunciation, and if they were correctly reading the sentences.

For the remainder of the lesson, the teacher focused on completing the activities regarding “Dinosaur Days”. After they finished reading the book aloud, the teacher asked the students some more questions about it. The students actively responded to the question, “What was something new you learned from this book?” One student shared, “I didn’t know that the temperature was different back then.” At the end of the class, the teacher took the group to the library to watch a movie. Before they began, the students had to vote between two options for the movie, “The Lorax,” won. As excited as they were, the teacher had to quiet them down often, as they could not stay quiet for long. Throughout the observation, it was apparent that the teacher was confident, and that the majority of the ELL students enjoyed her class by actively participating in today’s activities. She attempted to positively engage with those who did not participate as much by using both English and their native language throughout the day, which is similar to what she said she does in her interview. However, she also mentioned that she used modeling while instructing her students, but I did not observe this during today’s activities.

Mrs. L.: Mrs. L. is one of the KG and first grade ESL teachers with a large and well-decorated classroom. She welcomed me into her classroom with a big smile and told me that today’s lesson was about the environment. The classroom had large circular tables with the students’ names on them, along with their grade levels. She had fifteen ELL students that were sitting in groups of
four to five students at each table. She had two big cabinets that were decorated with the students’ work.

I also noticed that the walls of her classroom were filled with many inspiring posters. One of them, which was above the white board, stated, “Never settle for less than your best!” The right side of the board was used for her behavior policy, which was incorporated in her classroom through a stop light system. She commented, “A student would normally receive two warnings before I put their pin on the yellow light.” She further described that if a student were on the red light that day, she would contact the students’ parents about the incident that led to moving his card to red and expected the parents to sign a written behavior contract that night.

I observed that the teacher began the lesson by asking the students in English to make their own posters regarding what they find in nature. She explained, “I want you to draw a picture and write about it.” I noted that the students began to chatter in their native language excitedly as they retrieved their crayon boxes from their cubbies as the teacher passed out large pieces of construction paper. She walked between the tables with a large smile on her face, while saying encouraging words, and checking on the students’ progress on their environmental posters. Her students were eagerly expressing their various ideas through their drawings except for one student who was sitting quietly. For example, one of the students drew an image of bees landing on flowers, trees, and bright, yellow sun. The students shared with me, “We found a place outside where we can hang their posters after they are done,” referring to the hallway where the teacher usually hangs up their projects. I saw that another student had written what she saw when she played outside, “The wind was blowing, leaves flying, people yelling, airplane flying by, and hear leaf blowing.”

The students were talking to each other, and looking at each other’s drawings, while they were coloring and writing on their own posters. I sensed that most of the students were excited
about the activity; however, a few students seemed to lack interest in it and did not fully participate. I wondered if this was simply due to a lack of interest in the classwork or because the teacher’s directions were given in English. As Mrs. L walked around the room, she spoke with those students in their native language. Mrs. L. consistently appeared energetic and excited to both teach and positively engage her students in today’s activities. Although in our interview, she had expressed the importance of teaching vocabulary words to ELLs, I noticed that she did not introduce or review new vocabulary words before beginning this activity. I felt a strong level of comfort between the teacher and her students, as she remained sensitive to her students’ language concerns when needed.

Mrs. Z. Mrs. Z. is one of the fourth grade general education teachers at Midwestern school. When I stopped by Ms. Z’s class, she hurriedly welcomed me and explained, “We are trying to finish the Math quiz, so we can start the science class.” Her room was bright and colorful. She had seven ELLs in her class of sixteen students and were dispersed throughout the room. I noticed that she put up cardinal direction posters on the walls for the students to have a sense of direction. She had a Word Wall with many sight words posted on it. When the students learned a new word, the teacher added that word on the wall under the letter that the word began with.

The students quickly completed their quiz, and the teacher began her lesson about the life cycle of frogs. I looked around to see if the students were prepared to start the new subject and noticed that they quickly pulled out their science folders. As she described their development, she referred to the container of tadpoles that were on the desk in front of her. Her students had observed the tadpoles every day and wrote their observations in a packet called The Frog’s Log. Afterwards, the teacher asked the students about what they had observed and if they needed any help. I noticed that all but one of the ELLs were eagerly participating and raising their hands. I heard one of them saying, “They are growing bigger.” Another one said, “They go to the bathroom,” while another
ELL student mentioned, “They have a big tail and they open their mouths.” One of the bilingual students helped the shy newcomer who was not participating as much and explained the questions to him. The teacher then asked the children what they thought was going to happen next in their development. I heard several students guess that they were going to become frogs. However, others remarked that the tadpoles were just going to grow bigger and were going to grow back legs.

The teacher instructed her students to write their predictions in their Frog Logs. After the students finished, the teacher handed out small books called “Fancy Frogs,” to each child. They read the books aloud with the teacher, and she concluded the lesson by asking them questions regarding the different frogs they read about in their books. It was clear that the teacher was always ready and willing to assist her students in every way she can. She respected the ELLs’ cultural background by pronouncing their names correctly. Although I felt that the teacher was well prepared and invested in the education of her students, I did not notice any cultural diversity within her curriculum as she mentioned in her interview.

Mrs. C.: Mrs. C. is a bilingual specialist at Midwestern School. When I entered Mrs. C’s classroom, she welcomed me warmly and said, “We are going to start reading within a few minutes,” as she was correcting the students’ journals. She had ten ELLs total in her class and they were sitting at desks that were organized in groups of four. She asked the bilingual students in Arabic and in English to clear their desks and begin their independent reading. I noticed that four students took their books from the leveled reader bins and left the room to go back to their general education teachers, and one group of six stayed in class.

She had a well-organized room that was decorated with a class number grid and different colored posters. On one of the walls, she had placed the entire alphabet, and under each letter had their sight words. On another wall, she had hung up some of the First Grade Common Core
Standards on posters. One of them read, “Begin every sentence with a capital letter and use correct ending punctuation.” In addition, I observed that items in her room, such as the clock, were labeled in both Arabic and English. I noticed four desktop computers placed next to the white board. In the corner of her classroom, she had organized a library with many books placed in small baskets.

After their allocated reading time was over, the teacher had the students write out their spelling words from the book they read the day before. The teacher would state a word and translate it into Arabic, and the students would quickly write it down. I observed that some students wrote down the words faster than others did. The students appeared more excited when she used their native language and started to answer more questions. She monitored her students and checked to see if they needed any help. After that, the teacher passed around a new book with the title, “Skates for Luke.” I noticed that she showed them a picture of a boy who was sitting on the stairs and another boy who was skating. She explained to the students in both languages, “The boy who was sitting does not have enough money to buy skates. That’s why he was not skating with his friend.”

It was interesting to note that she asked her students the following question, “Can anyone relate to this story?” I observed how many students freely shared their experiences and noticed how she responded kindly to all who did. I noted that she accepted the answers in either English or Arabic. She then completed reading “Skates for Luke,” and the students put the book back in its Ziploc bag to take home. It was apparent that she was knowledgeable, organized, and passionate about teaching her bilingual students. I noticed that she approached the students with kindness and they were always attentive and responsive. She extensively used the students’ native language to support their academic needs such as when she explained the spelling words and the comprehension questions. Mrs. C mentioned in our interview that she used hands-on activities and group work; however, I did not see that in today’s observation.
**Ms. N:** Ms. N. is a KG and first grade, reading specialist teacher. Her classroom was small, but organized and smelled very fresh. I felt a very comfortable atmosphere upon entering. She had three bilingual students and two general education students. I noticed that all the leveled reader books were displayed on a long shelf that spanned the length of her classroom. In addition, I found that she had many educational games, such as “Can Do” games on the shelf below the books. Her group of five students was quietly sitting around a large circular table, especially the ELL students.

She began the lesson by passing out a worksheet to each student related to the book, “The Tortoise and the Hare.” As they worked on it, she showed me her lesson plans for the week. I noticed that the group became louder as they were supposed to be focused on their work. One of the bilingual students was noticeably quieter than the rest. I sat at an empty circular table and watched as she assisted the students in completing their work, saying words of encouragement such as, “Great job! Now, let’s work on the next question.” She then passed out the books, instructed the students to read aloud, and had them take turns using the popcorn reading method. Sometimes the teacher stopped to ask, “What does that mean?” and the majority of students were able to answer correctly, including the two talkative bilingual students. While most were well behaved and eagerly participated, I noticed the quiet ELL student had trouble focusing and was playing with her pencil. The teacher took it from her hand and put it aside while asking her to pay attention. I wondered if this behavior was due to not understanding the story.

For the remainder of the lesson, she worked with the students on Homophones. She took a considerable amount of time during this activity. She handed them small white boards to write down the homophones of the words she showed them. The first word was, "There," and she explained, “I want you to write down the other word that sounds the same, but has a different meaning.” I
observed that four of her students wrote, “Their,” while the fifth wrote down, “There.” The lesson continued with the words, “pear,” “pair,” “hear,” and “here.”

After they finished this task, she asked them to write the word “Homophones,” at the top of the paper that they were going to take home. Then she asked them, “What if your parents asked you what this word means?” All five students raised their hands to answer. One of the students said that homophones sound the same, while another student said that they are spelled differently and mean different things.

The classroom setting she established was encouraging and accommodated the needs of the students’ learning abilities. However, I noticed that she was unable to help the quiet bilingual student, as it seemed that she required help in her native language. Although in our interview she noted that she learned some words in different languages, I did not observe her using words in the students’ native language.

Ms. G: Ms. G., a third grade teacher, appeared very friendly and was well prepared for the day. Her students were very excited and ready to go to the science lab. She had seven ELL students. As we walked together to the lab, she mentioned, “There is only one other science lab in the area that is similar to this one and we are lucky to have this for our kids.” When we arrived, the students excitedly rushed toward their assigned seats, and another third grade class joined us. The bilingual students were spread out around the lab, but some sat closer together than others.

The group that I was with began the “Sink or Float” activity. The teacher held a clay ball in her hand and asked, “How would you change the state of this ball to make it float?” She passed out pieces of clay to each student and small buckets, which they filled with some water. I watched as each student tried to make different shapes of the clay float in the water. I noted that a few of the ELL students were very excited and discussed the activity in their native language. Another
bilingual student stated, “Why is this not working?” Finally, one of the students raised her hand and told the teacher, “I made a boat out of the clay, and it floated on the water.” I noticed that the teacher smiled at her and said, “Great job!” and proceeded to explain why it was able to float. She talked about balance, weight, and sizes and asked the students, “If we change the boat into a tower, does it still weigh the same or does it change?” One of the third graders answered, “The weight would definitely change,” while other students said the weight would not change. I noticed that each of the bilingual students was eagerly participating and sharing their answers with the class.

The teacher then gave the students another challenge, where they had to add pennies to the floating boat and find out how many pennies the boat could hold and still stay afloat. I observed how excited the ELLs were during this new challenge. Their teacher walked around the lab and assisted each student as they attempted to make a boat that could float. I noticed that she spent a little more time with some of the bilingual students than with the general education students. The students then began to add pennies to their boats and made a chart in their notebooks about the number of pennies the boat was able to hold.

Next, the group rotated to the other side of the lab, where another teacher was waiting to give each student different seeds and beans to predict their names and to classify them into different groups. Some of the students guessed the names of each bean/seed correctly, which were, “Kidney bean, lima bean, grass seed, pea seed, and radish seed.” After that, the students used color and size to classify the seeds. I was amazed to note that they could even correctly identify a radish seed.

The teacher explained the process of how seedlings are made and placed a wet paper towel on the bottom of the tray and then arranged the seeds on it. Lastly, she covered the seeds with another wet paper towel to allow germination. Students followed along and placed three seeds of the
same kind in a row, and then covered them with another wet paper towel. I watched as the bilingual students organized their trays and helped one another complete this activity.

This observation served as an example of how effectively both teachers worked together to provide a fun and engaging learning activity for their students. I noticed that Ms. G. maintained her high level of expectation for the bilingual students in her class, and spent a little extra time with them to ensure that they understood the lesson. However, she discussed how she used visual cards in the science curriculum in our interview, but I did not notice this during my observation.

**Mrs. W:** Mrs. W is a KG through fifth grade ESL teacher. She had nine ELLs in class during my observation. Her classroom reflected the various grade levels that she taught. It was filled with leveled reader books and many posters discussing subjects such as long and short vowels and others for WIDA. On another poster, I noticed a “Recipe for a Happy Class”: Raise your hand if you want to talk, one-person talks at a time, keep hands and feet to ourselves, use nice words, and listen and follow directions. The teacher had also organized the sight words on the largest wall in her classroom and displayed her student’s work on another wall.

I stopped by Mrs. W’s class early in the morning and found the ELLs sitting down in a circle on large, blue rug at the back of the room. As she welcomed me into her room, she said, “We are just doing our morning routine right now.” The teacher turned back to her students and asked, “How many days have we been in school?” while pointing to the “Days in School” poster she had up next to the class calendar. I listened as the students guessed, but none of them knew the answer. Then they checked the calendar, the weather that day, and after that, the teacher asked the students about the temperature, with one student answering in degrees Celsius. The students were attentive and answered all the teacher’s questions.
I observed the teacher prepare the students for reading. She said, “Alright everyone, please line up. We are going to start reading.” The students listened right away and lined up in two groups of five: One group left the room to go to their general education teacher, and one group stayed in the classroom with her. Another group of students from a different classroom joined them soon after. She started the lesson and gave them a few long o words to write on their white boards such as window, snow, and hollow. I noticed that she positively engaged the students that struggled more by answering all of their questions. When the students finished writing, they cleaned their white boards and put them away.

Then the teacher passed out their leveled reader books and instructed them to start their independent reading. I noticed that most of the students paid attention to their reading. However, two of the students played with each other. I watched as the teacher separated them from each other. After that, they were able to focus on their reading. Next, the teacher said, “Ok, everyone, put the book away, and sit on the rug.” After that, she put “The Ugly Duckling” on the easel, and asked, “How many of you read or heard about this story before?” A few students raised their hands and she began to read the story. Afterward, she asked questions about the story such as, “What was your favorite part of the story?” Next, she told them to choose one classmate to buddy read with him/her. When they completed this task, I noticed that the teacher put their books and their reading log in a big Ziploc bag for each student to take home and have their parents sign.

This observation provided me an opportunity to gain an understanding of the amount of instruction and patience needed to accomplish the teaching goals of the ESL teacher. I noticed how much time she took during the long vowel activity, ensuring that each student understood the lesson. She taught them compassion, used simplified language, and visuals during my observation and this reflected our interview.
Mrs. T.: Mrs. T., a second grade teacher, welcomed me to her classroom with a smile and explained, “We have different tasks planned for today, including reading and journal writing.” I was eager to observe how well the five bilingual students she had would complete those tasks. I noticed that they were dispersed throughout the room. Mrs. T. had a large classroom and organized the desks in four rows of desks. I noticed that she had an expansive word wall and many posters scattered around the room. One described some of the rules of subtraction and addition, while another illustrated some examples of the different types of contractions. Along with the window, I noticed that she hung up the students’ work on a long piece of rope, along with some decorations.

The bilingual students were diligently working on their journals, and the teacher told them, “When you are done, I will check your work.” I observed that as each student completed their writing, they prepared themselves for TIDE time, which is an intervention period for reading. Some of the students left the room with their reading books to go to a different class, while only one group that included two bilingual students stayed with Mrs. T., and three other students joined in from a different class. The teacher began the lesson and asked them, “Does anyone have questions about yesterday’s reading assignment?” No one had any, so she passed out the book, “Johnny Appleseed.” I noticed that she used Popsicle sticks with their names to have them take turns reading passages. Mrs. T occasionally asked the students about the characters, the settings, main ideas, and the meanings of some of the words. The ELL students seemed invested in the story, and knew most of the answers to her questions; however, I noticed that they had some difficulty with the vocabulary due to the language barrier that they face.

After students finished reading, the teacher asked them, “Go to the discussion questions and answer them together.” I watched as she walked between the desks and checked if they needed any
assistance. During that time, she passed out the book, “Meadow Green,” for them to take home in a Ziploc bag.

The teacher then asked the students to bring out their anthologies. She first asked one of the bilingual students, “Please begin reading the first page.” She corrected his pronunciation as he read the first passage, and the teacher continued to pick one student at a time to read the following passages. Near the end, she had her students read the passages together. While reading, the teacher walked around the students and pointed to the lines that they were on to ensure that each student followed along.

It was wonderful to observe how much the general education teacher focused her attention to the bilingual students and their needs while instructing the whole class. However, I noticed that her help could only be extended to a certain degree, as the bilingual students required some additional assistance in their native language. In our interview, she mentioned that she differentiated instruction to meet the needs of her ELL students; however, I did not see this as all reading material was the same during my observation.

Ms. H: As a Kindergarten teacher, Ms. H’s classroom, was very colorful, had many live plants, and was filled with different manipulatives for the students to work with during their math class. She had six bilingual students in her classroom, and they were sitting next to their general education peers. Posters of different shapes and different colored crayon posters were hung on the walls. On the doors of the large cabinets, I noticed that she had up different CVC words.

When I stopped by Ms. H’s class, all of the students, including ELLs, were working on making a kite. All the children finished their projects except for one bilingual student who received help from the teacher’s aide to complete his project. I noticed that he had a difficult time understanding the instructions, as he was a newcomer. After that, the teacher asked the students to
meet her next to the calendar and weather charts, where they counted how many days they have been in school. She then asked them about the temperature outside and one of the students placed a green sticker above the 50° F level on the poster. The teacher asked one of the students, “If today is April 26th, how many cents do we need to put above the number by using coins?” He answered, “One quarter and one cent.”

Then the students prepared themselves to do a shared reading. While all the students were reading, I noticed that the ELL students were sometimes reading at a slower pace than their peers were. I wondered why they struggled. Was it due to reading comprehension issues, vocabulary issues, or language barriers? The teacher checked on each one of the bilingual students and listened carefully to the way they were reading. After they completed the story, she gave the students words that they wrote down on their white boards. The words were friend, first, again, your, soccer, and green.

She then collected their boards and began the lesson on the story, “Soccer Game!” The teacher wrote six new words from the story, “Soccer, Goal, Defense, Dribble, Passing, Kicking and Sideline” on the board. I noticed that most of the students understood the new words; however, the ELLs had some trouble with a few of them due to not understanding the language. Then she asked, “What do you think is going to happen?” as she showed them the pictures in the book. After they finished, the teacher asked the students questions about the characters and setting in the story. The bilingual students responded correctly, and all students were excited and raised their hands to answer. The teacher then gave them their stories to take home in Ziploc bags with their reading logs.

This observation made it obvious how the teacher supported her kindergarten students by closely working with each child, including the bilingual students, and always encouraged them. However, it was clear that the students needed additional language assistance when she introduced
new vocabulary words. Moreover, she mentioned in our interview that she used the buddy system and differentiated instruction, but I did not observe this today. I observed that the bilingual students in this class were well behaved and attentive to the teacher’s instructions.

Ms. J: Ms. J, a Pre-K teacher, had seven bilingual students in her class, and they were sitting close to one another in the room. She had a large classroom with many windows that made it appear very clean and bright. Any person who entered this class could tell that this was a Pre-K class because of the big colorful, rectangular tables; they were organized in a U-shape. It also had many colorful posters on the walls and the students’ family photos by the window. I noticed that above the cabinets was big plastic clear boxes filled with colorful yarn and other boxes filled with educational games. There were many examples of students’ work hung around the classroom. The classroom rules were posted on the door. There were many binders on a desk at the front of the class. I wondered what was inside those binders. On each table, four students including the ELLs, sat and worked together as a group. In the middle of the table, there were big plastic crayon caddies filled with different colored crayons and markers.

I observed that the students completed an art project with the letter L. Some students read the letter, some glued yarn on the letter, while others colored it. The teacher was very attentive; she helped the bilingual students as much as she could. However, a few ELLs were not paying attention to the teachers’ directions, as they were in English and they could only understand Arabic. I noticed that one of the students was distracted with her bracelet and that a few other students talked in the back of the room and played with pencils. The teacher asked those students to pay attention and came closer to another group and talked to them. Later, she moved one of the students’ pins to yellow on their behavior chart.
In the pre-K class, I noticed that the students were energetic and playful. I also observed their snack time after they finished the letter tracing assignment. However, after the students started to talk loudly, the teacher turned off the lights and told them they had to quiet down otherwise, she would call their parents at the end of the day.

It was amazing to observe how much the Pre-K teacher focused her attention to the bilingual students and their needs while instructing the energetic class. I was impressed with all the students, including the ELLs who worked so hard during my observation. I noticed that this teacher was able to communicate with her ELLs in their native language because they shared a similar cultural background, as she expressed in our interview.

Observation’s Summary

The fourteen observations that I attended during the school year 2019-20 were to gain a comprehensive understanding of English language learners’ experiences at Midwestern Elementary School. I observed the teachers and students in a variety of settings, including meetings and classroom settings. Furthermore, these observations provided opportunities for me to experience the students’ behaviors in ELL general education classes, as well as bilingual/ESL classes and a variety of other events. These observations shed light on how ELL students are engaged in learning during the school day.

The observation of the “BPAC Meeting” reinforced the importance of having the parents be a vital part of the students’ learning process. The coordinator indicated that parents attending the meeting should assist their students at home with language acquisition, reading, and any additional support they required. Moreover, I felt the meeting helped the parents become more familiar with the bilingual program and helped establish relationships with the bilingual teachers and other parents from the district.
The next meeting that I attended, “Board Meeting,” clearly illustrated how the members of the board effectively worked together to support all the teachers. Another method of support was the “EL Night,” which provided me with information about the different avenues that communities have to obtain extra financial support for the EL program. Moreover, this observation provided an example of the collaborative efforts among parent volunteers, bilingual teachers, general education teachers, and the community to accomplish a successful fundraising EL event.

The next event that I observed, “Fall Registration Event,” illustrated how parents and children who were interested in the bilingual program attended this event to be tested for the program and learn more about it. The teachers worked well together to organize the day and provided extensive information about the program to new families. Furthermore, there was an opportunity for the parents and children to meet the general education and the bilingual teachers and ask questions if needed.

The classroom observations helped me gain a better understanding of all the teachers that contributed to the education and development of the ELLs. I was also able to understand the various challenges that ELLs face both in and out of the classroom. All the teachers were all very confident in their instruction and appeared energetic throughout the observations. I noticed how they had fostered strong relationships with all their students, and tried to always be attentive to their needs. However, at times, it seemed that the general education teachers did not know how to assist the bilingual students, as they needed some additional help in their native languages. Nonetheless, they worked hard to accommodate the different needs of all students. Throughout each classroom observation, I recognized how well the teachers prepared lessons and activities and engaged their students in learning.
These observations provided me with insight into the quality of teaching staff at Midwestern School. During the school and classroom observations, I gained an understanding of the teachers’ abilities to engage the bilingual students and their cultural backgrounds in their classrooms. As an experienced teacher, I was impressed with the relationships teachers had with their ELL students and how they motivated them to reach their highest potential. In addition, it was obvious the teachers were working hard with the bilingual students and their families to provide the most effective instruction possible. The principal recognized a few of the teachers that I observed for their high quality of teaching.

**Documents**

I collected multiple documents for this study during the school year 2019-20 (Appendix E). Those documents were selected to provide an overall picture of the ELL program and to describe the collaborative efforts of the general education teachers, bilingual teachers, and ELLs involved at Midwestern school. The following are examples of the documents reviewed: (a) Home language survey, (b) Access Test Staff memo, (c) Positive Behavior Intervention system note (Arabic and English) (d) Bilingual Parent advisory Committee (English, Arabic, and Polish) (e) School Website.

The Home Language Survey document indicated that the students whose families spoke a language other than English at home needed to be counted in order to provide support for them. To provide specific information, the survey stated that it would identify the students who needed to be assessed for English language proficiency. To elaborate further, the survey reported that if the answer to either question related to another language being spoken at home is yes, the law requires the school to assess the child’s English language proficiency.

Furthermore, the “Access Test Staff Memo” document, EL Meeting minutes, and the “PBIS Note” served as examples of the importance and purpose of advocating for strengthening the
students’ foundational skills before taking the standardized tests as well as improving students’ behaviors. The Access Test Staff Memo informed the staff about the ACCESS testing starting date. It indicated that the test is a state mandated assessment that is given to assess EL student’s progress in English, and it consists of four domains: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Each domain takes approximately 75 minutes to complete. It noted “EL student performance on ACCESS both in the areas of proficiency and growth contribute to the overall school rating. The extra coordination and planning by all is needed to ensure that all EL students have the best testing experience.”

In addition, the “PBIS Note” focuses on improving a school’s ability to teach and support the positive behavior of all students. Part of the PBIS system includes preventative programs for students who may need additional support. Furthermore, the “EL Meeting minutes” provided information about different subjects related to the bilingual department, such as BPAC meeting, IEP meetings, IAR/MAP Accommodations. A suggestion was made that the EL teachers would attend meetings “as needed” and the rest of the EL team would meet together to discuss other data (related to Access Test, and IAR accommodations that were based on IEPs), grade level notes, etc. With respect to Reading MAP, students who were reading below grade level- get Read Aloud accommodations, and teachers would take note of two different assessments to show students’ growth.

The BPAC document that was translated into Arabic and Polish provided information that supported the bilingual parents. The document indicated that the meeting was open to all the bilingual parents and students involved in the program. It also indicated that parents are able to discuss various topics such as the English language program at Midwestern school, MAP testing,
report cards, and the upcoming parent teacher conferences. In addition, it published the date, time, and location of the next meeting.

Moreover, the school district website provided a rich description of the bilingual teachers’ qualities and other certified teachers. For example, the website contained a biography about Mrs. C that showed her qualifications to teach bilingual students. Furthermore, her biography indicated her educational background and vast experience as a bilingual specialist.

The documents were an essential tool used for communicating among the teachers, parents, and students. In particular, the documents were a valuable, ongoing method of providing information to families at the school. Additionally, I located information related to the school and, more specifically, the documents related to the ELL program on the school’s website. The following section includes a summary of the findings as well as information specific to the interpretations, and the triangulation of the data.

**Summary of the Findings**

It would be useful to review the findings from this case study in order to present the interpretation and synthesis of the analysis. Many themes were identified from the following sources of evidence: interviews with the teachers, direct observations, documents, and physical artifacts. The themes that were related to my research question were: (1) the impact of parental involvement (2) Considering Cultural Background when teaching ELLs (3) Effective Instruction/Strategies that contribute to ELLs’ Academic Success (4) Challenges that weaken ELLs’ Motivation and Success, (5) School Curriculum related to ELLs (6) School Policies and Standardized Tests.

The purpose of this analysis was to interpret and describe the importance of my findings in consideration of the data collected from the interviews with the ten teachers. In this study, the process of analysis was defined as “breaking down the whole into elements in order to discover its
essential features. Interpretation means providing a description or explanation of the meaning of the study” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 165). In addition, I validated these findings with the other sources of evidence such as observations and documents from the school.

Furthermore, this analysis provides my perceptions and experiences about what I learned from this study. Moreover, the process I am following for this section in analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting the data is for reaching the conclusions and implications of my findings. In addition, this study displays the connections between the findings and the literature related to English Language Learners. However, the literature review that was discussed in chapter two was not focused on the same themes that emerged in this study. The following information will be presented by the themes that emerged from the multiple sources of data.

Impact of Parental Involvement

The interviews related to the theme of the Impact of Parental Involvement indicated that most of the teachers were trying their hardest to involve the parents in their children’s education. To summarize the responses from the participants, it was clear that they believed that it was essential to be approachable and to communicate with parents as often as possible. Furthermore, the teachers felt that it was essential to make phone calls to parents in their native language and to translate homework directions, so parents could feel that they were an essential part of their children’s education. Teachers suggested interviewing their students’ families about their culture and heritage, so they could become culturally sensitive educators.

It was also apparent that a few teachers had different views about why some parents were not participating as much as they should. They believed that many parents did not come to school because they did not recognize that in the U.S., parents are encouraged to meet with the teacher, and
they believed that those parents assumed that the teachers had the sole responsibility to teach their children.

To provide triangulation, the teachers’ observations, school events observations, and various documents of the ELL program validated the responses from the teachers regarding parental involvement. For example, the BPAC document that was translated into Arabic and Polish provided information that supported the bilingual parents. The document indicated that the meeting was open to all the bilingual parents and students involved in the program. It also indicated that parents are able to discuss various topics such as the English language program at Midwestern school, MAP testing, report cards, and the upcoming parent teacher conferences. In addition, it published the date, time, and location of the next meeting.

In the quarterly BPAC meeting, the coordinator explained the importance of communication between teachers, parents, and the need for them to work together to help students succeed in school and have positive experiences. It was evident that the meeting provided an opportunity for parents to become more involved in their children’s educational journey. Another example of teacher-parent communication was obvious when I noticed from the classroom observations that many of the participants had setup a stoplight system in their classrooms for positive reinforcement. Teachers would contact the students’ parents about any incidents that involved their children, which led to moving the students’ pins to red, and parents expected to sign a written behavior contract that night. Another example of bilingual parent’s involvement was at the EL night event that was hosted by the school district where bilingual parents’ volunteers, bilingual teachers, general education teachers, and the community came together to have a successful EL night.

From my perspective, the findings from the sources of evidence from Theme, I demonstrated how the teachers were committed to fostering strong relationships with both the parents and their
students within the Midwestern school setting. After reviewing and analyzing the sources of evidence, I was amazed by the tremendous amount of effort needed to develop this level of parental involvement. It was evident that the educators often communicated with parents about concerns they had regarding their child’s behavior or academic progress.

From the data, it was clear that the teachers involved in the study believed that part of their job was to educate the parents about how to be engaged in their child’s education. After observing many events in the school, it was evident that the school had established many excellent programs for the ELL population. In addition, parents are essential in reinforcing the concepts taught at school when studying at home. From my experience as a bilingual teacher, I found that engaging homework and projects encourage parental involvement at home. When analyzing the sources of evidence, there was a common thread of communication and collaboration among the teachers and parents to help students succeed in school. This finding helped answer my research question. One of the most outstanding features relating to this theme was appreciating how the teachers were able to work with the parents to achieve successful outcomes when helping the students. This was sometimes difficult as some teachers felt that not all parents participated in their children’s education as much as they should, due to different expectations based on culture. I strongly believe that when integrating the elements of collaboration and communication, including extensive parental involvement and student participation, it makes it possible to meet the needs of ELLs in public schools.

Furthermore, the responses from the teachers and the observations in this study supported my viewpoint of the importance of parental involvement in which it plays a significant role in efficiently promoting students’ interactivity with homework and projects in school. In sum, the teacher, parent, and student form a three-way connection that promotes collaborative relationships when learning at
school and at home. After reviewing the findings, it gave me a clearer picture of how the school should always provide families with information on how to support and be involved in their child’s education.

**Considering Cultural Background when Teaching ELLs**

The interviews indicated that it was very important for most of the teachers to consider cultural backgrounds when teaching all students, regardless if they were ELLs or not. Their responses from many teachers in this study showed that understanding the students’ different cultures had been most beneficial when teaching ELL students. The responses referenced the importance of having an awareness of students’ backgrounds when addressing the cultural diversity that exists in Midwestern elementary school. In addition, the school holds a variety of school activities, such as the “Cultural Day” event, to expose the students and their families to different cultures. These activities provide opportunities for students to share their cultures, and ask questions in order to take into consideration diverse cultures in the school.

To summarize the responses from the participants, it was clear that the teachers believed that the school should take into account the student’s cultural background. For example, one teacher felt that it was essential to model love and respect for all people and cultures, found texts that were culturally relevant to the students, and be aware of one’s personal beliefs about other cultures. On the other hand, one other teacher noted that she used the American culture’s curriculum and not any other culture when educating students; this curriculum was written by US educators and was focused only on American traditions.

To provide triangulation, the classroom observations, school events observations, and various documents of the ELL program validated the participants’ responses regarding the consideration of ELL’s cultural background in the classroom. For example, the Home Language Survey document
indicated that the students whose families spoke a language other than English at home needed to be counted in order to provide support for them. To provide specific information, the survey stated that it would identify the students who needed to be assessed for English language proficiency. To elaborate further, the survey reported that if the answer to either question related to another language being spoken at home is yes, the law requires the school to assess the child’s English language proficiency.

Moreover, the classroom observations provided many examples of how teachers were mindful of their students’ cultures. For example, one participant’s classroom library was filled with books in both English and Polish. It was evident that many teachers tried to find/read texts that represented different cultures and languages, labeled things in different languages, and hosted parent workshops to help them understand the school curriculum and expectations, and learned words in different languages. To exemplify this, the bilingual specialist would sometimes instruct students and accept responses in the native language of her students.

A synopsis from the teacher’s responses and the documents from Theme II, Considering Cultural Background when Teaching ELLs, showed that many of the participants thought that considering cultural backgrounds was significant to take into account because it provides a more effective and empathetic teaching environment for all students especially ELLs. I was delighted that many teachers provided opportunities for students to share their cultures, removed their biases as they became aware of them, and sent home translated papers that families could understand. These examples helped me answer my research question: what are the characteristics that contribute to the academic success of English language learners in a Midwestern suburban elementary public school. I concluded that most of the teachers provided opportunities to support their student’s cultural backgrounds when at school.
Effective Instruction/ Strategies that contribute to ELLs’ Academic Success

The interviews indicated that the teachers recognized the need to provide different teaching strategies that contribute to English Learners’ academic success. The responses from the teachers acknowledged that they offered quality instruction that helped ELLs succeed in school. For example, students were provided with differentiated instruction, plenty of visuals, sentence starters, and many other strategies and resources. Besides, the responses showed that the quality of both the general education teachers as well as the bilingual teachers played a huge role in ELL’s academic success. On the other hand, the bilingual teachers were able to provide the extra native language support that the students need. A bilingual teacher believed that the use of the students’ native language increased comprehension and vocabulary when teaching ELLs. Moreover, another bilingual teacher thought that open communication with parents is vital when it comes to the student’s success in school. Finally, the teachers (general education and bilingual) recognized that they worked well together and their combined strengths were used to provide high quality instruction to the ELL students.

The triangulation was based on the observations of the teachers’ classrooms, school events’ observations, and various documents of the ELL program for the Effective Instruction/ Strategies that contribute to ELLs’ Academic Success theme. For example, the “Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee” observation provided evidence to support the responses from the teachers that they offered quality and tailored communication for families to help their ELLs succeed in school. Moreover, the observation of the ELL Registration Event reinforced how effectively the general education teachers and the bilingual teachers worked together to help parents register their ELLs and provided answers to parents’ questions about the programs at school, and this, in turn, helped ELLs
achieve success in school. Furthermore, the event provided me insight into how the school informs families about the important documents and procedures needed for ELL registration.

In addition, the board meeting observation offered information regarding the high quality of staff at Midwestern School. It was at the board meeting where Mrs. C was recognized for earning her second master’s degree as a reading specialist, which would have a great impact on teaching ELLs. The school district website provided a rich description of the bilingual teachers’ qualities and other certified teachers. For example, the website contained a biography about Mrs. C that showed her qualifications to teach bilingual students. Furthermore, her biography indicated her educational background and vast experience as a bilingual specialist. In addition, I noticed from the classroom observations that many teachers had classroom libraries filled with books in different languages and that they labeled the items in the room in Arabic and Polish. I also noticed that some teachers used the students’ native language to ask questions, used many visuals, engaged individually with those who struggled the most and asked students to buddy read with a classmate. Although the teachers used these strategies with their ELLs during the classroom observations, I did not notice using some of them using differentiated instruction as they discussed in the interviews.

It was apparent that there was a strong support for the ELLs in the school. I believe the observations of the teachers and events clearly showed how they actively support their ELL students. For example, most of the teachers were not only helpful and well prepared, but also enthusiastic while teaching their students. At Midwestern School, most teachers help to support the ELLs because they recognize the importance and the need to provide quality instruction for ELLs in order for them to succeed in school.

**Challenges that weaken ELL’s Motivation and Success**
The teachers’ responses have shown that some challenges weaken ELL’s motivation and success at Midwestern School. The responses from a few of the teachers addressed the challenges that came about due to unrealistic expectations placed on ELLs and that sometimes the school’s environment was not culturally sensitive. One teacher felt that there were challenges in finding appropriate teaching resources to assist her ELLs. Most of the teachers commented that communicating with parents of ELLs was one of the biggest challenges, because of the language barrier that affected ELL’s success.

From the perspective of a general education teacher, one of the factors that may negatively affect ELLs is a parent’s attitude towards learning English. She acknowledged that if a parent recognized the importance of acquiring the language, they would instill this priority in their children and would then be more motivated to work to his/her fullest potential. In addition, the responses recognized that the classroom environment played an important role in determining whether a child succeeded or failed. On the contrary, the bilingual specialist believed that the main challenges she faced were related to teachers from outside the field as well as some parents who did not understand the purposes and benefits of English as a second language/bilingual instruction. She also thought that it was difficult to find native-language materials when teaching students who just immigrated to the U.S.

The responses collected from the teachers, documents, and observations of the teachers triangulated my findings that some challenges affect ELL’s motivation. For example, one of the teachers recognized that the lack of parental support as well as the lack of a strong work ethic, could weaken motivation and success for second language learners. Another teacher questioned the accuracy of the placement tests of ELLs. She felt that the students’ low scores might be attributed to other factors than their inability to speak English. Unlike the other teachers, a general education
teacher thought that if the environment were uninviting, the child would not feel comfortable enough to take risks or ask questions.

Moreover, she believed that the child should feel secure and respected so that anxiety would not affect him/her from making mistakes and continuing to blossom while acquiring language skills. Furthermore, the classroom observations provided many examples of how students were shy to speak; some had trouble focusing, and were playing during the lesson; in addition, a few had difficulty with the vocabulary as well as understanding the directions. For example, one student required additional assistance from the teacher’s aide during an activity, as he was not able to understand the instructions, while another ELL student had trouble focusing when the teacher was asking her reading comprehension questions.

Most teachers acknowledged the challenges that affect ELL’s motivation and learning. They made sure that ELLs would make adequate progress throughout the school year. From my perspective, the collaborative efforts between bilingual teachers and general education teachers would contribute to the success of ELLs. For example, a general education teacher acknowledged that she worked well with the bilingual teacher to determine whether some ELLs were struggling because of low language and/or because of other reasons like a potential learning disability or lack of exposure/practice. Similarly, another teacher recognized that teachers worked together to ensure that students would continue to receive academic content while they were acquiring English. Finally, I was impressed to discover that the teachers worked really well together to make sure that ELLs make adequate progress throughout the school year.

**School Curriculum Related to ELLs**

The analysis of the interviews indicated that the curriculum lacked specific instruction directly related to English Language Learners. Teachers’ responses indicated that a few of the
teachers provided culturally diverse materials as well as differentiated skills, and the majority of teachers thought that they lacked instruction related to ELLs. One of the general education teachers believed that the curriculum did not include any culturally diverse material, for example, the Math curriculum did not have names of children that are of various cultures, and the stories within the reading curriculum were not representative of various cultures. Another general education teacher believed that it was up to all teachers to determine how he/she could integrate cultural differences in the curriculum. Similarly, one of the bilingual teachers designs her instruction to include culturally relevant practices, such as doing research about the students’ countries and share their projects with the rest of the school. On the other hand, the reading specialist teacher believed that the units she was using designed to include supports to help ELLs to obtain the knowledge and skills to meet academic standards.

On the contrary, the ESL teacher felt that the reading curriculum needed improvement to fit the culturally diverse student body. For example, the nursery rhyme unit is very appropriate to teach rhyme and poems to English, only students, but not to ELLs since they do not understand nursery rhymes. Similar to the ESL teacher, one of the general education teachers recognized that the ELLs follow the same curriculum and take the same assessments as non-ELLs (if they have been in the country for at least a year).

The teachers’ responses and school observations provided triangulation for the School Curriculum related to ELL’s theme. For example, many teachers had books in their classroom libraries that were relevant to ELLs; however, the observations indicated the use of a school curriculum related to English only students. From my perspective, the sources of evidence from Theme V demonstrated how a few of the teachers were committed to providing a school curriculum that is culturally relevant to their students within the Midwestern school setting. I was sympathetic
to the fact that some students were not introduced to culturally sensitive material, which is essential to both ELLs and other students. In addition, I appreciate how bilingual teachers designed their instruction to include culturally relevant practices.

**School Policies and Standardized Tests**

The responses from the interviews revealed that the majority of the teachers’ instructional practices were focused on strengthening the students’ foundational literacy and mathematical skills before taking the standardized test. The teachers’ responses provided evidence that the majority of teachers work very hard to help students close the gaps in their academic learning and achieve English proficiency. For example, the Pre-K teacher provided her students with differentiated instruction because of the expectations that the students would be ready for the next grade level. She also felt that children learn in different ways so she would provide lessons that reach all her students. However, the third grade teacher utilized MAP and IAR tests from the state and national level, but she also used standardized tests from within the district level and building level. She believed that regardless of the test, she would teach and plan with each student in mind. Moreover, she tried to use a variety of assessments such as writing brochures, essays, extended responses, multiple choice, matching, as well as Plickers and Kahoot to assess formative assessments.

On the other hand, the bilingual teacher used ACCESS Test data to guide her teaching and to best support the needs of the students she services. Access test is a state mandated test for ELLS. The teacher also indicated that based on the results of each of the four domains (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing), she would tailor her instruction to help support her students overcome their weaknesses and strengthen their English skills. From the perspective of another bilingual teacher, she believed that the practices she implements that were influenced by school and state laws were
mostly related to standardized testing. She tries to ensure that her students can attain their targeted amount of growth on standardized tests.

Triangulation was based on the teachers’ observations, school events’ observations, and various documents of the ELL program for the School Policies and Standardized Tests theme. For example, the “Access Test Staff Memo” document, EL Meeting minutes, and the “PBIS Note” served as examples of the importance and purpose of advocating for strengthening the students’ foundational skills before taking the standardized tests as well as improving students’ behaviors. The Access Test Staff Memo informed the staff about the ACCESS testing starting date. It indicated that the test is a state mandated assessment that is given to assess EL student’s progress in English, and it consists of four domains: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Each domain takes approximately 75 minutes to complete. It noted, “EL student performance on ACCESS both in the areas of proficiency and growth contribute to the overall school rating. The extra coordination and planning by all are needed to ensure that all EL students have the best testing experience.”

In addition, the “PBIS Note” focuses on improving a school’s ability to teach and support the positive behavior of all students. Part of the PBIS system includes preventative programs for students who may need additional support. Furthermore, the “EL Meeting minutes” provided information about different subjects related to the bilingual department, such as BPAC meeting, IEP meetings, IAR/MAP Accommodations. A suggestion was made that the EL teachers would attend meetings “as needed,” and the rest of the EL team would meet together to discuss other data (related to Access Test, and IAR accommodations that were based on IEPs), grade level notes, etc. With respect to Reading MAP, students who were reading below grade level- get Read Aloud accommodations, and teachers would take note of two different assessments to show students’ growth.
It was amazing to me that the majority of the teachers were focused on strengthening the students’ foundational literacy and mathematical skills before taking the standardized tests. Their goal was achieved because each teacher understood her responsibility in providing well-prepared lessons for their students to close the gaps in their academic learning. One general education teacher believed that collecting data based on formal and informal assessments was key to adjusting her plans in order to affect students academically to get them to reach target scores. I agree with one of the teachers acknowledging that the state laws and policies are there as well as school administrators to help ELLs to close the gaps in their academic learning and become proficient in English.

It is rewarding as an ELL teacher to see the involvement of administrators, teachers in promoting a supportive bilingual program for ELLs within a school’s curriculum. If advocacy is the process of supporting one’s belief, I feel we should consider bilingual education a priority within the curriculum of a school. Furthermore, to serve as an advocate one needs to remain current with the new information regarding best practices for English Language students. Most importantly, I feel that advocates should have a clear understanding of their beliefs and speak with a unified voice.

In the next chapter, I will be listing the research findings that I deduced from the analysis and interpretation of the data. I will also discuss the implications, limitations, recommendations and insights of the study. In addition, I will reflect on my personal experience during this research journey.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

In this chapter, I provide the findings, possible implications, recommendations, and insights for the field pertaining to this study. First, I restate the research purpose and questions, and present a list of the findings and how the findings contribute to the field of education specifically ELLs. Second, I discuss the implications and limitations of this study. Third, I provide insights for future research and recommended action. Fourth, I provide a comprehensive summary of this study. Finally, this chapter provides a chance for me to share my personal experiences related to this research study.

Statement of the Research Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to find out from the perspective of public school teachers, how their ideas and teaching strategies are applied to foster the academic success of their ELLs and the challenges these students face in school. Most of these students are first-generation Americans from a Middle-Eastern background. This is a descriptive single case study that is focused on a public school, pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade, located in a middle-class suburb in a metropolitan area in the Midwest.

Research Question

The following is the broad research question that guided this case study:

What are the characteristics that contribute to the academic success of English language learners in a Midwestern suburban elementary public school, pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade?
List of the Findings

The following is a list of findings described in the interpretation that was discovered in the data. These findings were drawn from the analysis of the multiple sources of data, which include interviews, observations documents, and physical artifacts. These findings are presented around the themes that emerged from the data:

**Impact of Parental Involvement:**

- Teachers try to communicate with parents as often as possible.
- Many parents did not come to school because they did not recognize that in the U.S., parents are encouraged to meet with the teacher. These parents assumed that the teachers had the sole responsibility to teach their children.
- Teachers had to allocate time to educate parents about how to be engaged in their child’s education.
- Parental involvement plays a significant role in efficiently promoting students' interactivity with homework and projects in school.

**Considering Cultural Background when Teaching ELLs:**

- The school did not do enough to represent ELL students’ cultural backgrounds within the curriculum.
- Teachers who incorporate a cultural background in the classroom provided a more effective and empathetic teaching environment.
- Teachers had to find many opportunities for students to share their cultures.
- Bilingual teachers included students’ cultural backgrounds when teaching ELLs more than the general education teachers did.

**Effective Instruction/ Strategies that contribute to ELLs’ Academic Success:**
• Teachers provided differentiated instruction, plenty of visuals, sentence starters, repetition, hands-on activities, and used buddy reading with classmates in all classroom settings.
• Teachers individually engaged the students who struggled the most.
• The use of the students’ native language increased comprehension and vocabulary when teaching ELLs.
• Classroom libraries were filled with books in different languages that increased language acquisition.
• The quality of both the general education teachers and the bilingual teachers played a huge role in the academic success of ELLs.
• The teachers’ (general education and bilingual) combined strengths were used to provide high quality instruction to the ELL students.

Challenges that weaken ELL’s Motivation and Success:
• There were unrealistic expectations placed on ELLs by the school.
• The school’s environment was not always culturally sensitive.
• There were challenges in finding appropriate teaching resources to assist ELLs.
• Communicating with parents of ELLs was sometimes challenging because of the language barrier.
• The general education classroom environment played an important role in determining whether a child succeeded or failed.
• In an uninviting environment, the child would not feel comfortable enough to take risks or ask questions.
• It was difficult for bilingual teachers to find native-language materials when teaching students who just immigrated to the U.S.

• The lack of parental support weakened the motivation and success of dual language learners.

• Teachers questioned the accuracy of the placement tests of ELLs because students’ low scores might have been attributed to factors other than their inability to speak English.

**School Curriculum Related to ELLs:**

• The majority of the teachers thought that the curriculum lacked culturally diverse materials and specific instruction directly related to English Language Learners except for the reading specialist teacher.

• It was up to each teacher to determine how he/she could integrate cultural differences in the curriculum.

• Bilingual teachers provided culturally diverse materials in their classrooms.

• Bilingual teachers design their instruction to include culturally relevant practices.

• The ELLs follow the same school curriculum and take the same school assessments as non-ELLs.

• The reading curriculum needed improvement to fit the culturally diverse student body.

**School Policies and Standardized Tests:**

• Teachers utilized MAP and IAR tests from the state and national level, in addition to standardized tests from within the district and building level when testing ELLs.
• The bilingual teachers used ACCESS Test data to guide their teaching and to best support the needs of the students they teach.

• The bilingual teachers tailored their instruction to help support their students to overcome their weaknesses and strengthen their English skills.

• The majority of the teachers were focused on strengthening the students’ foundational literacy and mathematical skills before taking standardized tests.

• Collecting data based on formal and informal assessments was key to adjusting the teachers’ lesson plans in order to help students reach their target scores.

• There was a lack of adaptation to the needs and cultural background of ELLs within the standardized tests.

All the previous findings were drawn from the data analysis, and they addressed the research question. What are the characteristics that contribute to the academic success of English language learners-pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade in a Midwestern suburban elementary public school? The following section will discuss the implications of this case study.

**Implications of this Study**

Regarding the implications of this study, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) suggested that the researcher should “look outside the immediate space of the research and suggest not just the academic but also social consequences or benefits of your research” (p. 343). While this study was conducted in a suburban, Midwestern elementary school, its findings may contribute to the academic success of ELLs beyond this setting and benefit and deepen the discourse of educators, administrators and researchers around the issue of bilingual education. Bilingual education continues to face many challenges due to the lack of support in public schools, a culturally insensitive school environment, and a curriculum that does not meet the ELLs’ needs. The
implications of this case study include the following: (a) the value of collaboration between parents and teachers, (b) changes in the way we see students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, (c) having effective strategies for ELLs in place, (d) finding the challenges that hinder the full achievement of ELLs and working to combat these challenges, (e) school curriculum contributes to the academic success of ELLs when it includes culturally diverse material, and (f) properly developed Common Core Standards, and English Language Development that encourage students to engage with rigorous academic content. This study showed that connections were made between the findings and the literature related to ELLs. I have gone back to my readings and checked how my implications resonate with what was studied by other researchers.

As I reflect on the importance of parent involvement in the success of ELLs in school, I was unimpressed with the levels of parental participation as parents sometimes leave the job of teaching to the educators, and allow their language barrier to hinder their participation when translators are available. The theme that emerged from the interviews with the teachers, as well as information presented from the observations and documents, provided a holistic picture of how insufficient parents’ participation in their children’s education negatively impacted the academic success of their children. The lack of involvement could contribute to a negative attitude about school, disruptive behavior in class, and a deficiency of motivation and self-discipline. Parents are an essential component in the education of bilingual students. They provide support at home, serve as a model of the use of both their native language and English (if they speak it), and instill within their children the importance of education. To increase their participation, teachers regularly communicated with parents and informed them about ways they could be more engaged in their children’s education. In addition, educators provided the parents with opportunities to be engaged during school. However, parents were sometimes unresponsive to these suggestions as some were
hindered by their language barrier, some had a lack of time as they worked multiple jobs, and they did not understand the value of their involvement.

The first implication of this study is the value of collaboration between parents and teachers. This collaboration provides support to the parents as they help their children succeed in school. Furthermore, parents could be challenged by the teachers to move beyond traditional methods of participation, such as fundraising efforts, and assume more responsibility in the educational process of the ELL program. Parents should also attend all school activities, work with teachers, and help their children with schoolwork to achieve success in school. However, Cooper, Denner, and Lopez (1999), pointed out that immigrant parents who have limited English skills often find it difficult to monitor their children’s academic progress, keep track of their children’s after-school activities, and understand their children’s experiences (as cited in Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009, p. 714). In addition, a bilingual parent could volunteer to act as a school coordinator to develop relationships with other parents, school staff, teachers to help in such things as registration, meetings, discuss what needs to be communicated with school staff, and other information related to school.

ELLs academically flourish with the support of their parents and may become more involved in school activities as a result. They may also increase their participation in class, interact more with their peers, and gain the confidence needed to explore the world around them.

The second implication of this study addresses the need of knowing and respecting the students’ cultural background when teaching ELLs. In this respect, it may be worthwhile that the school administrators, school curriculum and the general education teachers will find more ways to involve, increase, and apply their understanding of bilingual students’ different cultural backgrounds in their interactions with ELLs. This includes their students’ language, culture, values, traditions,
family, and home environment. This knowledge will help them better support their students in the classroom and beyond. The bilingual educators were able to do this, but to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for the nourishment of ELLs’ academic success, support is needed also from the rest of the staff. This implication is resonated with literature that supported the need of respecting and knowing the students’ cultural background when teaching ELLs. In *Embracing Race*, Dixon (2003) cites Moses, a philosopher of education, who argues that students cannot authentically be themselves when their cultures and languages are devalued, suppressed, and pathologized by school practices and policies.

Besides, for the teachers to engage students effectively in the learning process, they must know their students and their academic abilities individually, rather than rely on racial or ethnic stereotypes or prior experience with other students of similar backgrounds. Acting on stereotypes often creates a hostile learning environment for the student, where they experience micro-aggressions, where their contributions may not be valued or respected, and their needs are supported.

The third implication of this study is having effective strategies for ELLs in place, such as differentiated instruction, plenty of visuals, cooperative learning, repetition, and hands-on activities. The teachers in this study were dedicated to providing the best practices for ELLs, however, the bilingual teachers provided more effective strategies to meet their needs, as they were more knowledgeable of ELL’s needs. Literature confirms that bilingual teacher support is vital in helping ELLs succeed in school. Lambert (1987) suggested that ELLs can benefit more in bilingual environments that use two language models and consider their native language as a resource (as cited in Christian, 1996, p. 67). In order for the bilingual students to reach their grade level expectations, they need to work on language acquisition as well as grade level content/requirements. Some
researchers such as Snow, Burns, and Griffin suggested that reading development depends on the level of language development.

All of this requires specific strategies made with ELLs in mind. Strategies such as visuals are essential for ELLs because they reduce their anxiety, increase their comprehension, and build their vocabulary. Furthermore, highly qualified teachers could be hired to provide extra instruction before and after school. The general education teachers should also have professional development related to ELLs because ELL students spend more time in those rooms, and their needs change with time. Findings from research revealed that “children’s daily classroom experiences influence their development of bilingualism and biliteracy and impact the way they feel about themselves as successful learners” (Alanis, 2018, p. 21). Similarly, researcher Lindholm-Leary (2012) called attention to influence the students’ success in school. She elaborated that “more exposure to, and instruction in English in school does not result in higher levels of proficiency” (p. 259).

The fourth implication of this study is finding the challenges that hinder the full achievement of ELLs and working to combat these challenges. These challenges included unrealistic expectations from the general education teachers to no longer need the EL program after just a few years, issues of finding appropriate teaching resources, the varying academic levels of ELLs, and the accuracy of placement tests. Identifying the challenges that weaken ELLs’ motivation and success is pertinent in the creation of the best learning environment that supports their academic growth and development. Authors such as Adair (2015) stated that educators often consider limited English proficiency of ELLs as a huge hurdle to learning and more than likely would be placed in special education classes. It is recommended that teachers be made aware that ELLs might need seven years or more to learn the academic language, and not expect them to only need support for one or two years. Furthermore, we should use a variety of assessments to determine whether a student lacks
content knowledge, has issues with language acquisition, or is having problems unrelated to low levels of English. We must advocate for a more nurturing environment, where ELLs’ needs are met and adequate support is provided to educators.

The fifth implication of this study indicates that the school curriculum contributes to the academic success of ELLs when it includes culturally diverse material and specific instruction directly related to bilingual students. In this study, it was noted that the school curriculum did not provide the necessary EL resources for teaching, and therefore educators had to acquire resources by themselves. When appropriate resources are provided by the school through its curriculum, students feel represented and respected, and this may increase their participation and interaction with the material and their peers.

ELLs deserve the same rich and challenging curriculum that other students receive. Varying levels of support in using English should be built into the EL educational curriculum to assist them with the challenges that they encounter in school. The curriculum should encourage teachers to honor and incorporate children’s native language as students learn English. Many educational professionals have tackled the subject of school curriculum that contributes to the academic success of ELLs. Combs contributed to this discussion by stating, “School districts that dismantle their bilingual programs in favor of structured English Immersion face the legal and curricular challenge of providing ELLs with full access to the academic core content areas” (Combs et.al. 2005, p. 722). Teachers can learn words and phrases in their students’ home languages and acknowledge them. For example, they can do this by adding some words to charts and using them during various classroom routines.

A sixth implication of this study is that Common Core Standards and English Language Development encourages students to engage with rigorous academic content and provides
opportunities to help ELLs interact with challenging and engaging material. Standardized tests including ACCESS, MAP, and IAR assessments are expected to help the teachers ensure that ELLs are meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) in reading, math, and English, as required by the state’s law. They are supposed to measure their success; however, these currently used assessments are inaccurate and do not test what ELLs actually know. For example, such an assessment method would ask the student to identify something common in America, such as oatmeal, but to an ELL student who is new to the country or does not eat oatmeal at home, he/she would label it incorrectly. Additionally, these assessments are only conducted in English, which does not allow these students to fully comprehend the material. The full breadth of their knowledge is not captured by these measurements. In 2006, Abedi argued that tests designed for mainstream students might not be suitable to identify ELLs (as cited in Sullivan, 2011, p. 220). In order to nurture their academic success, school curriculum and policies should take into account the bilingual students’ population.

Limitations of this Study

In an intrinsic case study, the researcher might be a “participant observer” (Creswell, 1998), where it is important to consider the researcher’s background knowledge about and interpersonal relationships with the participants. As a bilingual/ESL schoolteacher in the district, my day-to-day interactions with the students, and the educational staff may affect the responses participants provide on semi-structured interviews. Stake (1995) notes being both a participant and an observer in a research study can be a limitation. For example, participants might feel obliged to provide “conserved” responses in interviews to show they are doing what they are “expected to do,” especially in front of a co-worker. To lessen this phenomenon, I made sure that all the interviews and observations were voluntary. Furthermore, this study was limited to the experiences of a small sample of only 10 teachers at one school.
Recommendations for Future Research

The following are recommendations suggested for future research related to English Language Learners programs. The first recommendation for future research would be to conduct a case study describing different approaches to teaching and supporting ELLs’ educational programs. Possible examples might include researching a middle school ELL program within a public school. Additionally, future research could focus on the types of technology that ELL teachers use such as, Penpals, Brain pop junior, and Raz-kids program.

A second recommendation for future research would be to study the EL students in a bilingual program to see how they benefitted from the ELL program. The purpose of this longitudinal study could be to gain the perceptions, experiences, and thoughts of students regarding how they view learning the English language in the Elementary Public Schools. In addition, this study would gain knowledge about how bilingual/ESL Programs contribute to their academic achievement. Furthermore, this study should focus on the experiences of other minority students such as, Lithuanians, Albanians and Croations as not enough research exists for these populations.

Finally, as an educator, parental involvement is of particular interest to me. A third recommendation is that schools continue to find ways to incorporate parents as a component of their children’s education; such as inviting parents into the classroom for meaningful experiences, reading to the students in their native language, and hosting parent workshops to help them understand the school curriculum and expectations. Parental involvement was not in the scope of this study; however, future research would focus on this vital aspect of ELL academic success.

Insights and New Understandings

As I have outlined, teaching bilingual students does not come easy, as teachers need to reach the diverse needs of ELLs. The American education system has focused primarily on the needs of
native English-speaking children. However, a large growing number of students in the U.S. come from homes that speak different languages other than English and considered limited English proficient. I believe that administrators should be aware of these situations and find educational programs that best fit ELL students’ needs. In addition, teachers should be knowledgeable in curriculum and instruction, linguistics, sociology, and history of languages of minority students. Murrel (2007) indicates, “There is a danger of young White future teachers adopting pedagogy of poverty positionalities that carry low expectations” (p. 12). All teachers should have appropriate experience with and a positive attitude about ELL students. A Swahili proverb stated, “It is better to build bridges than walls.”

In today’s world of globalization, knowing one or more foreign languages has many advantages; it gives the person more career opportunities and abroad education. Furthermore, it helps the person to have more than one perspective on specific issues. There is more bilingualism in more places than ever before because of “globalization, geographical and social mobility, economic and political transformations, and the omnipresence of technology in all areas of life” (Ruiz de Zarobe & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2015, p. 395).

Bilingual education should be widespread in the U.S., especially since many diverse languages are spoken here. While learning English is essential for all students, it is equally pertinent to cultivate one’s personal heritage and language as well. I am amazed when I see people who are fluent in two or more languages. I cannot understand why some people make such a huge and controversial issue out of bilingual education. We live in the twenty-first century and, at some point in the future, almost everyone will be able to speak a second language, and “multilingual education is becoming the norm almost everywhere in the world” (Ruiz de Zarobe & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2015, p. 396). It is a privilege to speak two or more languages; it keeps us connected to the rest of the world.
Since children’s backgrounds and needs are so diverse, I believe that teachers should take a step back and think before they plan and act. Teachers should be aware of these attributes and plan in accordance with each of their students’ needs, rather than planning whole group instruction. Teachers, much like artists, can creatively work to design a model that can work to meet what is best for each student. Every model has its advantages and disadvantages, but it is all up to the teacher to make it work by implementing it effectively and wisely. Bilingual education makes students learning more meaningful and fulfilling. In 1981, Cummins presented the idea that “strength in the native language is essential for second-language learners and that the knowledge and skills that are learned in the native tongue provide the basis for a positive transfer of skills” (as cited in Palmer, El-Ashry, Lectere, & Chang, 2007, p. 11). I believe that despite the student’s limited access to academic English, ELLs have a great deal to share and talk about if they know their teachers are interested in their experiences.

As I look to where I would like to see things in the future, with respect to bilingual education, I am empowered to act with a knowledgeable perception. I believe that school districts should offer teachers several workshops pertaining to ELLs’ learning needs and culture. School administrators and teachers should also read books about diversity, take part in book studies, and discuss how these readings correlate with the school's cultural climate. Public schools should offer programs to develop partnerships between schools and parents. The goal of those programs is to involve parents in their children’s education. For example, if parents do not speak English, schools should hire interpreters so parents would inquire about school regulations and rules regarding field trips. Those interpreters will help parents when their kids are sick and need to inform the school or if they want to have lunch with their students.
Personal Experiences/ Reflection

My life experiences while growing up during the civil war in Lebanon and moving to the United States inspired me to champion those who also come from different cultural backgrounds and face challenges that come with this new journey. It is important to tell my story to encourage ELLs to share and learn from their stories as well. Learning about ELLs at Midwestern School has been an irreplaceable educational and personal undertaking. It was a pleasure to be able to work with passionate, knowledgeable, and caring teachers in the field of education. Among the highlights of completing this research project, I remain in admiration and respect for the talents and love of teaching displayed by those who participated in this study. Further fulfillment came from recognizing the elementary school and most teachers in which this study took place as supportive and committed to exposing the bilingual students to magnificent school experience.

Moreover, this opportunity has presented me with a unique chance to promote bilingual/ELL advocacy in our schools. It was interesting to discover the combined efforts among the bilingual and general education teachers to maintain a tremendous bilingual program in this school. My dedication to advocating for bilingual education remains a lifelong passion and it will be an important influence in my future work. I believe that continuing these programs in public schools are essential for all bilingual students. Therefore, I will remain current with research that addresses the impact of bilingual education on ELLs’ academic achievement.

Furthermore, I look forward to remain an active member of professional organizations related to the bilingual curriculum, development, and advocacy. In addition, my early educational experiences as a bilingual student helped me to develop a passion and respect for bilingual education in my life. Finally, as Federico Fellini stated, “A different language is a different vision of life”.
Summary

Significantly, school districts continue to focus their attention on bilingual education programs due to the increase of ELLs in public schools. As an experienced bilingual teacher, I found that many challenges existed in providing good educational support for these ELL students to succeed in school. Therefore, I conducted a case study to find out from the perspective of public school teachers, how their ideas and teaching strategies are applied to foster the academic success of their ELLs and to combat the challenges these students face in school. The findings showed that collaborative efforts among general education teachers and bilingual teachers were vital for a successful bilingual program. In addition, strengthening the students’ foundational literacy and mathematical skills were key in improving students’ academic achievements.

To keep advocating for bilingual students and programs and to implement quality research-based programs for ELLs, a vast amount of research has been conducted in the area of EL student academic achievement. Moreover, the findings indicated the benefits of parental involvement in efficiently promoting students’ interactivity with homework and projects in school to improve educational outcomes for ELLs. Adapting the procedures of Yin (2009), data for this study were collected from multiple sources of evidence: interviews, observations, documents and physical artifacts. The findings showed that a focus on the use of the students’ native language increased comprehension and vocabulary when teaching ELLs, and was critical for the success of the bilingual students. Furthermore, future research could expand the findings from this study and provide further understanding and solutions to issues related to bilingual education programs.
References


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https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815572747


Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Rina Kassem
4126 Blanchan Ave. Brookfield, IL 60513
708.268.3360

Dear Participant,

You are invited to be part of a qualitative research project, [Cultural and Linguistics Challenges of ELLs in Public Schools], conducted by Rina Kassem, a doctoral candidate in the field of Curriculum Advocacy and Policy program at National Louis University, for the purposes of fulfilling the degree requirements.

The purpose of this project is to explore the qualities, characteristics, and attributes of an expert in an educational field. I am particularly interested in researching the following issue: What are the characteristics that contribute to the academic success of English language learners in a Midwestern suburban elementary public school, pre-kindergarten through fifth grade?

I value your input very much and would appreciate your participation in my research project. I am only presenting this information to you so you can decide whether or not you would like to participate. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you can withdraw from it at any time without affecting your relationship with me in any way. The study does not have any known or potential risks.

You are invited to participate in an individual semi-structured qualitative interview that may last approximately 45 minutes to an hour at a location of your choice. You will be asked to respond to a series of questions pertaining to your educational background and the path to the position of your career. The interview will be audio recorded (pending your consent) and transcribed by myself. The transcription of the interview will be presented to you for verification of accuracy.

The goal of this case study is to find out, from public school teachers, how their ideas and teaching strategies are applied to foster the academic success of their ELLs and the social challenges these students face in school.

For confidentiality purposes, the interview transcripts and all files pertaining to your participation in this study will be stored in my laptop under a secured password. A pseudonym will be assigned to protect your identity. If you have questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at (708)268-3360. You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Sara Efron at sefron@nl.edu. You will be tendered a copy of your signed consent form. Please acknowledge with your signature below your consent to participate in this study.
Thank you,

Rina Kassem

I consent to participate in an audio-recorded interview:

Participant's Name (Print): ____________________________

______________________________

Participant's Signature: ________________________________

______________________________

Date: ____________________________

________________________

Researcher's Name (Print): ____________________________

______________________________

Researcher's Signature: ________________________________

______________________________

Date: ____________________________

________________________
Citi Training Certificate

Completion Date: 27 Mar 2018
Expiration Date: 26 Mar 2020
Record ID: 26060089

This is to certify that:

Rina Kassem

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Research (Curriculum Group)
Group 1: Students (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

National Louis University

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w60a0e729-45ed-490d-a712-d17f11f0665d-26060089
Appendix B

Interview Guide

1. How would you describe your role and responsibilities as a teacher in this school district? Can you provide some specific examples to illustrate your role and responsibilities?

2. What experiences have shaped the qualities that you now possess as an educator? Please give examples.

3. How do these qualities manifest in your work? Please provide specific examples that illustrate these characteristics.

4. What skills and qualities do you consider effective for an education setting that you can transfer from your previous working experience? Please elaborate on your answer.

5. In what ways have you changed your practice throughout the years. What made you change? Give specific examples to demonstrate the process of change.

6. What challenges do you face as an EL teacher? Can you please share them?

7. How different is it teaching various grade level ELL students, and what are some effective teaching strategies that you currently use in your classroom? Please give specific examples.

8. How do schoolteachers and administrators take into consideration students’ diverse cultures in the classroom? Please give specific examples.

9. When you consider your students’ cultural backgrounds in developing class homework/projects, how does this practice strengthen relationships with their parents?

10. How does your curriculum reflect a culturally diverse student body? Please give specific examples.

11. What are the characteristics that contribute to English learners’ academic success?

12. What are the elements that weakens English learners’ academic motivation and success?
What are some practices that you implement in class that are influenced by the policy and expectations of school administrators and state law? Please give specific examples.

How do the standardized test affect how you plan your sessions and assess the students? Please give specific examples.

Is there anything that you would like to add that I might not have asked about already?
Appendix C

Students’ Work

Something I threw up and once I
needed to go to the bathroom so I asked
my mom to walk with me but she said
no you try to go by yourself and
I went and then I threw up and
I was born in Illinois in 2010 January 10.

I always went fishing with my dad. My

Granny always bought me toys.

Me and my dad always went to play golf

It was very fun. My uncle bought me a
spider man bike and he taught me how to ride. When he taught me how to ride it I never wanted to let go of it. It was my best friend. My sister when she was a baby she always used to bite me and scratch me and it really hurt. When I was in Alaska and I went fishing I caught the most fish when I was 6 years old. When I caught a fish I would always play with it. I always loved eating ice cream and smashing it in my face. I would always cry when it started storming.
I'm going to tell you my story. My dad and his
family were forced to move because of the war.
They went to Jordan. My dad came here to
work. My mom was 23. They went to Indiana.
And then I was born in Indiana. We were a half family then they decided we would go to Chicago because the place that they know all the time I had 2 siblings after a named Adam and then 6 years old and 4 years. I moved houses and know I move. I have other thing but the finish that's my story.
Chapter 1: The Sadness

I was born in Chicago. I never got to see my older sister only a grandson and my mom was really nice and my dad acts or is my friend. He will be her when I need him most.

I was five years old when my grandfather
CULTURAL CONTEXTS AND LINGUISTICS OF ELLS

She was the woman I needed her to be. She lived in Malta which is in Asia. So I only got to see her on visits. My mom was devastated to hear this news. It was sad. I don't blame her. I never did but that was my aim. Now she has been there for my mom forever even through the tough moments. Now it was to be hers for her. Then I was 8 years old when my house burnt it was sad. For her. Now I'm 9 and I'm in my house again.
I was born in Chicago, Illinois. I lived in my oldest grandma. Then moved two times when I was 5. Then I went to preschool. Then I went two
Maddock school. When I was in third grade, I moved to [blank]. I went to [blank] Elementary school. My oldest grandma thought I will never see her again, but I went on Saturdays to see her.
I was born in Chicago in February 16, 2015, and when I was born my grandpa died and then I had to come to Jordan where my grandpa died and then I was really sick every time when I ate.
Appendix D

Sample Interviews

(R) 1. How would you describe your role and responsibilities as a teacher in this school district? Can you provide some specific examples to illustrate your role and responsibilities?

(BT) I am the EL and the bilingual Polish teacher in this school and I serve as an advocate for the students I work with. My responsibilities and my role in this school is to support students in their English language-learning journey. I provide support in the students’ native language (Polish), and modify activities and lessons to meet the needs of the students. I also push-in to classrooms and help newcomer ELs by translating, modeling and modifying activities and lessons, as needed. I also service non-Polish speaking students with languages such as Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Spanish and Albanian. For these students I support them by modifying activities, using visuals and Google translate to ensure understanding and continued learning.

(R) 2. Do you think that some of the qualities that you now possess have been cultivated early in your career or in your educational or other experiences? If so, then how? If not, why not?

(BT) The qualities of my teaching now, after 12 years of teaching, are certainly different and have grown tremendously as compared to my teaching early on in my career. Since I worked as a Special education for the first 6 years of my career, then changed to EL, I found that many of the experiences and resources I used within the Special education setting related very closely, to what I can use in the EL classroom to support my students. Since I myself was an EL student, having immigrated to the US at the age of 8 from Poland, I can relate to what my students are going through in their English language learning journey. I can relate to how they are feeling, their frustrations and their sense of pride when they finally grasp a concept because they can finally understand it. I think
this has helped me the most in my transition from Special Ed to EL, the closeness I feel with the students I teach.

(R) 3. How do these qualities manifest in your work? Please provide specific examples that illustrate these characteristics.

(BT) As stated in previous question, I am able to relate to how they are feeling, their frustrations and apprehensions and am able to support them not only with the English language acquisition skills, but also with the social emotional needs. An example would be working with newcomers to establish friendships with peers, help them solve problems and learn to relate to one another. I also translate homework, notes and homework activities for the newcomers to ensure less frustration and more confidence, so they stay on the same pace as their peers.

(R) 4. Are there any skills and qualities that you consider effective for an education setting that you can transfer from your previous working experience? Please elaborate on your answer.

(BT) Flexibility is the main skill that is needed in any classroom, especially in one like mine where I have students coming in and out all day. Groups get cancelled, sometimes extra push-in time is requested, and if time allows, I try to fit everything in. Patience is also very important as all students learn at different paces and have different learning styles. Being creative is also very important since modifications needs to be made on a daily basis to ensure that all students are learning and are receiving the proper support needed for their level of skills.

(R) 5. In what ways, have you changed your practice throughout the years? What made you change? Give specific examples to demonstrate the process of change.

(BT) I have definitely become more aware of the factors that affect my students’ learning. I can control what happens in my classroom and how they are treated here, but I have no control over their home life and how much support they receive from their family. I have made great efforts to ensure
that I am compassionate, supportive and understanding of their needs and challenges while they are with me, in hopes that it will be help fill whatever they may be missing at home.

(R) 6. Have you had any challenges as an ESL teacher? If so, can you please share them?

(BT) One of the biggest challenges that I have experienced as an EL teacher has been the level of expectations that are set for us EL teachers by General education teachers. Some of the expectations they have of us and our EL students are not always realistic. We have to explain to them, time and time again, that learning English is a lengthy and rigorous process, there are a variety of stages that students go through while learning the language. We need to be positive, supportive and patient. Another challenge would also be that the accuracy of our placement tests is not the strongest. Sometimes students score very low on these tests due to other factors, rather than inability to speak English, and unfortunately, they qualify for our program, when they really do not need it. This is something that becomes frustrating to us as educators because we have students qualifying for our program that do not need the help of this program and are mixed with students who are newcomers and really do need our support.

(R) 7. How different is it teaching various grade level ELL students, and what are some effective teaching strategies that you currently use in your classroom? Please give specific examples.

(BT) Having the ability to switch from one grade level to another all day long is a skill that not everyone can adapt to. Fortunately, many of the strategies and techniques that are used in the lower grades can also be used in the upper grades. All students benefit from modeling and visuals, the use of their native language to increase comprehension and vocabulary is also something that can be used across all grade levels.

(R) 8. Do you think that it is important for schoolteachers and administrators to take into account diverse students’ cultures? If so, how can this be done?
Yes, I definitely think that this is very important to take into account. A child’s culture and cultural background may have a very large impact on their learning. Depending on what their native country is, may depend on the level of academics this child received. We should understand this and take it into consideration when planning school wide activities, rewards and motivational opportunities. Maybe allowing students from diverse cultures to share important details or facts about their native country would educate everyone in the school, peers, teachers and administrators.

Have you ever considered your students’ cultural backgrounds in developing class homework/projects? How does this practice strengthen relationships with the parents?

I have sent home activities and homework packets that were translated into the native language of the students I work with, which is Polish. Upon doing this, I found that the number of completed assignments increased; the reason for this was very simply that the parents were able to understand the directions and what was being asked of their child on the assignment, and were able to help their child with it. They felt like they were finally able to be a part of their child’s education and to help support their learning. This was expressed to me by some of the parents of the students I work with, and it was very eye opening to me to see how much of an impact this made on their lives. Something so small and so simple meant so much to them. This is something that I will continue doing in my classroom.

Do you think that your curriculum reflect a culturally diverse student body? If so, then how? Please elaborate.

I do not think so because we use the American culture’s curriculum not any other cultures’. This curriculum is written by US educators and focused on American traditions and cultural experiences. As an EL teacher, I try my best to support cultural diversity by including information
and activities from other resources. I use Twinkl as a main resource to support my student’s learning of cultural diversity. I also read stories related to the student’s native culture and background.

(R) 11. What are the factors that contribute to English learners’ academic success?

(BT) Inclusion is the largest and most crucial factor that contributes to our EL students’ academic success. The students need to feel accepted by their peers and be given opportunities to interact with their English speaking peers. Their peers also serve as strong examples and models for our ELs in many different aspects: social, academic, emotional, etc.

(R) 12. What are the factors that weakens English learners’ academic motivation and success?

(BT) The frustration level of an EL who does not speak the English language is something that decreases their motivation. Also not being able to use their native language throughout in the various settings during their school day: recess, music, art, etc.

(R) 13. What are some practices that you implement in class that are influenced by the policy and expectations of school administrators and state law? Please give specific examples.

(BT) ACCESS testing is state testing that is mandated for English Learners in our program. We use the data from this assessment to guide our teaching and to best support the needs of the students we service. Based on the results of each of the 4 domains (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) on the assessment, we can meet the students where their weaknesses are, and help support and strengthen their English skills. Starting next school year we will begin to follow the Common Core Professional Learning Committees to focus on the learning standards for each grade level. This will allow us to focus more on specific skills that are required by state policies and laws.

(R) 14. How do the standardized test affect how you plan your sessions and assess the students? Please give specific examples.
BT) Using ACCESS scores to guide our instruction, we also use information from this assessment to focus on Can Do Descriptors from the WIDA model; specifically we look at each domain (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing), and base our instruction on the specific Can Do statements under each domain. As students show that they are making progress throughout the year, they can move up levels - ex: Level 1: Beginning; Level 2: Entering; Level 3: Developing; Level 4: Bridging; Level 5: Exceeding; Level 6: Reaching. For example: Student A might start on Level 1 based on his/her ACCESS score, but may end the year on Level 3 or 4, depending on the progress they are able to make during the school year.

(R) 15. Is there anything that you would like to add that I might not have asked about already?
1. How would you describe your role and responsibilities as a teacher in this school district? Can you provide some specific examples to illustrate your role and responsibilities?

I am in my fifth year teaching. This year I am a third grade, general education, classroom teacher. I have only six EL students in my class this year, but four students with an IEP. I work closely with my grade level team, administrators, and support staff.

2. Do you think that some of the qualities that you now possess have been cultivated early in your career or in your educational or other experiences? If so, then how? If not, why not?

I think experiences I have had growing up have helped develop the qualities I have now. I grew up with a wide range of friends from various backgrounds. I went to a huge high school, over 5,000 students, so was surrounded by cultures different from mine. Within the high school, many programs and clubs existed and put on events that showcased their cultures. These experiences I think helped my appreciation for all backgrounds and cultures. I also have been working with kids with special needs since 7th grade, so even working with the families as I got older helped me to understand that families and students need different supports, language barriers can have a huge limitation within educational situations, and that families are all looking for that same end goal: student success! As a current educator, and one finishing a master’s degree in Educational Leadership with an Administration focus, I think my biases have been checked and reevaluated. I am more mindful of my thoughts and myself especially as I work with students from all backgrounds and speaking different languages. Last year, my classroom of 21 students had 18 different languages spoken! This melting pot of a classroom was an amazing learning experience for my students and myself! I can cater activities to students that allow them to highlight and showcase their cultures. I provide visuals and supports for all students knowing there is such a large need for them. I can also put myself in a vulnerable spot by asking questions to get to know and better understand the students. I take time to
eat lunch with students, play with them at recess, read with them, and just take time to sit and talk to them. All of these non-academic settings really allow me to better know my students and in turn develop the knowledge of them I need to help them be successful.

(R) 3. How do these qualities manifest in your work? Please provide specific examples that illustrate these characteristics.

(GT) I mentioned that before.

(R) 4. Are there any skills and qualities that you consider effective for an education setting that you can transfer from your previous working experience? Please elaborate on your answer.

(GT) I mentioned that previously.

(R) 5. In what ways have you changed your practice throughout the years. What made you change? Give specific examples to demonstrate the process of change.

(GT) I do not think I have really changed my practices all that much. I think the largest change came when I learned more about what families of various cultures value in regards to education. I learned more about the role of genders within some cultures and roles of their communication as well. These I think shifted my approach, but made me more aware and culturally responsive.

(R) 6. Have you had any challenges as an ESL teacher? If so, can you please share them?

(GT) I think a challenge for me is just ensuring I am matching the supports needed for each of my students. It would be great to have more collaboration time with the EL teachers in the building and the grade level team to best ensure we are meeting the needs of our EL students and if not, how we can alter our instruction or materials to help them.

(R) 7. How different is it teaching various grade level ELL students, and what are some effective teaching strategies that you currently use in your classroom? Please give specific examples.
(GT) I use a lot of visual cards for vocabulary and content specific material. I also provide sentence starters for writing responses. Accountable talk posters are hung up in the classroom to provide all students with sentence starters as they discuss with their partners or table groups, but also these are utilized in writing. Visual schedules are used daily. Manipulatives and whiteboards are provided for math to again assist.

(R) 8. Do you think that it is important for schoolteachers and administrators to take into account diverse students’ cultures? If so, how can this be done?

(GT) I think that it is critical that teachers and administrators to take into account diverse cultures. Together, celebrating the cultures, providing opportunities for students to share their cultures, asking questions, removing and being aware of biases, translating papers going home into languages that families need. I had training at my previous district about better understanding families from various cultures (i.e. Japanese and Indian) as they communicate about their child’s success at school, but how to best communicate with these families at conferences. The “Oreo” approach that so many U.S. teachers use at conferences confuse Japanese families, as they are accustomed to the blunt “how is my kid doing”. Having an awareness of the importance of specific areas within cultures when it relates to school is huge for administrators and teachers.

(R) 9. Have you ever considered your students’ cultural backgrounds in developing class homework/projects? How does this practice strengthen relationships with the parents?

(GT) I have considered the projects I do within the classroom and what I send home. One of my favorites is talking about diversity and having a family interview. Students have the opportunity to interview their families about their culture and heritage. They then create a postcard representative of themselves. I hang these around a world map and connect strings from the students’ postcards to the countries of their heritage. It is a huge success and very visually eye-opening for everyone to see.
commonalities but also differences. The activity opens great discussions and learning moments from all students. Parents enjoy this activity as they come into the building for conferences, etc. I am very open with parents and build the communication lines with families early on. I send home weekly Friday notes with all students that highlight the positive things from the week for their student specifically.

(R) 10. Do you think that your curriculum reflect a culturally diverse student body? If so, then how? Please elaborate.

(GT) I think the curriculum does a bare minimum job of providing culturally diverse materials. The names within the Envisions math curriculum are names of children that are various cultures (i.e. Mohammad, Sarah, Yuko) and the stories within Wonders literacy are representative of various cultures (i.e. Puerto Rican folk tale, Japanese characters, etc.). I think that curriculums could include more supports for EL students within the texts and materials. Our science STEM Scopes does include visual cards for us to use, but the material and readings are not written for EL students.

(R) 11. What are the factors that contribute to English learners’ academic success?

(GT) I believe that a variety of factors contribute to English learners’ academic success. One is the support and patience within the school from their EL teachers, classroom teachers, peers, etc. I also believe the resources used plays a large role. I use a lot of visual cards for vocabulary and content in all subject areas to support my students, including EL. I think the mindset and awareness of biases we have can also contribute to their success. Believing in the students and providing them with the positivity that they can succeed!

(R) 12. What are the factors that weaken English learners’ academic motivation and success?
(GT) I think not providing the things listed in #11. By assuming students don’t understand English, though they may not, the assumption can hinder their motivation. Showing bias towards students can also weaken their success.

(R) 13. What are some practices that you implement in class that are influenced by the policy and expectations of school administrators and state law? Please give specific examples.

(GT) I utilize the common core state standards in most subject areas. Because the current expectations of social studies from our district does not follow the standards, I do what is asked by our district administrators. In math, I teach daily using the mathematical practice standards, though I know this is not an expectation of either school or district. Within the state, the mathematical practice standards are criteria for success for students, so I use them.

(R) 14. How do the standardized test affect how you plan your sessions and assess the students? Please give specific examples.

(GT) Standardized tests can be a variety of things. We use MAP and IAR from the state and national level, but we also utilize standardized tests from within the district level and building level. Regardless of the test, I teach and plan with mind in end. I know what I want my students to learn and how they will be assessed, and what will be assessed, so I can then teach in a way to help them be successful. When thinking about MAP and IAR, since those are out of my control as far as what will be asked, I know that to plan and assess students throughout the year, and teaching to the standards, I am helping them to be successful. I try to use a variety of assessments like written in different formats (writing brochures, essays, extended response, etc.), multiple choice, matching, etc. I also use Plickers and Kahoot to assess as formative assessments. Students have a variety of methods to show their learning, so planning is based on how I am going to assess and what resources I am going to use.
(R) 15. Is there anything that you would like to add that I might not have asked about already?
Appendix E

DOCUMENTS

ACCESS TEST STAFF MEMO

Dear Staff,

ACCESS testing will begin January 15, 2020 for Kindergarten-Grade 8 for all students identified as English Learners. ACCESS, Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners, is a state mandated assessment that is given to assess EL student's progress in English. ACCESS consists of four domains: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Each domain takes approximately 75 minutes to complete. Our EL teachers will be administering this assessment individually or in small groups to all EL students.

ACCESS is administered online and in paper format. With the growing number of EL students in each building, please be aware that students will miss part of class time to complete this required state assessment. EL students have been assigned scheduled times to take each domain for ACCESS. Please review the attached schedule so you can plan accordingly for the various times your EL students will need to be out of your classrooms for testing purposes. Also, please collaborate with your student’s EL teacher to work on ways to accommodate/modify for the time that your student is out of the class.

EL student performance on ACCESS both in the areas of proficiency and growth contribute to the overall school rating. We recognize that extra coordination and planning by all is needed to ensure that all EL students have the best testing experience. If you have any questions and/or concerns regarding ACCESS testing or schedule, feel free to contact your building principal.

Thank you for all your dedication and cooperation in helping to ensure that all students have a successful experience.

J P
Principal
Home Language Survey

The state requires the district to collect a Home Language Survey for every new student. This information is used to count the students whose families speak a language other than English at home. It also helps to identify the students who need to be assessed for English language proficiency. Please answer the questions below and return this survey to your child’s school.

Student’s Name: ______________________________

1. Is a language other than English spoken in your home?

Yes _____ No _____

What language? ________________________

2. Does your child speak a language other than English?

Yes _____ No _____

What language? ________________________

If the answer to either question is yes, the law requires the school to assess your child’s English language proficiency. ____________________________  ____________________________
PBIS English Note

Dear Parents,

Palos West School continues to implement the Positive Behavioral Intervention System (PBIS). PBIS focuses on improving a school’s ability to teach and support positive behavior of all students. It is a proactive systems approach of prevention and response to classroom and school discipline issues.

Part of the PBIS system includes preventative programs for students who may need additional support. One of the programs we offer is called, “Pride Check-In.” The purpose of this program is to support students who struggle to maintain positive behavior at school. Eligibility for “Pride Check-In” is based on the number of office referrals a student is receiving and teacher observations. This program is not to be viewed as a punishment or negative consequence, but as a positive strategy designed to support your child at Palos West School.

The PBIS team, along with your child’s teacher, feels your child would benefit from this support program. The “Pride Check-In” program consists of daily morning and afternoon check-ins with our social worker, Mrs. N. Each morning, students will receive their daily behavioral goals and are encouraged to meet their goal. At the end of the day, they will “check out” with Mrs. N and review the scores they earned for the day. Your child’s participation in the program will be re-evaluated on a monthly basis.

Your child will receive a Daily Pride Report which will indicate the progress which was made throughout the day. Please review the report and discuss it with your child each day. Your involvement is key in motivating your child to display appropriate behaviors at school and be successful in the Pride Check-In.

Your child will begin the “Pride Check-In” program on _____________________________. If you have any questions, please call H (999-9999 ext. 9999).

Thank you for your continued support at home.

Sincerely,

R. W., Assistant Principal
الأباء الأعزاء،

تواصل مدرسة [name] تطبيق نظام التدخل السلوكي الإيجابي (PBIS). يركز على تحسين قدرة المدرسة على تعزيز ودعم السلوك الإيجابي لجميع الطلاب. إنه نهج PBIS استباقي للأنظمة الوقائية والاستجابة لقضايا الفصل والانضباط المدرسي.

جزء من نظام PBIS يتضمن برامج وقائية للطلاب الذين قد يحتاجون إلى دعم إضافي. يسمى أحد البرامج "Pride Check-In" والتي تقدمها [name], والغرض من هذا البرنامج هو دعم الطلاب الذين يكافحون للحفاظ على السلوك الإيجابي في المدرسة. تستند أهداف "Pride Check-In" إلى "Pride" إلى عدد الإحالات المكتوبة التي يتلقاها الطالب وملاحظات المعلم. يجب ألا يُنظر إلى هذا البرنامج على أنه عقوبة أو نتيجة سلبية، ولكن كاستراتيجية إيجابية مصممة لدعم طفلك في مدرسة [name].

يتألف برنامج "Pride Check-In" من تسجيل الوصول اليومي في الصباح والمساء مع [الاسم]. كل صباح، سيتلقى طلابك أهدافهم السلوكيه اليومية ويتم تشجيعهم على تحقيق هدفهم. في نهاية اليوم، سيقومون "بالخروج" مع [الاسم]، ومراجعة الدرجات التي حصلوا عليها لهذا اليوم. سيتم إعادة تقييم مشاركة طفلك في البرنامج شهريًا.

سيتلقى طفلك تقرير "Pride Check-In" يوميًا في [تاريخ]. إذا كانت لديك أي أسئلة، فيرجى الاتصال بـ [النомер]. شكراً لدعمك المستمر في المنزل.

ب眼下 المو،
ر. و، مساعد المدير
Drody Rodzice,

Zapraszamy wszystkich na pierwsze spotkanie dla naszych rodzin dwujęzycznych!

Podczas spotkania porozmawiamy na różne tematy, i się zapoznamy lepiej ze szkołą i programem dwujęzycznym. Porozmawiały również o MAP test i wywiadówce.

Będzie oraz szansa na wszystkie państwa pytania.

**Data: Środa 16-tego Października**

**Godzina:** 5:30 – 6:00PM

**Lokacja:** Media center

Opieka nad dziećmi będzie zapewniona. Będą serwowane przekąski.

Ta sesja informacyjny jest przez PAC (Parent Advisory Committee).

Please return this bottom portion to Mrs. S

*Proszę oddać dolną część Pani S.*

First & last name of parents (Imie rodziców) __________________________

First & last name of child(ren) (Imie dziecka/dzieci) _____________________

_____ Yes I can attend (Tak przyjde).

_____ No I cannot attend (Nie dam rady przyjść).

Number of adults (Ile dorosłych) __________ Number of kids (Ile dzieci) __________

*Please return by Tuesday October 15th. Thank you!*

*Prosimy o odpowiedź przed Wtorkiem, 15-ego Października. Dziękujemy!*
Dear parents,

We would like to invite you to our annual meeting for all our bilingual families. During the meeting, we will discuss various topics such as information about the English language program at school, MAP testing, report cards and the upcoming parent teacher conferences.

There will also be an opportunity to answer all of your questions.

**Date:** Wed. October 16th, 2019  
**Time:** 5:30-6:00 pm  
**Location:** Media Center

Childcare services will be provided, and light refreshments will be available.

This informational session is brought to you by PAC (Parent Advisory Committee).

Please return this bottom portion to Mrs. S.

First & last name of parents ___________________________  
First & last name of child(ren) ___________________________  
_____ Yes I can attend  
_____ No I cannot attend  
Number of adults __________   Number of kids __________

*Please return by Tuesday October 15th. Thank you!*
BPAC Arabic (Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee)

لجنة الاستشارة ثنائية اللغة

لقاء مفتوح

يرجى الانضمام إلينا الساعة 5:30 إلى 6:00 مساء يوم الأربعاء 16 أكتوبر للاجتماع الأول لهذا العام لأولياء أمور الطلاب في البرنامج ثنائي اللغة.

استمتع بالحلويات والشاي معنا في مدرسة بالوس ويست للتعرف على Report (بطاقات التقارير) و Map Reports (تقارير الخرائط) أو طرح الأسئلة أو مشاركة أي تعلقات قد تكون لدينا.

نأمل حضوركم!

الإسم:-------------------------------------
نعم ،---------- أستطيع الانضمام
لا ،---------- لا يمكنني الانضمام
BPAC English Meeting (Bilingual Parent Advisory committee)

Please join us at 5:30-6:00 on Wednesday Oct. 16th for the first meeting of the year for parents of students in the bilingual program.

Enjoy sweets and tea with us at [redacted] School to learn about Report Cards, Map Reports, ask questions, or share any comments you may have.

**Note:** Childcare will be available during the meeting.

*We hope to see you there!*

**Name:** -------------------

Yes, --------- I can join

No, --------- I can’t join

*Please, return to Mrs. K. by Oct. 15th. Thank you!*
EL Team Meeting
February 19, 2020
1:00- 3:30 pm

Agenda

Location: P. S. School in Green Capstone room

- **IEP meetings**
  - At a Glance
    - Make sure we have them at the beginning of the year from Sped teachers
  - Communication form filled out by EL prior to IEP meeting to ensure EL accommodations are added to the IEP.
    - If Parent Refusal-just write **Parent Refusal**
    - If seen during TIDE- write **TIDE+ minutes/day**
    - In IEP-which accommodations we want the student to have in the classroom, ie: extended time, small group, etc. This information is included in the blurb in Student Information part on the IEP (page 2).
      - Put parent refusal/consult/direct minutes + the accommodations for in classroom assessments section
      - You don’t have to put an accommodation- if not needed- JUST put direct instruction OR Parent refusal OR consult- if appropriate.
    - **Accommodations for ACCESS** section should be filled out ONLY if they use these accommodations throughout the year and they are not a REFUSAL
    - **Accommodations for IAR**- consult with case manager and then document those
    - By the end of the year have one of these filled out for each IEP student on EL caseload- send Huwaida a copy.
      - If you service the student- If ABLE, go to the meeting.
      - If you don’t service student and CAN attend meeting- talk first and then excuse yourself
      - If you are unable to attend the meeting- contact parents prior to meeting, go through information and excusal will be filled out at meeting

  **SEE SAMPLE FORMS**

- **PLC**
  - Feedback
    - **Pros:**
• Feel close to the team
• Good feedback and information from grade level team

  ▪ Cons:
    • Missing other grade levels
    • Not always on the same page with grade levels
    • Confusion on EL teacher responsibilities

  ▪ Improvements
    ▪ Once we have data, we could use it with EL team to come up with ideas and strategies that we can bring to PLC teams and use amongst ourselves.
    ▪ Maybe focus on the “neediest” grade levels and rotate through those
    ▪ Ask grade levels to let EL teachers know when data from CFA’s will be discussed- we would attend at that time.
    ▪ The EL teachers will attend meetings “as needed” and the rest of the EL team would meet together to discuss other data, grade level notes, etc.

• ACCESS
  ▪ Prefer not to have subs for next year
  ▪ Make sure the schedules include a PLAN time for us
  ▪ Prefer to assess ALL KG students next year

• BPAC
  ▪ Feedback
  ▪ Next BPAC
    March 19th, 2020 (Thursday @ S.) 5:30-6:15pm
      ▪ Bilingual Parent Summit-
        ▪ Date not available- will give parents a general idea of what it is and if they are interested we will have a sign-in sheet and date and time will be sent when available
      ▪ IAR
        ▪ Will provide parents with practice website
          ▪ ildigitalitemlibrary.com
      ▪ MAP-
        ▪ discussed in first BPAC meeting
      ▪ Show BPAC parents programs used by their student (Raz Kids, Lexia, etc.)
      ▪ Provide them with passwords and login information
      ▪ Programs are available at any time including spring and summer breaks

  ▪ OTHER-
    ▪ Bring all student logins for programs
    ▪ O.: refreshments, napkins, plates
    ▪ K.- Coffee
• Send invites by Thursday, March 12th
• PowerPoint slides due to H. by Friday, March 13th
  o R.- Raz Kids
  o A.- Dreambox
  o O.- Reflex Math
  o K.- Lexia
  o C.- Lexia PowerUp
  o B.- Typing Pal- Logins? Which grades use it?

  o Handout
    ▪ H. will put it together
  o MAP/IAR Presentation- N/A

• IAR/MAP Accommodations
  o IAR accommodations should be made based on IEP’s as needed
    ▪ Check with case managers and Gened teachers for appropriate accommodations
  o MAP- done as a whole group- no small group option
    ▪ Look at only students who really need it
    ▪ For Math MAP- any students who is reading below grade level- get Read Aloud accommodation- for data, make sure we look at 2 data points that both include the accommodation to see growth
    ▪ This is effective for Spring benchmarking

• Subscriptions
  o Reading A-Z- keep
  o Twinkl- keep
  o iLit- O.- don’t keep- does not meet student needs. Check back in May with C.
  o Imagine Learning- Don’t keep

• Professional Development
  o 1 day for Bilingual conference- Cut down to 1 day per person
    ▪ If Bilingual conference doesn’t fit our needs- look into something else if needed
  o IRC free workshops- Attend as many of the free workshops as appropriate/as we would like

• OTHER
- Teachers are still questioning what EL teachers are doing
  - What we are? What do we do?
  - Next year: clear explanation of our responsibilities
  - Team days:
  - EL teachers can come in maybe once a month to a grade level meeting and help answer questions/concerns, etc.

Grade level team meetings can’t all be on the same day

- Screenings for ALL incoming students: start in May
  - For current Pre-K students we will screen during school hours
  - Community incoming students will be after school hours (a few days in May)
  - Send H. at least 4 dates in May we would be available to stay for screenings