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# Literacy Development Practices for English Learners With Interrupted Formal Education

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# Literacy Development Practices for English Learners With Interrupted Formal Education

by
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## Approval Page

This Applied Dissertation was submitted by Francisco Javier Oaxaca under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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**Statement of Original Work**

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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___*Francisco Javier Oaxaca*_____
Name

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Date

**Acknowledgments**

I recognize having the opportunity to continue my education and pursue my doctorate degree is one that should not be taken for granted; rather, an opportunity to be cherished. I feel blessed to have had this chance to deepen my knowledge, passion, and scholarship in the field of education particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

First, I would like to thank my Chair, Dr. Barbara Christina, for all her guidance and patience through this process. I have learned so much from you over the past few months and appreciate all the time you gave me to ensure I grew as an educator. Also, to my Committee Member, Dr. Shery Bennett, I am grateful for your keen eye and thoughtful feedback. I could not have asked for better mentors on this journey.

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To all the teachers who participated in this study, I am deeply grateful for your time. You are the true superheroes! Continue to work each day to support students in their pursuit of excellence knowing you are not alone. We are on this journey together.

## Abstract

Literacy Development Practices for English Learners With Interrupted Formal Education. Francisco Javier Oaxaca, 2021: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: literacy, English language learners, SLIFE, secondary, teacher knowledge

English language learners (ELLs) are a diverse student group that continues to grow within schools all throughout the United States and those students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) continue to lag behind their peers in academic achievement, particularly in literacy. Although there have been several studies to explore this complex phenomenon, a gap in the research continues to exist on specific conditions needed for academic success for SLIFE such as beginning/basic literacy instruction in secondary educational contexts. The purpose of this research study was to determine the extent to which teachers' perception and knowledge of basic literacy skills impacts the teaching of these skills for secondary SLIFE students.

The researcher surveyed 32 secondary ESOL teachers in a large urban District in South Florida who taught a variety of courses such as English Language Development (ELD) for SLIFE students. The survey contained items to determine teacher perception in regards to basic literacy skill instruction for secondary SLIFE, demographic data, and a section to determine the knowledge and skills of secondary ESOL teachers in regards to basic literacy skill concepts. Basic literacy skill data from high school ESOL students was analyzed and compared to the knowledge, skill level and perceptions of teachers.

Teacher self-perception of their knowledge of phonemic and phonics skills correlated to their knowledge of these literacy concepts. However, no correlation was found between teachers' self-perception of their ability to teach literacy skills and their knowledge of overall basic literacy skill constructs. Of note, teachers' self-perception of their vocabulary knowledge did not correlate to their ability to perform morphological skill related tasks. The basic literacy skill concept of phonological awareness (such as syllable counting) was the strongest for secondary teachers, with the area of morphology being the weakest, indicating a strong lack of knowledge of morphological principles. Overall, teachers' implicit knowledge and ability was stronger than their ability to apply explicit knowledge, such as, the phonics rules which govern language.

Implications of these findings and recommendations for educators at the secondary level serving SLIFE are presented. Specific resources for developing literacy for secondary ELLs are provided, as well as, recommendations for future research.

## Table of Contents

Tables



Figures

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Statement of the Problem

English language learners (ELLs) are a diverse student group that continues to grow within schools all throughout the United States (Francis et al., 2006; Hoover et al., 2016; Hussar et al., 2020; NASEM, 2017). A subgroup within this larger population are those students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE or SLIFEs). This subgroup also continues to grow particularly in secondary schools (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a; Potochnick, 2018; Salva & Matis, 2017; Samway et al., 2020).

### *The Research Problem*

Potochnick (2018) found that of those students with interrupted schooling that come to the United States almost two-thirds arrive after the age of twelve and attend secondary schools. Additionally, these students have been found to be behind their peers academically by almost two grade levels (Potochnick, 2018). ELLs who are SLIFE continue to not show the same level of academic proficiency and achievement as their peers within secondary educational settings (Huang et al., 2016; NASEM, 2017; Spees et al., 2016). Although there have been several studies to explore this complex phenomenon (e.g. Burns et al., 2017; Ingram, 2017; Johnson, 2013; Marrero Colón, 2018), a gap in the research continues to exist on specific conditions needed for academic success for SLIFE, such as, beginning/basic literacy instruction in secondary educational contexts.

The problem is that students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) are not performing well in reading achievement and are at risk for dropping out of high school due to a complex set of challenges. Therefore this research study aims to explore the extent to which teachers' perception and knowledge of basic literacy skills affects the

teaching of these skills for secondary SLIFE students to understand what may be needed in order to teach SLIFE for improved academic outcomes.

***Background and Justification***

Reflecting the trend that ELLs increased in public schools from 2000-2017 across the United States (Hussar et al., 2020), ELLs in Florida increased from 250,430 in School Year (SY) 2013-2014 to 268,189 in SY 2015-2016 (CGCS, 2019); and in SY 2019-2020 ELLs in Florida increased to 288,754 representing 10.1% of the student population (FLDOE, 2020). In the District where this study was conducted, ELLs represented 11.83% of the overall student population in SY 2015-2016 an increase of 21.5% from SY 2007-2008 (CGCS, 2019). Four years later (SY 2019-2020), the ELLs in this South Florida District have increased to 14.1% of the student population or 27,683 ELL students overall (FLDOE, 2020).

Due to the continued increase of ELLs, and in particular those who are SLIFE, research into effective practices for supporting secondary ELLs' literary and language development must be a focus in the educational field. Though ELLs have potential for linguistic and academic success, this group of students continues to be challenged by the academic requirements faced particularly in secondary schools (NASEM, 2017). In 2015, ELLs in grade 12 underperformed their non-ELL peers on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading by receiving forty-nine points lower on the average reading score between the two groups; and this similar trend was evident for ELLs in grade 8 who scored forty-five points lower on the 2019 NAEP reading than non-ELLs on the average reading score (Hussar et al., 2020). In an analysis of the U.S. Department of Education's Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS:2002) of tenth graders'

performance, Potochnick (2018) found that students with interrupted education were more likely to drop out of school, and their academic achievement was lower than their grade-level peers. Similarly, Umansky et al. (2018) found that recently arrived immigrant students had an increased probability of up to 70% of not graduating from high school. Further, meeting the reading and literacy demands at the secondary level can be an extreme challenge for ELLs (Potochnick, 2018).

According to Florida's 2018-2019 State Report Card (FLDOE, 2019), there was a significant gap in the achievement level of ELLs in relation to the overall student population. In SY 2018-2019, 57% of students scored proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) with only 39% of ELLs scoring proficient (FLDOE, 2019). In mathematics, the same gap existed with 60% of all students scoring proficient, and only 48% of ELLs scoring proficient; and in social studies and science, the gap was greater than 20% difference in performance (FLDOE, 2019).

For SY 2018-2019, the school district in this study showed similar outcomes for ELLs. In mathematics, 63% of other students scored at proficient with only 48% proficiency for ELLs (FLDOE, 2019). However, in reading, social studies, and science, the gap was more than 22% in each subject respectively, with science showing the largest disparity between groups of 26%, with only 33% of ELLs proficient according to the state-wide assessments results (FLDOE, 2019). Further, in ninth grade ELA, the ELL student group scored at only 5.2% proficiency in SY 2014-2015, and the score had only increased slightly to 7.9% in 2019; and tenth grade ELLs showed similar challenges with 6.2% proficiency in ELA in 2015 decreasing to 5.4% proficiency in 2019 (FLDOE, 2019). With these academic outcomes for ELLs in secondary schools, it is critical to

determine best practices in particular for literacy instruction.

***Deficiencies in the Evidence***

According to the Council of Great City Schools' report (2017), English language development programs should have a balance of instruction focused on general English language development as well as academic language development that is specific to content. This claim is supported by the findings of both August and Shanahan (2006) and NASEM (2017). Although there are resources with strategies to support secondary reading comprehension for ELLs such as Calderón and Slakk (2018) and secondary newcomers such as Custodio (2011), Short and Boyson (2011) or Zacarian and Haynes (2012), most resources currently are focused on remediation and intervention for general English-speaking struggling readers (Denton et al., 2007) with others that include more general strategies for any ELL in acquiring language (Escalante, 2018; Francis et al., 2006; Ivey & Baker, 2004; Li, 2012, McBee & Orzulak, 2017) or academic vocabulary (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014; Zacarian, 2013). There are some resources for supporting SLIFE students (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a; DeCapua et al., 2020; NYSED, 2019; Salva & Matis, 2017) and even a recently published guide for educators on how to support Latino SLIFE specifically (Digby, n.d.).

However, there is little research on effective literacy instructional practices for secondary ELLs who are SLIFE (Menken, 2013; NASEM, 2017); and researchers, who have been published, indicate more research is needed on how beginning/basic literacy instruction can impact secondary SLIFE students in a positive way (August & Shanahan, 2006; Marrero Colón, 2018; Schmidt de Carranza, 2017). Schmidt de Carranza (2017) indicated that because ELL SLIFE represent various educational backgrounds and

experiences explicit instruction in foundational literacy may be needed. In addition, research from Marrero Colón (2018) and Ingram (2017) found that secondary teachers need more professional development in order to meet the beginning/basic literacy needs of SLIFEs. Teachers of secondary SLIFE are accountable to not only ensure these students acquire literacy skills but also meet the rigorous standards of high school curriculum as well (Ingram, 2017).

Research exists on how online learning impacts literacy instruction for secondary ELLs (Ziemke, 2014) and on the impact of utilizing translanguaging practices for SLIFEs (Menken, 2013). Santiago (2014) and Francis et al. (2006) indicated that for secondary ELLs targeted and explicit phonemic awareness and phonics instruction (or word study) is needed for effective language and literacy development. Other researchers indicated that although beginning literacy instruction (phonemic awareness and phonics instruction) can be effective, it must be aligned to authentic literature that is developmentally and academically appropriate (Calderón & Slakk, 2018; NASEM, 2017). However, even with these studies, there continues to be a deficiency in the research specifically in what knowledge is needed for secondary teachers in order to implement effective practices for integrating beginning/basic literacy instruction with academic language development for secondary SLIFE students to improve academic outcomes (August & Shanahan, 2006).

***Audience***

The audiences that will most benefit from this research are school administrators as they make hiring and professional development decisions for their schools. Additionally, this research will be of interest to district and state leaders charged with

providing professional development and resources for schools for supporting and educating SLIFE at the secondary level. Lastly, this research should be of interest to curriculum development agencies and companies who create materials to supplement the instructional practices within secondary classrooms as well as professional development for secondary educational practitioners.

**Setting of the Study**

This non-experimental study was conducted in a large urban school district in South Florida. A survey was distributed to all secondary language arts, reading, and ESOL teachers who teach ELLs and SLIFE throughout the district. There are approximately 150-200 teachers who had the opportunity to complete the survey. The survey was distributed via *Survey Monkey* in the fall and was open for three weeks for participants to respond.

**Researcher's Role**

In the large urban school district where this research study took place, the researcher holds a district office position that supports the Title III and ESOL language programs. However, because the researcher does not have direct supervisory obligations for the teachers in the study, the potential negative impacts or biases from this relationship were minimal.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the extent to which teachers' perception and knowledge of basic literacy skills affects the teaching of these skills for secondary SLIFE in high school settings in South Florida. English language learners (ELLs) are a diverse student group that continues to grow within schools all

throughout the United States (Frances et al., 2006; Husser et al., 2020; NASEM, 2017; Sugarman, 2017) and those who are SLIFE continue to lag behind their peers in academic achievement, particularly in literacy (Huang et al., 2016; NASEM, 2017; Potochnick, 2018; Spees et al., 2016). Although there have been several studies to explore this complex phenomenon (e.g. Burns et al., 2017; Ingram, 2017; Johnson, 2013; Marrero Colón, 2018), a gap in the research continues to exist on specific conditions needed for academic success for SLIFE such as beginning/basic literacy instruction in secondary educational contexts.

**Definition of Terms**

*Basic/beginning literacy* is instruction focused on developing the foundations of literacy development such as phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and decoding skills, and fluency (DeCapua et al., 2020; NPR, 2000).

*English language learner (ELL)* describes a student who is learning or acquiring English as a new language and does not speak English as their native or home language (McBee Orzulak, 2017; Whelan Ariza et al., 2010). The Federal Government more narrowly defines an ELL as a student age 3-21 who will enroll or is enrolled in an elementary or secondary school, is born in a country other than the United States or whose native language is a language other than English, and whose difficulties with the English language may prevent them from meeting success in school or in society (CGCS, 2019). Additionally, this individual has been and may be referred to in the literature as an English learner (EL) or as Limited English Proficient (LEP) (CGSC, 2019). For the purposes of this study, the term will be English language learner (ELL).

*English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)* is a term utilized to describe the

teaching or programs associated with instruction of English to those individuals whose primary or native language is not English (Whelan Ariza et al., 2010).

*Grapheme* is a unit of written language or letters (NPR, 2000).

*L1 (first language) and L2 (second language*) are terms used to refer to a person's language. L1 is generally referred to as a person's native or first language that they learned when growing up. The L2 refers to a language that is learned second or after a person's native language. L2 generally refers to the additional language being learned even if it is a third or fourth language (Cummins, 1981; Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Gass & Selinker, 2001; McBee Orzulak, 2017).

*Morpheme* is the smallest unit that conveys meaning (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Freeman & Freeman, 2004). Morphemes are part of morphology which is the study of words (or linguistic units of meaning) and word formation (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Whelan Ariza et al., 2010).

*Newcomer or Recently Arrived Immigrant* are terms that describe a student who is categorized as an ELL, has been in the United States for less than two years, and is at the beginning stages of English language development (Custodio, 2011; Short & Boyson, 2012)

*Phoneme* is the smallest linguistic units or sounds of oral language (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; ILA, 2019; NPR, 2000).

*Phonemic or Phoneme-level awareness* is the ability of a speaker to distinguish and manipulate phonemes in spoken language; and is the most complex or advanced subset of phonological awareness as it is the awareness that each spoken word is comprised of a sequence of phonemes (August & Shanahan, 2006; Freeman & Freeman,

2004; ILA, 2019; NPR, 2000).

*Phonology or Phonological awareness (PA) is* the overarching understanding of and ability to differentiate larger linguistic units of speech into their smaller structures of words, syllables, and even subsyllabic units such as onset-rime awareness (August & Shanahan, 2006; Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Gunther et al., n.d.; ILA, 2019)

*Phonics* is the knowledge of the alphabetic principle that there is a relationship between letters and sounds and the ability to apply that knowledge when decoding or reading words that are unfamiliar (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Gunther et al., n.d.; NRP, 2000).

*Second language acquisition (SLA)* is a term used to describe the study of and process of acquiring an additional language in addition to the native or first language (Krashen, 1982; Whelan Ariza et al., 2010).

*Student(s) with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)* is a term used to describe a student (or several students) who has had very little formal education in their native country or has had some education, but it has not been continuous and has low literacy skills in their native language (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a). SLIFE may also be referred to as SIFE, meaning student(s) with interrupted formal education. Generally, SLIFE and SIFE are utilized interchangeably (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2010b, 2015; NYSED, 2019; NYSED, n.d.; WCER, 2015).

*Translanguaging* is a term used to describe the phenomenon where multilingual speakers utilize all their languages as an integrated communication system (NASEM, 2017, p. 323).

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## Introduction

English language learners who are SLIFE face many challenges when they arrive in U.S. schools (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Marrero Colón, 2018); however, these challenges are most impactful for secondary students not only when they arrive but into their futures as well (Sugarman, 2017). Students in this group continue to lag behind their peers in academic achievement, particularly in literacy (Huang et al., 2016; NASEM, 2017; Potochnick, 2018; Spees et al., 2016). In reviewing current literature, a gap in the research continues to exist on specific methods for ensuring basic literacy instruction occurs and promotes overall academic achievement for SLIFE in secondary educational contexts (August & Shanahan, 2006; NASEM, 2017).

## Theoretical Framework

Four separate but related theories underpin this research study: Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), Jim Cummin's Theory of Second Language Acquisition (1981), Stephen Krashen's Monitor Model (1982), and the culturally responsive teaching theory posited by Geneva Gay (2000; 2010). Sociocultural theory indicates that learning language is fundamentally a social process and that there is a social and cultural interdependence as cognitive development is occurring (Hoover et al., 2016; Newman, 2018; Soto Huerta & Pérez, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Further, interactions of children with their environment and culture provide the ability for new knowledge and skills to be developed (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning occurs on a social level and then is internalized within the child (Hoover et al., 2016). Part of sociocultural theory is Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, which is described as two

levels: the area where a child (or student) is actually developing and the area (or zone) where he or she has the potential for development (Vygotsky, 1986; Whelan Ariza et al., 2010). For students to optimize their learning or potential, they must be within their own Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Through social interaction, utilizing relative and concrete topics from the environment around the learner in simplified language (or language common to the student), a learner can move from their level of actualization to their level of potential development where maximum learning occurs (Whelan Ariza et al., 2010).

Cummins posited that an ELL has underlying proficiency of their L1 or native language which directly supports the acquisition of another language (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020). Cummins (1981) provided that there is a distinction between social language and academic language in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Social language is the language of conversation and casual social interactions that is fully embedded into context (Whelan Ariza et al., 2010) and academic language refers to the language utilized in academic content areas and may not be fully contextualized. Cummins (1981) referred to social language as basic interpersonal communicative skills or BICS and the more decontextualized academic language as cognitive academic language proficiency or CALP. ELLs can utilize their L1 to develop BICS and to strengthen CALP as they continue to acquire English language skills (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020). Further, Cummins described the need for language to be embedded contextually as much as possible in order for SLA to effectively occur (1981).

Krashen's Monitor Model (1982) is focused on second language acquisition and consists of five main hypotheses: the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Monitor

Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. The idea that *learning* a language is the conscious process, and the *acquisition* of the language occurs subconsciously through a variety of means is central to the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982). Gass and Selinker (2001) described acquisition as "picking up" a language (p. 198). In order for literacy development to occur for English language learners (ELLs), there must be both explicit teaching which leads to learning and time for acquisition to occur (Krashen, 1982). In the Monitor Hypothesis, what is acquired is monitored as learned output when three conditions have been met: the learner knows the rules; can focus on the form of the rules; and has time to apply the learned rules (Gass & Selinker, 2001; Hoover et al., 2016; Krashen, 1982). Central to the Natural Order Hypothesis is the understanding that there is an order that is common or predictable to acquiring grammatical elements or rules of language (Gass & Selinker, 2001). Because of this order, language structures (or rules) are acquired in a sequence. For example, the morpheme *–ing* indicating progressive (as in: He is eat*ing* salad.) and the morpheme *–s* indicating plural (as in: three horses) is acquired well before the morpheme *–s* indicating possessive (as in: The girl*'s* dog.) (Krashen, 1982). These predicable language patterns continue to be seen in current research (Briceño & Klein, 2016) even though deeper understanding of a learners L1 and its impact on L2 acquisition does impact the order of acquisition. How acquisition of the language moves from one point to another in a predictable sequence through receiving comprehensible input is the Input Hypothesis (Gass & Selinker, 2001; Hoover et al., 2016; Krashen, 1985; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Comprehensible input is language that is understood by the learner; and in order for language to be acquired, language input

should be just beyond where learner's current level (Gass & Selinker, 2001; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Krashen referred to this as i+1 (input plus one) and further posited that acquisition would not take place if input was i+0 (always at current level) or even i+15 (input way beyond comprehensible input) (Freeman & Freeman, 2004). Krashen further indicated various nonlinguistic factors or variables may impede a learner from receiving comprehensible input, which is the basis of the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Gass & Selinker, 2001; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). For example, if an ELL student is always in an i+15 environment or one that is highly stressful, the Affective Filter is raised and language acquisition will not occur. However, if an ELL feels comfortable and is engaged in lessons at the i+1 level consistently, the filter will be lowered and language acquisition can occur (Freeman & Freeman, 2004).

Gay (2000; 2010) indicated that culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is ensuring learning opportunities are made more relevant, and therefore more effective, for students by leveraging ethnically diverse students' cultural knowledge, previous experiences in life, as well as their points of view or references infused into instructional practices. In approaching instructional practices in this way, teachers focus on students' assets and strengths they bring to the educational setting as well as deepening their own cultural competence (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Piazza et al., 2015); and in doing so highlight the interconnectedness of all humans while empowering and validating students and their cultures (Gay, 2018). Valuing the knowledge and cultural experiences of students within educational contexts provides unique opportunities for student voice and development of self-identity (Chenowith, 2014; Molyneux & Hiorth, 2019; Stewart et al., 2018). Additionally, CRT actively, thoughtfully, and intentionally engages students in critical

dialogue which deepens understanding of ethnically diverse students' cultures and connects their lived experiences to the learning within the classroom to develop cultural integrity as well as academic success (Gay, 2018). Central to CRT is the ideology that there must be a social-emotional connection between teachers and students (Hammond, 2015). Hammond (2015) further described the four areas of CRT in practice as awareness (of sociopolitical contexts and personal cultural lenses), being in learning partnerships (focused on building trusting relationships with students), developing information processing (in order for students to engage in complex thinking), and through community building (to ensure learning environments are safe for all). Additionally, Salva and Matis (2017) posited that CRT is essential for creating learning environments and educational opportunities that are specifically appropriate for SLIFE.

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) posited the need for a student to essentially feel safe (or stress-free) in his/her environment in order for language learning to occur which directly connects to CRT and creating effective conditions for learning (Gay, 2010, 2018; Hammond, 2015). Similarly, linked to sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), CRT in action has educators create instructional practices specific to the sociocultural and linguistic needs of the students before them (Gay, 2010). Learners, specifically ELLs, are poised to learn more complex concepts (and acquire language) when they are engaged in social contexts that are culturally responsive and meaningful to them (Gay, 2010; Krashen, 1982; Vygotsky, 1986). Together, these theoretical frameworks form the basis for the research study focused on understanding how teachers' perceptions and knowledge of basic literacy skill instruction and development impacts students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE).

**Legal Cases and Policies for Education of ELLs**

The education of English language learners has a rich history in the political and philosophical landscape of the United States and in public K-12 schools. In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, and Title VI of this Act specifically prohibited any program receiving federal funds from discriminating against individuals based on race, color, or national origin including public school districts (Stader, 2013). Four years later, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed, and Title VII (also known as the Bilingual Education Act) specifically focused on the educational rights and needs of ELLs (NASEM, 2017). For the first time, federal grants were available to local education agencies (or school districts) to implement and conduct research on bilingual educational programs for ELLs (NASEM, 2017).

In the landmark case *Lau v. Nichols* of 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the San Francisco Unified School District had violated the rights of Chinese students who did not speak English by failing to provide equal educational opportunities thus violating both Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Fourteenth Amendment (Stader, 2013; NASEM, 2017). *Lau v. Nichols* clearly articulated that a student may not be denied education due to limited English proficiency (Whelan Ariza et al., 2010). Also in 1974, Congress passed the Equal Educational Opportunities Act which prohibited any state from denying equal educational opportunities as a result of an educational entities' failure to ensure language barriers were overcome that may prevent equal participation in programs (NASEM, 2017). Combined, these two decisions laid significant groundwork requiring public schools to address and provide meaningful participation for ELLs (Whelan Ariza et al., 2010).

Soon after, two other significant rulings came regarding ELLs. In *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981), the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals specifically defined what "appropriate action" under the Equal Educational Opportunities Act would be stating that programs for ELLs: 1) must be based on sound educational theory that is accepted by experts in the field; 2) provide appropriate resources to be implemented adequately; and 3) must be monitored for effectiveness (NASEM, 2017; Stader, 2013). In Plyer v. Doe (1982), the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits states from withholding a free public education to any child regardless of their citizenship status of the student or parents (Stader, 2013). Further, ELL students are entitled to all services provided by public schools within a school district boundary (Stader, 2013).

Specific to the State of Florida, in 1990, the Florida Consent Decree was signed into law by the United States Court of the Southern District of Florida as a result of *League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) et al. v. State Board of Education* (Whelan Ariza et al., 2010). Although the Consent Decree (FLDOE, n.d.) does not afford ELLs any additional rights than those already provided by previous court cases, it does provide a framework for compliance of all federal and state laws applicable to ELLs and programming for ELLs ensuring that ELLs have access to appropriate educational programs as well as comprehensible instruction (Whelan Ariza et al., 2010). Additionally, the Consent Decree (FLDOE, n.d.) outlines specific requirements and professional development for educators to complete in order to obtain their ESOL Endorsement as well as other in-service requirements for those who provide instruction and services for ELLs. In order for an educator to obtain their ESOL Endorsement, they must demonstrate knowledge and understanding in the areas of methods of teaching,

curriculum and materials design, cross-cultural communication, language and linguistics, and assessment each specific to English language development for ELLs (FLDOE, n.d.).

Under the reauthorization of ESEA, called Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, in the Bilingual Education Act, Title VII, the federal definition of a student who is limited English proficient was revised providing a common definition for public school K-12 educational entities (Whelan Ariza et al., 2010). In 2001, Congress passed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) which carried with it accountability measures to ensure all students' were meeting proficiency including ELLs (NASEM, 2017). Within NCLB, an annual requirement for testing of reading and math skills was included and a heightened focus on closing the achievement gap between subgroups of students ensuring that all students, including ELLs, were making Adequate Yearly Progress was a cornerstone of this legislation (Whelan Ariza et al., 2010). Further, NCLB provided a more detailed definition of limited English proficient students and Title I of NCLB shifted the responsibility of ELL progress to local schools, districts, and states with corrective measures in place for failure to reduce achievement gaps (NASEM, 2017). Additionally, English language proficiency standards became a part of the accountability system under Title III and funds related to Title III shifted to an entitlement grant based on the number of ELLs within a state or school district (NASEM, 2017).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was amended in 2015 with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replacing NCLB (Klein, 2016). ESSA requires that each state have an accountability system in place tracking several factors including English language proficiency for ELs (Klein, 2016; Sugarman, 2020). Further, progress

of ELLs is highlighted within ESSA and a focus on ensuring these students make significant progress each year is a focal point of the new legislation (Klein, 2016; USDOE, 2018). ESAA also changed limited English proficient to English learner (or EL) but kept all other qualifiers from NCLB (USDOE, 2018). In addition to a wider understanding that English language learner success is the responsibility of all educators at the local, state, and federal levels, Title III under ESSA also recognizes the various types of ELLs within the larger group and most notably those who are SLIFE (USDOE, 2018). There is not currently a formal definition of SLIFE at the Federal level (Sugarman, 2020), though some states such as Minnesota (MNDOE, 2016), Massachusetts (MDESE, 2019), New York (NYSED, 2019), and Oregon (ORDOE, 2020) do have such a definition. In Florida, the Department of Education considers recently arrived ELLs with interrupted education as "newcomer/new beginnings" (DeCapua, 2020). Case law and federal policy align to support programmatic efforts to ensure equitable educational opportunities and instructional practices are realized by those ELLs within the public school system and that high academic proficiency is obtained appropriately by ELLs at each level within the educational system.

**Second Language Acquisition**

Second language acquisition (SLA) is the study of how second (or additional) languages are learned drawing upon other scientific fields to create theories and hypotheses on the way in which languages are structured and learned (Gass & Selinker, 2001). Specifically, SLA investigates how proficiency in an additional language from the native language is obtained (O'Grady et al., 2005). Although the term SLA indicates a second language, it is commonly used to describe the phenomenon of learning any

additional language after someone's native language (NL), mother tongue, or the first language a child learns which is commonly referred to as a primary language or L1 (Gass & Selinker, 2001). In SLA, the target language or the language being learned is commonly referred to as the L2 meaning "second language" but can also mean any language learned after the L1 (Gass & Selinker, 2001).

Theories and understandings of SLA have been grounded in first language acquisition. Noam Chomsky indicated that there is an innate ability for each person to learn language and that all languages have universal properties (Chomsky, 1975, 1986; Gass & Selinker, 2001; Whelan Arzia et al., 2010). Humans have within their brain a *language acquisition device* (LAD) that is specialized for language (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Whelan Ariza et al., 2010). These universal properties found within the LAD are known as *Universal Grammar* (UG) and form one's representation of language within their mind (Gass & Selinker, 2001). Further, Chomsky described languages has having properties that could be utilized to generate any utterance or sentence as the theory of *generative grammar* (Chomsky, 1975; Freeman & Freeman, 2004). Coupled with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of language development (Vygotsky, 1978), Chomsky's first language acquisition theories (Chomsky, 1975, 1986, 1997) have been applied to the field of SLA.

Although understanding how language is learned and acquired is critical for any ELL or SLIFE student, SLA research addresses the need for *communicative competence* to ensure someone is actually proficient in an L2 (O'Grady et al., 2005). Not only must a learner be able to utilize correct grammatical structures, they also must also be able to communicate in a variety of ways within a variety of contexts understanding social and

cultural underpinnings (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Gay, 2010; O'Grady et al., 2005). Krashen's Monitor Model (1982) provided hypothesizes to explain how this can and does occur within SLA contexts. Additionally, Cummins (1981) provided that the distinction between social language and academic language is critical in SLA. Language used in conversations between individuals or groups that is fully embedded into context (Whelan Ariza et al., 2010) or basic interpersonal skills (BICS) is acquired in a relatively short amount of time (Cummins, 1981). Academic language, also known as cognitive academic language proficiency or CALP, refers to the language utilized in academic content areas that may not be fully contextualized taking about five to seven years to fully be developed (Cummins, 1981). Further, Cummins described the need for language to be embedded contextually as much as possible in order for language acquisition to effectively occur and that when able instruction should leverage a students' native language to develop the L2 (1981).

It is important to note that the emergence of speech for ELLs goes through distinct oral language development stages: preproduction, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency, and (advanced) fluency (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; McBee Orzulak, 2017). The preproduction (or silent) phase is characterized by a student who may be silent and may repeat after someone, in the early production (or early speech emergence) stage students are developing vocabulary and may utter one to two word sentences, and then students who have moved into the speech emergence stage they are producing more oral language through interactions and simple phrases (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; McBee Orzulak, 2017; Whelan Ariza et al., 2010). The later stages of oral language development have been described as intermediate fluency, where in a learner is

utilizing more complex discourse and grammatical structures in oral and written production, and then fluency or advanced fluency which is a stage where the student is producing lots of oral language on their own and has acquired much academic language as well at this point (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; McBee Orzulak, 2017). These final stages of oral language development for BICS can take anywhere from 3-5 years to reach, with CALP taking up words of 7-10 years (Cummins, 1981; Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

Schumann (1978) found that ELL students should be socially integrated in order for SLA to occur. This finding aligns to language development theories posited by Krashen (1982), Vygotsky (1978), and Cummins (1981). When social or psychological factors create social distance between learners, opportunities for comprehensible input are severely limited (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Krashen, 1982). Further, Cummins et al. (2015) found that effective SLA literacy practices which honored ELL student's identity were more likely to increase language and literacy development. This finding supports the need for SLA to not only be socially integrated but also culturally relevant and identity-affirming (Cummins et al., 2015; Gay 2010, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Contextualizing language through communicative practices not only allows ELLs to learn the various grammatical and phonological aspects to the English language but supports acquisition of language in meaningful ways (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Hoover et al., 2016; O'Grady et al., 2005; Whelan Ariza et al., 2010).

**Students With Limited or Interrupted Formal Education**

From 2000 to 2015, the percentage of ELLs in public schools in the United States rose from 1.4% to 9.5% representing 4.8 million students (McFarland et al., 2018). Of that, close to two million are children who are immigrants or foreign-born ages 5 to 17

(Umansky et al., 2018). With this increase in ELLs in K-12 public school systems, more focus has come on a specific subpopulation within this group who qualify for ELL services and also have limited or interrupted formal education in their home countries (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2010b; Umansky et al., 2018). ELLs in this group represent a heterogeneity that is complex encompassing a variety of factors (NYSED, 2019). Immigrant students or newcomers who have recently arrived to the public school system may have had their education interrupted due to factors such as war, civil unrest, or natural disasters (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a; Short & Boyson, 2012) and may be considered a refugee or asylee (Salva & Matis, 2017). Students with significant gaps in their educational paths or those who migrate often (between countries or states) and have intermittent educational opportunities are considered students with interrupted formal education or SIFE (Custodio & O'Laoughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a; WCER, 2015). Other immigrant students may have been attending school in their home country but due to a variety of factors (i.e. poverty, limited options, geography, social-cultural expectations) may have had limited educational opportunities (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a; DeCapua et al., 2020; WCER, 2015). Grouping all of these students into one student subpopulation, students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) represent a variety of previous educational contexts and background experiences (Custodio & O'Laoughlin, 2017; NYSED, n.d.; Umansky et al., 2018).

SLIFE are as diverse a student group as the larger ELL group with students coming to the United States from all over the world and who must not only learn to speak a new language but also learn to read and write in this new language in order to be

successful in the secondary school context (Marrero Colón, 2018). Although SLIFE do come to the new educational setting with a wealth of knowledge, they may also have low literacy in their home or native language, have limited English proficiency, have gaps in their academic content knowledge, and sometimes have psychological and/or social emotional needs (Custodio & O'Laoughin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2010b; Hoover et al., 2016; Ingram, 2017; Umansky et al., 2018). Additionally, SLIFE must acclimate to a new culture (both community and school) as well as the more individualistic, academic orientation of the Western-style schooling model found in the United States (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011b; Zacarian & Haynes, 2012). These challenges can be significant for those at the secondary level and in particular those who arrive in high school because of the short time frame of the high school experience (DeCapua et al., 2020).

In a study of 177 students in the Midwest who were mainly refugees from Thai Karen backgrounds, Schmidt de Carranza (2017) found that there was little difference in students' perceptions of learning English between SLIFE from refugee and non-refugee backgrounds. However, students correlated academic success to improved language skills (Schmidt de Carranza, 2017); and similar to findings by DeCapua and Marshall (2010b) and Salva and Matis (2017), the students had an overall positive feeling of appreciation for teachers who helped create a welcoming environment. Those SLIFE from refugee backgrounds felt "a pressure to achieve academically," and those from non-refugee backgrounds felt a "sense of urgency with respect to improving their English language skills" (Schmidt de Carranza, 2017, p. 83). Both groups of ELL students felt the need to accelerate learning quickly.

**Literacy Development**

Learning to read is not natural, and, as such, written language is acquired rather differently than spoken language (Trieman, 2018). Learners go through various stages of reading development generally from learning how to read, to reading to learn about other topics (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020). These stages move from pre-reading (understanding the connection between letters and sounds) all the way to what Chall (1983) called the construction/reconstruction stage where learners are selectively reading and building knowledge for themselves (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020). Research by the National Reading Panel (2000) posited five components of reading indicating that in order for students to be able to both learn how to read and then read on their own, these elements must be present: phonological awareness, alphabetic principle (phonics), fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Since this time, researchers and practitioners have been debating whether phonological awareness and phonics instruction should be an explicit part of a reading program or if students can learn to read by exposure to reading through discovery and being read to with a focus on fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (Castles et al., 2018; Garan, 2001; ILA, 2019; Krashen, 2019; Treiman, 2018).

However, previously in 1986, Gough and Tunmer posited that while the acquisition of reading ability is a complex process, reading comprehension requires the ability to both decode (recognize words in print) and the ability for language comprehension (understand spoken language) (Hoover & Tunmer, 2018). This "simple view of reading or SVR" states that reading and further, reading comprehension, are actually the "product" of both decoding and language comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). As an equation, $R = D \times C$ indicates that not only are both needed they are

interrelated (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Tunmer, 2018). As each area (decoding and language comprehension) increases in strength, reading comprehension also increases; however, if one area is not present (e.g. $D = 0$), then overall reading is not present in that if $D = 0$, then $0 \times C = 0 = R$ (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). In a review of three current research studies, Hoover and Tunmer (2018) found that the SVR continues to hold strong evidence of application and its implication for instruction of reading more broadly supports the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000) and other research (Castles et al., 2018).

Building on Gough and Tunmer's (1986) simple view of reading, Scarborough (2001) explained the complex process of becoming a skilled reader by utilizing the image of the strands of a rope called The Reading Rope (see Appendix A). The ideology is that the upper language-comprehension strands of background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge work together and strengthen each other (Scarborough, 2001). At the same time, the lower word-recognition strands (phonological awareness, decoding, alphabetic principle, and sight recognition) work in connection with each other and become more fluent and automatic with practice (Scarborough, 2001). Word-recognition here is equivalent to *D* for "decoding" and language-comprehensions equivalent to *C* for "comprehension" as seen in the simple view of reading (Hoover & Tunmer, 2018). Both the upper and lower strands overtime and with increasing automaticity strengthen each other yielding skilled reading ability (Scarborough, 2001).

Phonology or phonological awareness (PA) is the overarching understanding of and ability to differentiate larger linguistic units of speech into their smaller structures of

words, syllables, and even subsyllabic units such as onset-rime awareness (August & Shanahan, 2006; Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Gunther et al., n.d.; ILA, 2019). Put differently, PA is one's ability to interpret letters as sounds (DeCapua et al., 2020) and these skills move from simplest of recognition of words within speech or a sentence, to being able to count syllables within words (i.e. segmentation, blending, adding, substitution), to onset-rime which involves manipulation of sounds, to create rhyming words, to finally phonemic awareness skills (Lovelace-Gonzalez, 2020; Gunther et al., n.d.). The ability of a speaker to distinguish and manipulate phonemes (or the smallest linguistic units or sounds) in spoken language is called phonemic awareness or phoneme-level awareness (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; ILA, 2019). This, phonemic awareness, is the most complex or advanced subset of phonological awareness skills and requires a learner to be aware that each spoken word is comprised of a sequence of phonemes (August & Shanahan, 2006; Freeman & Freeman, 2004; ILA, 2019; NPR, 2000). In English, there are approximately 44 phonemes represented by 26 letters (or graphemes) which can make phonemic awareness challenging for learners (ILA, 2019; NPR, 2000). Words such as *I* have one phoneme and others have multiple phonemes as in the case of *dog* with three phonemes. Some graphemes are represented by one letter such as *B*, *G*, and *R* while others have two letters such as *CH* and *SH*, but in each of these cases these graphemes represent one phoneme. An additional challenge that makes phonological and phonemic awareness critical for emergent readers is that speech is not broken down or paused indicating where phonemes begin or end as in written text (ILA, 2019; NPR, 2000).

Related to phonemic awareness is phonics but it is not the same. Phonics and

phonics instruction is the knowledge of the alphabetic principle (Nieser & Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020). Further, it is the understanding that there is a relationship between letters (graphemes) and sounds (phonemes) and the ability to apply that knowledge when decoding or reading words that are unfamiliar (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Gunther et al., n.d.; NRP, 2000). Increased knowledge and understanding of the alphabetic principle in English enables readers to be able to read words in isolation as well as within various contexts and texts (NPR, 2000). Phonics instruction teaches concepts such as the fact that the grapheme (or letter) *b* represents the sound /b/ and it is the first letter in *boy*, *big*, and *bag*; similarly, concepts such as the fact that the letters *c* and *k* can represent the same phoneme /k/ as in *cake* or the phoneme /s/ as in *nice* involve phonics (DeCapua et al., 2020; Gunther et al., n.d.). Part of phonics instruction is also for learners to understand that morphemes (comprised of graphemes and phonemes) are the smallest units which contain meaning and create what is commonly understood to be 'words' (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Whelan Ariza et al., 2010). For example, the word *auctioneers* is considered a morpheme because it holds meaning; and in addition, within the word there are three morphemes that also hold meaning: *auction*, *-eer*, and *–s*. Morphemes can be free (or independent) such as the morphemes *auction*, *boy*, *happy*, *them* or they are bound (or must be attached to another morpheme) such as the morphemes *–eer*, *-s*, *–ed*, *pre-*, or *–ing* (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Whelan Ariza et al., 2010). Bound morphemes are also called affixes and can be categorized as prefixes, suffixes, or infixes (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Whelan Ariza et al., 2010). It is important to note that there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between phonemes, graphemes, and morphemes and that the correspondence associated with these

units is arbitrary (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Freeman & Freeman, 2004). In the word '*bikes'*, there are four phonemes (/b/, /I/, /k/, and /s/), two morphemes (*bike* and *–s*), and five graphemes (*b*, *i*, *k*, *e*, *s*).

Building up in oral or spoken language there are sounds (or phonemes) which are connected to create morphemes then words, which are spoken together into phrases. Phrases are strung together to create sentences which ultimately creates conversation or discourse (Fillmore & Snow, 2000). This oral discourse can and is also represented in a graphic way through graphemes and written text (Freeman & Freeman, 2004). This basic understanding and application of phonology, phonics, and morphology is critical to fluency, vocabulary development, and ultimately reading comprehension.

There are several instructional approaches to phonics instruction broken down into two main categories; those programs that teach phonics systematically and explicitly (e.g. synthetic phonics, phonics in context, or analytic phonics) and those that do not (e.g. whole-language programs, basal programs, or sight word programs) (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; NPR, 2000). Systematic and explicit phonics instruction means that phonics is taught in an organized and planned way using a predetermined sequence of letter-sound relations directly taught by the teacher until automaticity in applying phonics skills is evident (Gunther et al., n.d.; NPR, 2000). There is also evidence through a brain mapping study, that this explicit teaching of letter-sound correspondence (or grapheme-phoneme mapping) can have a significantly larger impact on word recognition as the student progresses in literacy development (Yoncheva et al., 2015). Other approaches, such as, whole-language programs or sight word programs, may have phonics instruction, but it may not be done in a systematic (and sometimes not explicit) manner (NPR, 2000).

Castles et al. (2018) indicated that direct and explicit phonological awareness instruction is rooted in the science of reading and as such should be the foundation of reading acquisition. The International Literacy Association (2019) posited that phonological awareness plays a crucial role in early literacy and language development in young children. The National Reading Panel reported that systematic phonics instruction did improve literacy outcomes for students prior to grade 1 (NPR, 2000); however, as researchers (Cummins, 2007; Garan, 2001) pointed out, the report (NPR, 2000) did not show the similar outcomes for older students in grades 2 through 6. Supporting a lesser discussed finding from the NPR (2000) that systematic phonics instruction cannot be a dominant portion of a reading program, Cummins (2007), and later Krashen (2019), argued phonics instruction should be a smaller part of a balanced approach to reading instruction; but that reading engagement and storytelling are needed to develop literacy. Castle et al. (2018) also indicated there should be a balance between reading components and that each component of reading should not require the same amount of instructional time. Even though most of these studies have focused primarily on early literacy learning in younger students, Edwards (2008) found significant improvement in fluency for struggling high school ninth graders when they went through a structured phonics intervention. In addition, Wendt (2013) and Swanson et al. (2015), indicated that literacy development must be a focus in the secondary content classrooms just as it is in the primary grade classrooms.

In 2006, the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth was convened, and the research panel found the five components of reading previously identified (NRP, 2000) were also important for ELLs (August & Shanahan, 2006; Hoover

et al., 2016). However, careful consideration should be taken when applying these findings to ELLs. August et al. (2014) found that explicit instruction in each reading component along with writing instruction is essential for ELLs. However, components such as phonics instruction, should not be taught in isolation, but rather in context (Hoover et al., 2016). Additionally, combining several of the components simultaneously was found to positively impact literacy outcomes for ELLs (August & Shanahan, 2006). August et al. (2014) posited that phonological awareness and phonics supported ELLs, increased exposure to texts in English must also be included for ELL programs particularly those focused on literacy development. Similar to Wendt (2013) and Swanson et al. (2015), integrating literacy components into academic content for secondary ELLs supports overall reading and language acquisition (Fránquiz & Salinas, 2013; NASEM, 2017; Sandefur et al., 2007).

***Literacy Development for ELLs***

Much of the literature that deals with ELLs and literacy development focuses on students in the primary grades (Snyder et al., 2017). In a quantitative longitudinal study, O'Connor et al. (2019) studied 272 elementary students (both ELLs and non-ELLs) and created latent profiles of *poor comprehenders* and *good comprehenders*. After analysis of all the data, researchers found that those in the *poor comprehenders* groups, both the ELLs and non-ELLs groups, had challenges with reading comprehension and with basic foundational literacy skills such as decoding and phonemic awareness (O'Connor et al., 2019). Burns et al. (2017) focused on reading interventions for second and third grade ELLs to determine if they helped increase language proficiency. In the study, 201 students participated in reading interventions focused on phonemic awareness, phonics

skills, and fluency based on students' areas of deficiency; and, in addition, each student had a regular vocabulary intervention as well (Burns et al., 2017). The findings indicated that students with the lowest English proficiency grew the most after being in the intervention groups and furthered the ideology that early intervention is crucial for improved reading outcomes (Burns et al., 2017). These two studies indicated that for ELLs (particularly in the primary grades), reading interventions focused on beginning literacy skills can positively impact reading comprehension. Additionally, August et al. (2014) highlighted research indicating early reading interventions focused on the differences between students' L1 and L2 produced strong outcomes.

Reading comprehension, as well as, one's ability to read fluently is predicated on one's development of vocabulary (Hoover et al., 2016). Researchers (Cisco & Padrón, 2012; Lin, 2012; Martínez et al., 2014; Miller, 2009; NASEM, 2017; Tamimi Sa'D & Rajabi, 2018) supported this claim and further indicated that vocabulary development within content specific contexts impacts reading comprehension for ELLs. In their synthesis of 11 studies involving middle grades ELLs, Cisco and Padrón (2012) found that vocabulary is key to reading comprehension. Similarly, Lin (2012) and Tamimi Sa'D and Rajabi (2018) found that in high schools in Taiwan and Iran (respectively) the acquisition of vocabulary positively impacted language and literacy development. Further, Lin (2012) found that with lower levels of language development, the text difficulty (and vocabulary within the text) impact students' long term reading comprehension and vocabulary development. For secondary newcomers, vocabulary development and knowledge should be central to the literacy curriculum (Short & Boyson, 2012). Focusing on science vocabulary development for SLIFE, Miller (2009)

indicated that specific and scaffolded science language awareness, which included repeated practice and interactive activities utilizing vocabulary, was needed for literacy development. Like Miller (2009), Tamimi Sa'D and Rajabi (2018) and Cisco and Padrón (2012), also indicated that repeated exposure and actually use of the vocabulary supported ELL literacy and vocabulary development.

Reading comprehension is not only dependent on vocabulary knowledge, but also the reader's ability to decode text and their language ability (August et al., 2014). Cummins (2007) argued that literacy engagement and time reading text has a significant relationship to reading comprehension. Stewart et al. (2018) found that engaging students in culturally relevant reading that honors their self-identity increases time on reading. However, even with ELLs self-selecting texts (Krashen, 2019) and engaging in culturally relevant pedagogical literacy practices (Chenowith, 2014; Gay, 2018; Stewart et al., 2018), for secondary ELLs, reading comprehension can be a challenge and not only for those students in the United States. Chaka and Booi-Ncetani (2015) looked into reading comprehension for grade 10 students learning English in Mthatha, South Africa. A lack of reading skills and reading strategies negatively impacted a students' reading comprehension (Chaka & Booi-Ncetani, 2015). This became evident in this study where the researchers found the participants did not do well in recall and summary tasks that ultimately impacted their overall reading comprehension ability (Chaka & Booi-Ncetani, 2015). Similar to both O'Connor et al. (2019) and Burns et al. (2017), Chaka and Booi-Ncetani (2015) found that in order for reading comprehension to develop, the various components of the reading process must be in place or remediated until they are solidified. Improvement of reading comprehension through remediation or intervention

programs must be aligned to the underlying challenges or deficits such as word-level skills or phonetic understanding (O'Connor et al., 2019). These studies (O'Connor et al., 2019; Burns et al., 2017) indicated more research in culturally relevant basic literacy skills instruction at the secondary level is still needed.

For ELLs (and specifically SLIFEs), oral language development is an integral part of the literacy development process (Hoover et al., 2016; Martínez et al., 2014; NASEM, 2017). The National Council of Teachers of English (2020) noted that allowing students to leverage their native language to express themselves and engage in oral discussions is essential for supporting ELLs. August and Shanahan (2006) found that a student's native language proficiency can positively impact literacy development, but that oral language in English is critical to reading comprehension and writing skills. However, most literacy programs for ELLs do not address this critical component of literacy development in either L1 or L2 for ELLs (Hoover et al., 2016). Snow's study (2014) of Word Generation yielded positive outcomes for ELLs. The study found that talking or oral language spurred learning more than simply listening (Snow, 2014). DeCapua et al. (2020) indicated for SLIFE with low literacy skills, instructors must begin on oral work before moving to written or printed text; and Krashen (2019) posited beginning literacy development through oral stories leads to the ability to read. In addition to a student's culture and the relationships between teacher-student, focus should be on *Oracy* or literacy instruction that uniquely and explicitly links oral language and literacy to support language acquisition (Hoover et al., 2016).

***Interaction for Language and Literacy Development***

Children in general develop their oral language skills prior to developing either

reading or writing skills, and as such, oral language proficiency leads to English literacy development (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014). ELLs must develop communicative competence as a means to ensure literacy development (NASEM, 2017; O'Grady et al., 2005). In a study of developmental bilingual programs (DBE) and dual language programs comprised of ELLs, López et al. (2015) found that DBE programs that incorporated language modeling and instructional conversations had students with higher reading achievement than the students in classes or programs that did not include this instructional practice. Although there was not a strong correlation to dual language programs (most likely due to the inherent nature of the program make up), the findings still indicated that language modeling from peers may still positively impact learning (López et al., 2015).

Further research on peer-mediated interventions (Cole, 2014; Klingbeil et al., 2017; Pyle et al., 2017) showed some support for these interactive interventions for ELLs. Cole's meta-analysis (2014) indicated that high-school students did not yield as much gains as middle school students using peer-mediated interventions though there was still some significance. In contrast, Pyle et al. (2017) completed a synthesis of peer-mediated interventions and found that although elementary and middle school students benefited from these type of interventions, studies of high schoolers were not available; and it was not possible to determine if English language proficiency was impacted positively or negatively. Peer-mediated interventions have been shown to be effective in word-level outcomes such as high-frequency words, vocabulary, and oral reading fluency (Cole, 2014; Klingbeil et al., 2017; Pyle et al., 2017).

Vaughn et al. (2017) studied implementing a more interactive approach in middle

school social studies classes and its impact on reading comprehension for ELLs. In the treatment group, practitioners implemented instructional practices such as theme-related vocabulary instruction, integration of oral and written instruction, paired learning, and team-based learning (Vaughn et al., 2017, p. 24). Many of the differentiation strategies found in Marrero Colón (2018) were also present in these lessons, in addition to targeted feedback from teachers (Vaughn et al., 2017). The results indicated that ELLs (and non-ELLs) in the treatment group increased both content knowledge and content-related reading comprehension (Vaughn et al., 2017).

Other researchers (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014; Lee, 2016; Ogle & Correra-Kovtun, 2010) further indicated that interactions between students (both ELL and non-ELL) promote literacy development. Fillmore and Snow (2000) posited that the bedrock of literacy within a school context and outside of the school is oral language, and educators must know more about developing and utilizing oral language. Supporting oral language development (August & Shanahan, 2006; Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020; NASEM, 2017) for ELLs, Ogle and Correra-Kovtun (2010) reported how partner reading routines including academic talk scripts with ELLs with appropriate leveled texts (similar to Lin, 2012) scaffolds learning and develops language and literacy. Through structured discussions and face-to-face interactions, Wong Fillmore (2014) suggested learners negotiate meaning jointly and in so doing acquire language. These structured discussions (also termed *instructional conversations)* provide meaningful opportunities for academic language development through focused and intentional conversational patterns (Goldenberg, 1993; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2007; Wong Fillmore, 2009). McBee Orzulak (2017) and Zacarian (2013) indicated that language learning is a social process

and that collaborative, supportive peer-to-peer interactions lead to language acquisition and more academic success. Related, Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) process utilizes dialogue as a way to work together in order to derive meaning from texts (Hoover et al., 2016). Lee (2016) utilized CSR with SLIFE refugees in Canada between the ages of 17 and 25 and found that integrating these meta-cognitive strategies along with whole group and interactive small groups yielded positive literacy outcomes.

August and Shanahan (2006) and NASEM (2017) indicated that small group collaborative interactions can yield positive results for SLIFE and ELLs in general and in particular those at the secondary level. In a recent high school case-study (Ancess et al., 2019), one of the instructional practices noted for overall student success was collaborative, structured routines among students. Integration of the four language domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing through conversations in pair and group work as well as collaborative engagement on literacy tasks have been found to be particularly helpful for secondary newcomer ELLs (Short & Boyson, 2012). Additionally, Walqui's (2000) study of high school immigrant ELL students noted that collaborative practices that promote interaction amongst peers is critical for overall language development; and that these interactions must be meaningful as well as purposeful. WCER (2015) also indicated that for SLIFE oral language development must be contextualized within literacy as well.

***Basic Literacy for SLIFE***

For SLIFE, introduction to a print-rich environment is a critical first step in addressing early or basic literacy skills (DeCapua et al., 2020; Short & Boyson, 2012). This environment should be designed to help address the basic concepts of print and

literacy such as the directionality of the English language (from left to right, and top to bottom) and the alphabet (Custodio, 2011). In addition, students should be exposed to age-appropriate materials that include photos and realia (actual physical objects) when possible to teach basic literacy skills (DeCapua et al., 2020). Even though Vaughn et al. (2017) indicated that instructional practices for ELLs must not focus on the foundational (or basic) skills of reading to get to reading comprehension, Chaka and Booi-Ncetani (2015) found for secondary students, foundational literacy skills must be in place for full reading comprehension. Further, Marrero Colón (2018) found that basic literacy instructional practices should be incorporated into secondary SLIFE classes. Montero et al. (2014) examined how guided reading and running records used with eleven SLIFE ages 14-20 can enhance how a secondary student with interrupted education will be able to access beginning literacy skills. Data from running records and three different psychometric language and literacy measures was quantitatively analyzed by the researchers in this mixed method study to determine if students' literacy level had increased after a semester of guided reading intervention (Montero et al., 2014). The researchers integrated an ethnographic approach as well to determine qualitative impact of utilizing early literacy skills instruction for secondary language learners. This research also indicated those students who attend school on a regular basis with the correct interventions can make significant progress (Montero et al., 2014). When the teacher integrated early (or basic) literacy skills into the instructional plan, there was an increase in print literacy development for adolescent SLIFE (Montero et al., 2014). Haager and Osipova (2017) refer to attending to foundational reading skills and language mechanics as "backfilling" (p. 12). Highlighting the importance of basic literacy skill instruction for

SLIFE, Custodio (2011) also cautioned that this should not be the sole focus of instructional practices and must be integrated within context. Similar to Custodio (2011) and others (see August & Shanahan, 2006; NASEM, 2017; NCTE, 2020; Umansky et al, 2018; WCER, 2015; Zacarian & Haynes, 2012), Haager and Osipova (2017) indicated that there must be explicit teaching of foundational skills that are embedded into content instructional strategies for ELLs.

**Integrating Language and Literacy**

In conjunction with teaching grade level academic content, educators must also teach basic foundational literacy skills while at the same time attending to language acquisition (Leos & Saavedra, 2010). It is clear that SLIFE have unique challenges in acquiring the English language, and those at the secondary level have limited time to gain the needed skills, which puts additional pressure on both students and teachers (DeCapua et al., 2020; Ingram, 2017; Marrero Colón, 2018; Schmidt de Carranza, 2017). Researchers further indicated reading comprehension is made up of more than just the ability to understand a text and is grounded in foundational or basic literacy skills (Chaka & Booi-Ncetani, 2015; Haager & Osipova, 2017; Montero et al., 2014; O'Connor et al., 2019). Vaughn et al. (2017), López et al. (2015), and Walqui (2000) also indicated through their research the importance of interaction and engagement for literacy and language development for ELLs. More specifically, Wong Fillmore (2014) indicated that ELL interaction must be utilizing academic discourse through structured discussions.

Instructional practices that yield positive outcomes for all students, but specifically for high school students, in general include honoring students' prior knowledge while engaging in high quality, culturally relevant work that is supported

through collaboration and community building approaches (Ancess et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Similarly, ELLs benefit from pedagogical approaches that are engaging, meaningful, and varied (Walqui, 2000). For secondary ELLs, the NASEM (2017) reported that in order for language to be acquired oral language and literacy goals must be integrated through meaningful academic contexts. Instruction for secondary SLIFE must not only be engaging and scaffolded to reach high expectations (DeCapua et al., 2020) it must draw on students' backgrounds, organized by theme(s), be culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and have immediate relevancy (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011b; Short & Boyson, 2012; Walsh, 1999; Zacarian & Haynes, 2012). Decontextualized memorization of discrete literacy skills or separate, isolated vocabulary instruction is not effective for language development (NASEM, 2017). These findings are further supported by NCTE (2020) for ELLs and WCER (2015) for SLIFE underpinned by the theoretical frameworks of Vygotsky (1978), Gay (2010), and Krashen (1982).

Even though studies here indicated the need for integrating language and literacy skills into instructional practices for ELLs, there continues to be a gap in the literature specific to secondary SLIFE and basic or foundational literacy instruction that is culturally relevant (Burns et al., 2017; Snyder et al., 2017; O'Connor et al., 2019). Although researchers have focused on developing and remediating foundational skills in the primary grades and on the perception of SLIFE students or teachers in regard to learning in general, only a few (such as Wendt, 2013; Swanson et al., 2015) approach basic literacy skills for ELLs at the secondary level. Short & Boyson (2012) found that for secondary newcomer programs, basic literacy skill development coupled with extensive reading and exposure to literature-based instruction are essential for overall

literacy instruction.

**Secondary Teacher and Student Perspectives**

The sense of urgency felt by students in the Schmidt de Carranza (2017) study is most certainly being felt by those teachers charged to instruct SLIFE and ensure that they are prepared academically. Drake (2017) found teachers and leaders had a strong belief that their students could be successful, but outside interests or needs vying for secondary under schooled immigrant students' attention presented huge challenges. In a study of a Haitian Literacy Program for high school SLIFE, Walsh (1999) indicated that one of the contributing factors to students' success was the safe and supportive environment created between students and teachers. Two qualitative studies (Ingram 2017; Marrero Colón, 2018) of high school teachers, found that teachers had positive experiences with SLIFE, worked to integrate students into the classroom and school culture, and worked to support the socioemotional needs of these particular ELLs. Similarly, in looking at how teachers' behavior impacts language acquisition, López (2012) found classroom dynamics play a crucial role in language acquisition and overall reading outcomes. Ensuring teachers' have care and concern for students who may be struggling is instrumental in ensuring academic and emotional outcomes (López, 2012). These studies support the findings of Christian et al. (2019) and Stewart et al. (2018) of high school ELL students who indicated that relationships (along with high expectations and student agency) were largely important to their academic success. Similarly, Walqui (2000) studied six high school immigrant students and found that for secondary immigrant students to succeed the classroom (and school) must foster a community of learners that honor students' unique backgrounds.

In two studies, Ingram's (2017) and Marrero Colón's (2018) teachers indicated that although they built relationships with students, and even though they had professional development and training, it was not enough to support their efforts to instruct SLIFE, and a focus on culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ingram, 2017) would be beneficial. Secondary ELL students tend to value teachers who promote agency, hold high expectations, and through scaffolding and support show care for students (Christian et al., 2019). Additionally, learning must be engaging, relevant, and collaborative in contextualized practices leveraging students' background experiences (Walqui, 2000). Ingram (2017) revealed four high school teachers stated one challenge in teaching SLIFE was teaching academic content and helping students comprehend when they were also learning language. However, supporting students' abstract vocabulary development and basic reading development was of particular difficulty for the secondary teachers (Ingram, 2017). Marrero Colón (2018) found that all eight of the high school teachers in her study differentiated instruction through both linguistic and non-linguistic means by scaffolding lessons and materials (texts) with graphic organizers to overcome the challenge of teaching academic content. In two another case studies, Adams (2017) and MacNevin (2012) revealed similar findings to that of Ingram (2017) and Marrero Colón (2018). The teachers of ELLs held high expectations, attempted to utilize inclusive and culturally relevant strategies, built class community, and found ways to build connections with immigrants and non-immigrants (Adams, 2017). MacNevin (2012) found that more professional development for supporting the needs of students from refugee backgrounds were also a critical need. Adams' (2017) study also indicated the teachers needed more support on language acquisition and multicultural realities.

However, a distinct challenge noted in Marrero Colón (2018) and MacNevin (2012) was meeting the beginning literacy needs of SLIFE in the teachers' classrooms. Recommendations for integrating beginning literacy instructional practices in the secondary classes were noted (MacNevin, 2012; Marrero Colón, 2018).

***Professional Development and Teacher Knowledge***

In a qualitative study of high school literacy teachers, Russell (2014) found that a collaborative approach to professional development not only enhanced teacher instructional practice but also the opportunities and success for ELLs. Similarly, two mixed-methods studies (Cavazos et al., 2018; McIntyre et al., 2010) found that job embedded professional development on effective teaching practices for ELLs improved reading achievement for elementary students particularly when the professional development is sustained over time and collaborative. Babinski et al. (2018) found similar outcomes as Cavazos et al. (2018) and McIntyre et al. (2010) in their randomized controlled trial with elementary teachers of ELLs and posited that sustained, systematic, and supported professional development increases a teachers use of effective instructional strategies as well as improves ELL language development. Specifically, Babinski et al. (2018, p. 121) found that a focus on Paris' (2005) ideologies of "*constrained literacy skills"* (such as phonemic awareness and phonics) and "*unconstrained literacy skills"* (such as vocabulary and comprehension) were critical for ELL language and literacy improvement. Studying teachers of immigrant students, DaSilva Iddings and Rose (2012) found that when teachers were engaged in professional development that was collaborative with colleagues, involved their students, and utilized critical reflection their perception of professional development increased as well as the academic outcomes for

the students.

However, Molle (2013) posited that professional development cannot only contain technical solutions through basic instructional strategies; but must also allow for full development through thoughtful and critical discussions particularly as it pertains to ELLs. DaSilva Iddings and Rose (2012) supports Molle's (2013) ideology that professional development should include critical reflection and promote change in instructional practices. These findings support earlier research (August & Calderón, 2006) indicating that for teachers of language minority students or ELLs considerable time committed to a change in practice and beliefs is needed from all educators who serve and teach these students. NASEM (2017) concluded that for teachers of ELLs there must be systematic and focused professional learning that is monitored for implementation and impact.

Secondary teachers of ELLs and particularly SLIFE indicate that they need more professional development in order to teach basic literacy skills (Ingram, 2017; Marrero Colón, 2018). This realization is critical because research indicates that what a teacher knows directly relates to what students learn. Pittman et al. (2019) found in their study of 150 elementary teachers that some did not possess the explicit knowledge of basic literacy skills needed to be able to teach reading. Alternatively, Carlisle et al. (2011) examined elementary teachers' knowledge of basic literacy skills and found a slight relationship to teacher knowledge of reading skills on academic achievement. Though this study did indicate that professional development with a distinct purpose can positively impact the knowledge a teacher has on teaching reading (Carlisle et al., 2011). Related, other research indicates that the more training an ESOL teacher has or has

participated in the higher outcomes of academic achievement and language development their students have (Babinski et al., 2018; Friend et al., 2009; López et al., 2013). However, in studying high school English teachers, Ramos (2019) reported inconsistent findings of how impactful phonics-based strategies had on English teachers' perceptions. While there was some perception that the specific phonics-based strategies did improve students' reading fluency, there was also an acknowledgement that some strategies caused frustration and did not lead to intrinsic motivation for the students (Ramos, 2019).

Research (Babinski et al., 2018; Carlisle et al., 2011; Piasta et al., 2009) indicated that with more professional development, specifically about reading and the components of reading, not only are there positive impacts for the teacher but for the students as well. However, Clark et al. (2018) found that even with one-on-one personalized professional development a teacher may not be getting support to fill the knowledge gaps they may have. Related, teachers' perceptions of what they know about basic literacy skills and their actual knowledge often times are not in alignment indicating that teachers may not be prepared to utilize effective pedagogy as it relates to reading instruction and basic literacy skills (Cunningham et al., 2004; Moats, 1994; Piasta et al., 2020; Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012; Spear-Swerling et al., 2005). It is critical for teachers to not only be exposed to new content through ongoing professional development, they must also be actively applying the new learning in order to improve pedagogical practice.

Most research studies on teacher knowledge as it relates to basic literacy skills and knowledge involves only primary level, elementary teachers or educators in elementary teacher preparation programs (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012c; Chapman et al., 2018; Cunningham et al., 2004; Kozak & Martin-Chang, 2018; Moats & Foorman, 2003;

Piasta et al., 2009; Piasta et al., 2020; Pittman et al., 2019; Spear-Swerling et al., 2005; Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012). Seminal research done in this area (Moats, 1994) revealed that those experienced reading teachers (in this study) did not have enough knowledge of language structures (specifically related to phonemes, syllables, and morphemes) in order to effectively provide instruction for beginning readers or those who may be struggling to read. Moats (1994) posited that teachers who would be responsible for teaching of reading skills should have a knowledge of phonemic awareness, phoneme-grapheme correspondence, and understand how the English sound system works. Moreover, research about teachers' knowledge about reading content knowledge specifically for adolescent ELLs (Friend et al., 2009; Pittman et al., 2019) or in high-poverty urban schools (Moats & Foorman, 2003) indicated that teacher knowledge can have an impact on outcomes.

Using Moats (1994) as an underpinning, Chapman et al. (2018) and Pittman et al. (2019) found that in the area of morphology and the application of morphological skills teachers were found to be weakest in a survey of teacher knowledge. Additionally, Spear-Swerling and Cheesman (2012) indicated in their study of teacher knowledge that the application of basic literacy skills was most challenging for the elementary teachers studied in particular within the area of assessment. Teachers demonstrated fundamental knowledge in the areas of fluency and vocabulary but lacked skills in providing specific phonics related activities and understanding decoding as the root of word recognition (Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012). Cunningham et al. (2004) found that primary teachers lacked sufficient knowledge in recognizing words that must be taught via decoding skills or through sight word methods. These teachers did not possess the skills

then to teach emergent readers that some words such as '*the*' are not able to be sounded and must be learned or memorized (Cunningham et al., 2004). In connecting teacher knowledge to professional development, Piasta et al. (2009) posited that teacher knowledge alone is not enough and that for students to achieve the reading content knowledge a teacher possesses must be applied effectively through sound instructional methods.

**The Peter Effect in Language Education**

For ELLs and SLIFE in particular, the development of all four language domains is critical. Secondary SLIFE come to high school with a myriad of challenges and it is the role of the educators at each school to ensure that both social and academic language (Cummins, 1981) are developed through a variety of methodologies. Critical to the development of the reading domain of language is grasping the basic literacy skills and foundational knowledge of English in order for reading achievement to be realized. Teachers' knowledge of Second Language Acquisition theory (Cummins, 1981; Krashen, 1982) along with how to develop literacy skills is critical, and through a variety of professional development opportunities can be improved. Studies further indicate that teacher knowledge (specifically in terms of basic literacy skills) can have an impact on student academic achievement and ELLs' language development (Friend et al., 2009; Pittman et al., 2019). At the same time, Applegate and Applegate (2004) posited that one cannot give to others what they themselves do not possess terming this the Peter Effect. Fashioned after the Apostle Peter (Acts 3:5) who was asked for money by a beggar and indicating he could not give because he did not have, the Peter Effect (Applegate & Applegate, 2004) has been studied in relation to teacher knowledge and providing for

students (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012c; Kozak & Martin-Chang, 2018). Researchers contended that if educators do not possess the knowledge of basic literacy skills and language concepts, then they themselves are not able to leverage that knowledge within instruction and ultimately students will not be able to acquire those needed basic literacy skills through interactions with their teachers (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012c; Kozak & Martin-Chang, 2018). As noted previously, much research regarding teachers' knowledge of basic literacy skills has been relegated to only primary level educators (see Moats, 1994; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Cunningham et al., 2004) or teacher preparation programs (see Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012c; Kozak & Martin-Chang, 2018; Washburn et al., 2016) or even how that knowledge impacts instructional practices (see Piasta et al., 2020). However, there continues to be a dearth in the literature specifically on how secondary teachers' knowledge of basic literacy skills impacts perception of and instructional practices for secondary SLIFE.

**Research Questions**

The researcher of this study explored effective literacy development practices for ELLs who are SLIFE in order to ensure language acquisition (Krashen, 1982) through a sociocultural lens (Vygotsky, 1978), as a way to positively change academic outcomes for SLIFE. Further, this researcher sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of secondary teachers of ELLs in regards to teaching of basic literacy skills for SLIFE reading and academic success?
2. How prepared are secondary teachers of ELLs to teach basic literacy skills for SLIFE students?
3. What areas of basic literacy skills knowledge are strongest for secondary

teachers of ELLs?

4. What areas of basic literacy development are most impacted for SLIFE?

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## Participants

This quantitative non-experimental research using a survey approach was conducted in a large urban school district in South Florida. The survey was sent to all high school teachers in the school district who teach students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) in English Language Development (ELD) courses, Developmental Language Arts-Reading (DLA-R) courses, Intensive Reading courses, or in English language arts (ELA) courses.

Teachers were assigned to these courses by the school's administration based on their current certifications and experience; and may be considered an ESOL teacher or general classroom teacher depending on the school and school administration. Due to this fact, a target population (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) was utilized. Also known as a sampling frame, this sampling was targeted because the teachers who were to be surveyed are teaching specific subjects in the high schools within the school district (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). There are thirty-five high schools in the School District with anywhere from one to twenty teachers who fell into this category which was approximately 150-200 teachers.

## Instruments

The data for this research study consisted of a survey instrument for teachers and student level data. The teachers' survey instrument (see Appendix B) consisted of 55 questions including demographic items, items specific to the teachers' current level of educational experience, and items specific to basic literacy skills concepts. The survey approach was utilized to provide observations using descriptive analysis (Creswell &

Guetterman, 2019). The data was analyzed utilizing quantitative methods in order to answer the research questions posed in this study. The teachers' survey instrument, the Teacher Knowledge Survey, included demographic and teaching experience information (#1-17) adapted from a previous study (Badger, 2017). Items (#18-28) related to teachers' perception of basic literacy skills instruction and SLIFE were developed and included by the researcher. Items (#29-55) related to teachers' content knowledge and skills about basic literacy skills concepts were taken from Binks-Cantrell et al. (2012a). Items were categorized as either assessing knowledge or skills of phonemes, phonics, or morphology; for example, Item #29 assessed phonemic knowledge and Item #30 assessed phonics skills (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012b). Twelve items covered knowledge with 26 addressing specific skills; and, thirteen were of the phonemic type, eight were of phonological type, nine were of the phonics type, and eight others covered morphological type questions (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012b). This final section of the survey (Items #29-55) had been utilized in various studies (see Chapman et al., 2015; Pittman et al., 2019; Washburn et al., 2016) and further validated as a means of teacher's knowledge of beginning literacy concepts (see Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012b). The reliability for scores on this survey of basic language constructs was 0.90 using Cronbach's alpha (Binks-Cantrell at al., 2012b, p. 163).

Student level data was also collected and analyzed. The data came from the Phonics Inventory (Wagner, 2009; 2011) which high school students in the district who are below grade level in reading take in the spring of the previous school year. The Phonics Inventory (Wagner, 2009) is administered online via a computer and can be completed as a whole group or individually. The Phonics Inventory (PI) was designed

specifically for students in grades 3-12 and has been utilized to measure phonological decoding and sight word reading (Wagner, 2009). The PI contained 92 pseudowords (or nonsense words) to determine a student's ability to decode; and included 37 sight words with target and distraction word items (Wagner, 2009). Internal validation and reliability have been measured for secondary students who were poor readers and results from the assessment continue to indicate that results are valid with strong reliability (Wagner, 2009). The assessment reports scored on the following phonics skills: letter names accuracy, sight words accuracy, sight words fluency, nonsense words accuracy, and decoding skills; and a Lexile score is also yielded from the online assessment (Wagner, 2009).

## Procedures

### *Design*

This non-experimental research utilized a survey approach with explanatory design as illustrated in Figure 1 (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017).

**Figure 1**

*Survey Approach*

| Variable | Observation |
|---|---|
| 1 | $O_1$ |

The teacher survey was emailed to the targeted population of high school teachers via *Survey Monkey*. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had three weeks to complete the survey. Participants were encouraged to complete the survey in one sitting and to not be concerned if they were unsure of an

answer or did not know information. They should have answered honestly since their responses were anonymous. Further, they were encouraged not to collaborate with others or use any other resources to answer questions prior to them beginning the survey. During the final week of the survey window, a reminder email was sent to all teachers in the targeted population in an effort to ensure the response rate (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017) was as high as it possibly could be in this type of approach.

***Data Collection Procedures***

The *Survey Monkey* platform collected the data as soon as participants entered their responses to the questions on the survey. The data elements were collected via *Survey Monkey* and then combined to be analyzed. Additionally, the student level data from the Phonics Inventory (Wagner, 2009; 2011) was collected at one time from the School District and was disaggregated to only include ELL students.

***Control***

As Edmonds & Kennedy (2017) indicated, for the validity to be solidified in quantitative methods, control must be attended to through five areas: manipulation, elimination, inclusion, group assignment, or statistical procedures (p. 13). Since this was non-experimental research, statistical procedures was the only element of control to be applied (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). It is important to note that the use of specific statistical procedures to observational data can support causal inference (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017).

***Data Analysis Procedures***

The main data analysis procedure was to collect data and apply a means and standard deviation procedure to the data. General demographic data through descriptive

statistics (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) included average age of the participants, average number of years teaching, average education level, and range of grades taught by the participants. Additional comparison of means or measures of central tendency was employed (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Research questions 1 and 2 (Items #16-36) had means and standard deviation applied to them to determine what if any correlations could be derived. Utilizing *t* test and means for student level data for the types of basic literacy skills (e.g. phonics vs. phonemic awareness) was applied to answer research question 4.

In looking at research question 3, a more inferential analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) such as analysis of variance (ANOVA) was to be utilized to determine differences between knowledge and skills items, and between levels of basic literacy skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding. For deeper study, the Pearson-product moment (Huck, 2012) would be utilized to isolate various covariants such as level of education or years of teaching to the outcomes of perceived knowledge of phonemic awareness or phonics to support answering research question 2. Throughout the analysis process, statistical significance would be applied to determine if outcomes were strong enough for determining correlations (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

# Chapter 4: Results

## Introduction

The central problem that this researcher has discovered is that secondary English language learners (ELLs) with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) are not performing well in reading achievement and are at risk for dropping out of high school due to a complex set of challenges (Huang et al., 2016; Potochnick, 2018; Umansky et al., 2018). Therefore, this research study aimed to explore the extent to which teachers' perception and knowledge of basic literacy skills affected the teaching of these skills for secondary students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE); the researcher's goal was to understand what may be needed in order to teach SLIFE for improved academic outcomes.

Utilizing a quantitative non-experimental research design, employing a survey approach in a large urban school district in South Florida, the researcher explored effective literacy development practices. Specifically, the researcher was interested in these literacy practices for ELLs who are SLIFE in order to ensure language acquisition (Krashen, 1982) through a sociocultural lens (Vygotsky, 1978), as a way to positively change academic outcomes for SLIFE.

Further, this researcher sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of secondary teachers of ELLs in regards to teaching of basic literacy skills for SLIFE reading and academic success?

2. How prepared are secondary teachers of ELLs to teach basic literacy skills for SLIFE students?

3. What areas of basic literacy skills knowledge are strongest for secondary

teachers of ELLs?

4. What areas of basic literacy development are most impacted for SLIFE?

**Demographic Characteristics**

During the survey window, 45 surveys were returned via the *Survey Monkey* platform. The researcher reviewed all surveys that were returned and the determination was made that any survey that was not at least 50% completed (through question #19 at a minimum) would be removed from the data set due to lack of quantifiable data to analyze. After these incomplete surveys were removed, a data set of 32 high school teachers' facts was included for analysis (see Appendix B for The Teacher Knowledge Survey).

The participants currently taught a range of subjects including science, mathematics, world language, critical thinking, and history with three participants indicating exceptional student education as well. Seventeen participants taught more than one subject area in their instructional day; and one participant indicated they also taught at the grade 6-8 level. However, all participants taught at least one section of English Language Arts (ELA), English Language Development (ELD), Developmental Language Arts through Reading (DLA-R), or Intensive Reading (IR) at the high school level (grades 9-12). There were 24 participants who identified as female, seven identified as male, and one preferred not to say. The participants ranged in age from 33 to 61 with the mean age of 49.12 ($SD$ = 10.12) years of age (see Table 1). Of the participants, 56.3% had never lived abroad consecutively in a county where a language other than English is the primary language; however, 31.3% of participants have lived abroad for two or more years and 12.5% have lived between one week and one year in another country.

**Table 1**

*Age Distribution of Respondents*

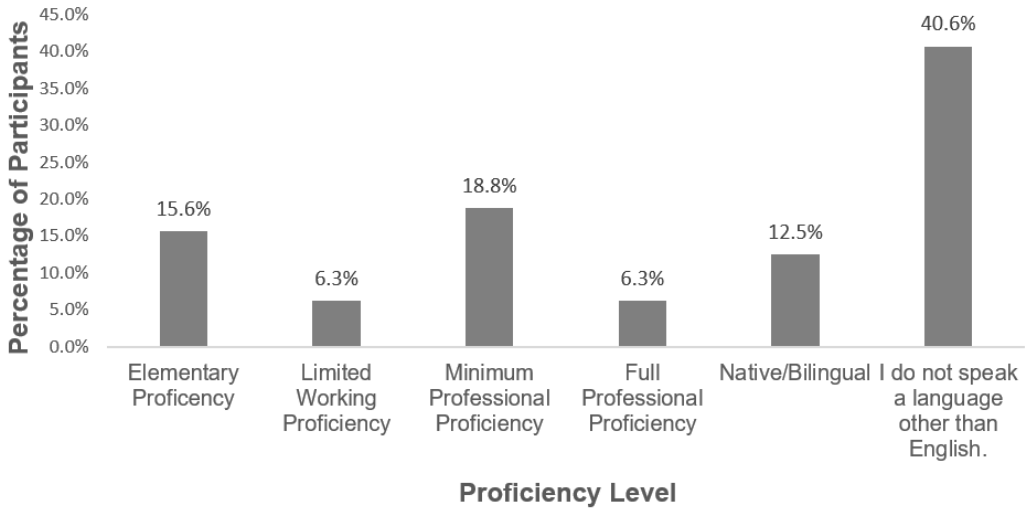
| Age Group (years) | Men (n) | Women (n) | Prefer Not to Say (n) | Total (N) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <31 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 31-40 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 7 |
| 41-50 | 0 | 8 | 1 | 9 |
| 51-60 | 4 | 8 | 0 | 12 |
| 61-70 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| | | | Total | 31 |

*Note.* One female did not disclose age making N = 31.

Participants self-identified their language proficiency in a language other than English (see Figure 2) based on the U.S. Department of State definitions (USDOS, n.d.). Fifteen participants (47%) indicated they had some level of proficiency in a language other than English ranging from elementary to full professional proficiency, four (13%) indicated they were native or bilingual, and thirteen (41%) indicated they do not speak any other language other than English.

**Figure 2**

*Language Proficiency in a Language Other Than English*



In terms of level of education, the participants ranged from holding a bachelor's degree to doctoral degrees with a majority (68.75%) holding a master's degree or higher (B.A/B.S. = 8, B.A./B.S. +15 credits = 2, M.A./M.S. = 12, M.A./M.S. +15 credits = 8, PhD/EdD = 2). The participants have been teaching in schools for an average of 16.5 years (range = 2 to 34 years) and hold a variety of certifications and endorsements. Of note, 81% hold the ESOL Endorsement/Certification, 59.4% hold the Reading Endorsement, and 37.5% hold the Secondary English Certification. While all participants currently taught grades 9-12, 37.5% (12) have taught at least one primary grade ranging from PreK to 5th grade.

Twenty-four (75%) of participants reported at least 75-100% of their current classes have English language learners in them, but that only 34.4% had classes with SLIFE in them. Eleven participants indicated they were unsure about SLIFE in their classes or skipped the question all together. Little over half (56%) of the participants indicated that 61-100% of the students they currently teach are ELLs. When asked about what percentage of students taught currently are SLIFE, 11 indicated between 0-20%, five indicated between 21-40%, two indicated between 41-60%, one indicated 61-80%, two indicated 81-100%, and 11 indicated that they were not sure what percentage of students currently taught are SLIFE.

**Data Analysis**

Due to the number of returned survey responses, it was determined that the probability sampling strategy (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017) would not be utilized and that all data in the 32 surveys would be included in the data analysis. Data was analyzed utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program (Green &

Salkind, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) for each of the four research questions. Various statistical measures were utilized as described below.

***Research Question 1: What is the perception of secondary teachers of ELLs in regards to teaching of basic literacy skills for SLIFE reading and academic success?***

Teacher self-perception regarding teaching basic literacy skills for SLIFE was captured in Item #18. Respondents rated eleven statements as Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral/Not Sure, Agree, or Strongly Disagree. In analyzing frequency data, each rating was given a rank from 1 to 5 so that Strongly Disagree =1, Disagree = 2, Neutral/Not Sure = 3, Agree = 4, and Strongly Disagree = 5 doing this allowed for the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) to be calculated for each statement (see Table 2). According to the data, teacher's perception is that direct, explicit instruction of basic literacy skills for SLIFE is needed for language acquisition and skill development. Item 18.02 ($M$ = 4.06, $SD$ = 0.982) and Item 18.04 ($M$ = 4.38, $SD$ = 0.907) both show strong agreement that phonics and basic literacy skills should be taught using direct, explicit instruction with agree/strongly agree at 78% and 82.5% respectively. Similarly, Item 18.12 ($M$ = 3.84, $SD$ = 0.808) indicates that 65% of respondents agree/strongly agree that separate, decontextualized instruction of phonics is needed for SLIFE success. However, when asked a different way (Items 18.01, 18.06 and 18.11) the agreement of respondents is not as strong. Item 18.01 ($M$ = 2.53, $SD$ = 1.224), Item 18.06 ($M$ = 2.72, $SD$ = 1.224), and Item 18.11 ($M$ = 2.81, $SD$ = 1.091) ask respondents their perception of indirect instruction of basic literacy skills with 53.3%, 43.8%, and 37.5% (respectively) of respondents in strong disagreement/disagreement that this type of instruction will allow secondary SLIFE to acquire basic literacy skills. For these items, between 21.9% and

25% of respondents indicated they were neutral or not sure.

**Table 2**

*Perception Results of SLIFE and Basic Literacy Skills*

| Statement | *M* | *SD* | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral / Not Sure | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18.01. Secondary SLIFE develop phonemic awareness without explicit instruction. | 2.53 | 1.224 | 21.9% | 28.1% | 21.9% | 15.6% | 6.3% |
| 18.02. Phonics skills should be taught directly to secondary SLIFE for language acquisition. | 4.06 | 0.982 | 3.1% | 3.1% | 15.6% | 40.6% | 37.5% |
| 18.03. Secondary SLIFE's reading ability is directly related to their phonics skill development. | 3.75 | 1.078 | 6.3% | 3.1% | 25% | 40.6% | 25% |
| 18.04. Basic literacy skills should be explicitly taught to secondary SLIFE. | 4.38 | 0.907 | 3.1% | 0% | 9.4% | 31.3% | 56.3% |
| 18.05. Secondary ESOL teachers should know basic literacy skills for SLIFE instruction. | 4.44 | 0.669 | 0% | 0% | 9.4% | 37.5% | 53.1% |
| 18.06. Secondary SLIFE will develop basic literacy skills without direct instruction of those concepts. | 2.72 | 1.224 | 18.8% | 25% | 31.3% | 15.6% | 9.4% |
| 18.07. Secondary SLIFE develop basic literacy skills through social interactions with peers. | 3.50 | 1.191 | 12.5% | 3.1% | 21.9% | 46.9% | 15.6% |
| 18.08. Training I have received has prepared me to teach SLIFE basic literacy skills. | 3.25 | 1.391 | 15.6% | 15.6% | 18.8% | 28.1% | 21.9% |
| 18.09. My knowledge of basic literacy skills is sufficient for instructional practices. | 3.66 | 1.096 | 3.1% | 9.4% | 34.4% | 25% | 28.1% |
| 18.11. SLIFE develop basic literacy skills most effectively through indirect instruction. | 2.81 | 1.091 | 12.5% | 25% | 37.5% | 18.8% | 6.3% |
| 18.12. For SLIFE success, separate (decontextualized) instruction on phonics skills is needed. | 3.84 | 0.808 | 0% | 3.1% | 31.3% | 43.8% | 21.9% |

Over 90% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that secondary ESOL teachers should know basic literacy skills for SLIFE instruction (Item 18.05, *M* = 4.44, *SD* = 0.669). However, only 50% felt they had received training to prepare them for this type of instruction (Item 18.08, *M* = 3.25, *SD* = 1.391), and only 53.1% either agreed or strongly agreed that their knowledge of basic literacy skills was sufficient for instructional practices (Item 18.09, *M* = 3.66, *SD* = 1.096).

Item 19 asked respondents to self-evaluate their knowledge of the following basic literacy skill areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, teaching literacy skills to ELLs, and using assessments to inform reading instruction. This item also asked about self-perception and knowledge of children's literature. Respondents rated their knowledge level as Minimal, Moderate, Very Good, and Expert. For data analysis of means of central tendency, each of these ratings were given a rank value of 1-4 so that Minimal = 1, Moderate = 2, Very Good = 3, and Expert = 4 (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Self-perception of Knowledge of Basic Skill Areas*

| Item | Skill Area | n | *M* | *SD* | Minimal | Moderate | Very Good | Expert |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19.01 | Phonemic Awareness | 32 | 2.7500 | 0.84242 | 6.3% | 31.3% | 43.8% | 18.8% |
| 19.02 | Phonics | 32 | 2.8438 | 0.84660 | 6.3% | 25% | 46.9% | 21.9% |
| 19.03 | Fluency | 31 | 2.9677 | 0.87498 | 6.3% | 18.8% | 43.8% | 28.1% |
| 19.04 | Vocabulary | 31 | 3.1935 | 0.65418 | 0% | 12.5% | 53.1% | 31.3% |
| 19.05 | Comprehension | 32 | 3.4063 | 0.66524 | 0% | 9.4% | 40.6% | 50% |
| 19.05 | Children's literature | 32 | 2.5938 | 0.79755 | 6.3% | 40.6% | 40.6% | 12.5% |
| 19.07 | Teaching literacy skills to ELLs | 32 | 2.6563 | 0.86544 | 6.3% | 40.6% | 34.4% | 18.8% |
| 19.08 | Using assessment to inform reading instruction | 32 | 2.6563 | 0.87759 | 3.1% | 25% | 34.4% | 37.5% |

Survey respondents indicated that their knowledge of basic literacy skill areas was relatively high with phonemic awareness (Item 19.01, *M* = 2.750, *SD* = 0.842) and phonics (Item 19.02, *M* = 2.843, *SD* = 0.846) having over 43% indicating their knowledge level was Very Good. The areas of vocabulary (Item 19.04, *M* = 3.1935, *SD* = 0.654) and comprehension (Item 19.05, *M* = 3.41, *SD* = 0.665) were the strongest with 87.1% and 90.6% indicating Very Good/Expert of each area respectively. These were the only two areas that no respondent indicated Minimal knowledge. For Item 19.07 (M = 2.656, SD = 0.865), 46.9% of respondents indicated that they have minimal to moderate knowledge of teaching literacy skills to ELLs. This is the same percentage of respondents that indicated they either did not have enough knowledge of basic literacy skills for instruction or were neutral/not sure of their knowledge when responding (see Item 18.09).

***Research Question 2: How prepared are secondary teachers of ELLs to teach basic literacy skills for SLIFE students?***

Frequency data analysis for the overall score of the knowledge portion of the survey (Items #20-38) was conducted by assigning 0 to incorrect answers and 1 to correct answers. The range of overall scores was from 4 to 33 with the mean of 21.68 (*SD* = 6.36) and a majority (71.9%) of participants getting 25 or fewer questions correct.

**Reading Endorsement.** A one-way within-group analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine the relationship between teachers holding the Reading Endorsement and their overall performance on the Teacher Knowledge Survey. The dependent variable was the total overall score of correct answers; and the independent variable included has a reading endorsement ($\mu_1$) versus does not have a reading endorsement ($\mu_2$). The null hypothesis ($H_o$: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$) states that there is no difference

between teachers who have a reading endorsement and those who do not have the additional endorsement. At a significance level of .05, the ANOVA yielded a significant effect, $F(1,30) = 7.170$, $p = .012$. The strength of the relationship was assessed yielding $\eta^2 = .193$ indicating a large effect size with teachers holding a reading endorsement (n = 18, $M = 24.11$, $SD = 4.702$) and those without a reading endorsement (n = 14, $M = 18.57$, $SD = 6.991$) and the null hypothesis was rejected.

**Language Proficiency.** To determine the impact of participants' knowledge of another language other than English, a one-way within subjects ANOVA was conducted. Those indicating that they had Elementary, Limited Working, or Minimum Professional Proficiency where grouped together ($\mu_1$), those indicating Full Professional or Native/Bilingual were grouped together ($\mu_2$), and those indicating that they only spoke English were grouped ($\mu_3$). The null hypothesis ($H_o$: $\mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3$) states that there is no statistical difference between each of these groups in their performance on the overall Teacher Knowledge Test. Analysis of the ANOVA indicated $F(2, 29) = 1.890$, $p = .160$, $\eta^2 = .115$. While the effect size is large, there is no significant difference between the three groups. Follow-up tests were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the means by conducting a post hoc comparison using Dunnett's *C* test which does not assume equal variances between groups (Green & Salkind, 2014). There was significant difference between the means between the two groups who had some level of language proficiency in a language other than English and the group who did not speak any other language than English; however, there was not significant difference between the two groups of other language speakers. The 95% confidence intervals for the pairwise differences are reported in Table 4. Based on the data analysis the null hypothesis is not

rejected.

**Table 4**

*95% Confidence Intervals of Pairwise Differences of Language Proficiency*

| Proficiency in Other Language | *M* | *SD* | Elem/Limited /Minimal | Full/Native/ Bilingual |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elem/Limited/Minimal | 23.69 | 5.329 | | |
| Full/Native/Bilingual | 23.2 | 4.382 | [-7.46, 8.44] | |
| No Other Language | 19.29 | 7.29 | [-2.08, 10.89] | [-4.67, 12.49] |

**Grade Level Experience.** In looking to determine what, if any, relationship existed between those teachers who in their teaching career only taught secondary (grades 6th to 12th) and those who taught at least one year in an elementary grade level (grades Kindergarten to 5th), a one-way within subjects ANOVA was conducted with the null hypothesis stated as $H_o$: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$. When comparing the two groups, the data indicated there was no significant difference between those who taught in secondary grade levels only versus those who had also taught in elementary with a medium effect size ($F(1, 30) = 2.278$, $p = .142$, $\eta^2 = .071$). Because most basic literacy skills are taught in the primary grades (Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd) at the elementary level, another one-way ANOVA test was conducted between those who taught at least one primary grade level and those who had not taught at the primary grade level. The null hypothesis remained the same for this analysis. The results of this analysis yielded a much more significant finding with a larger effect size ($F(1, 30) = 4.562$, $p = .041$, $\eta^2 = .132$). The null hypothesis is rejected indicating that there is a significant difference between the group of teachers who have taught at the primary grade level and those teachers who have not.

**Years of Teaching Experience**. To determine the impact of participants' years of teaching experience, a one-way within subjects ANOVA was conducted. The years of

teaching experience were categorized as five or less years, six to ten years, eleven to nineteen, and twenty or more years of teaching experience. Analysis of the ANOVA indicated $F(3, 28) = 1.538$, $p = .227$, $\eta^2 = .141$. While the effect size is large, there is no significant difference between the four groups. Follow-up tests were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the means by conducting a post hoc comparison using Dunnett's *C* test (Green & Salkind, 2014). There was some slight difference between the means of the groups with more than six years of teaching and the group of five or fewer years of experience; however, there was not a significant difference among the three sub groups of teaching experience with the least mean difference between those in the eleven to nineteen and twenty or more groups. The 95% confidence intervals for the pairwise differences are reported in Table 5. Based on the data analysis the null hypothesis is accepted.

**Table 5**

*95% Confidence Intervals of Pairwise Differences for Years of Teaching Experience*

| Years of Teaching Experience | *M* | *SD* | 5 or less years | 6 to 10 years | 11-19 years |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 or less years | 15.75 | 9.605 | | | |
| 6 to 10 years | 23.00 | 4.583 | [-36.39, 21.89]; -7.25 | | |
| 11-19 years | 21.79 | 4.353 | [-29.36, 17.29]; -6.04 | [-16.94, 19.37]; 1.21 | |
| 20 or more years | 23.36 | 7.145 | [-31.46, 16.23]; -7.61 | [-18.74, 18.01]; -.36 | [-9.00, 5.84]; -1.58 |

*Note.* Table 5 represents the mean, standard deviation, lower and upper bounds, and mean difference.

In order to mitigate inflated Type I Error risk, the researcher utilized the Bonferroni adjustment procedure (Huck, 2012) due to the various ANOVA tests being run on the same data. In this case, the Bonferroni adjustment technique, dividing alpha by the number of statistical tests performed (.05/5), yielded an adjusted significance level of

$p < .01$. Using this adjusted significance level, there are only slight adjustments to the findings reported previously. No significant difference was found between the groups of those with various language proficiencies, those who taught at the elementary level, and the number of years one has been teaching. However, the significance level for those with reading endorsements ($p = .012$) is not found to be as significant since the alpha is $p < .01$, though there is still indication that a strong significance exists for those who hold this endorsement versus those who do not. Additionally, for those who taught at the primary grade levels in their teaching career ($p = .041$) the statistical significance is only slight using the adjusted alpha. A summary of the descriptive statistics for each of these ANOVA tests can be found in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Teacher Performance on Knowledge Survey by Category*

| Certification | n | *M* | *SD* | $\eta^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes Reading Endorsement | 18 | 24.11 | 4.702 | 0.193 |
| No Reading Endorsement | 14 | 18.57 | 6.991 | |
| Proficiency in Other Language | | | | |
| Elem/Limited/Minimal | 13 | 23.69 | 5.329 | 0.115 |
| Full/Native/Bilingual | 5 | 23.2 | 4.382 | |
| No Other Language | 14 | 19.29 | 7.29 | |
| Taught Primary Grades | | | | |
| Secondary Only | 20 | 20.40 | 7.380 | 0.071 |
| Elementary at Least 1 year | 12 | 23.83 | 3.433 | |
| No Primary Grade Taught | 24 | 20.38 | 6.736 | 0.132 |
| Taught in a Primary Grade | 8 | 25.63 | 2.504 | |
| Years of Teaching Experience | | | | |
| 5 or less years | 4 | 15.75 | 9.605 | 0.141 |
| 6 to 10 years | 3 | 23.00 | 4.583 | |
| 11-19 years | 14 | 21.79 | 4.353 | |
| 20 or more years | 11 | 23.36 | 7.145 | |

***Research Question 3: What areas of basic literacy skills knowledge are strongest for secondary teachers of ELLs?***

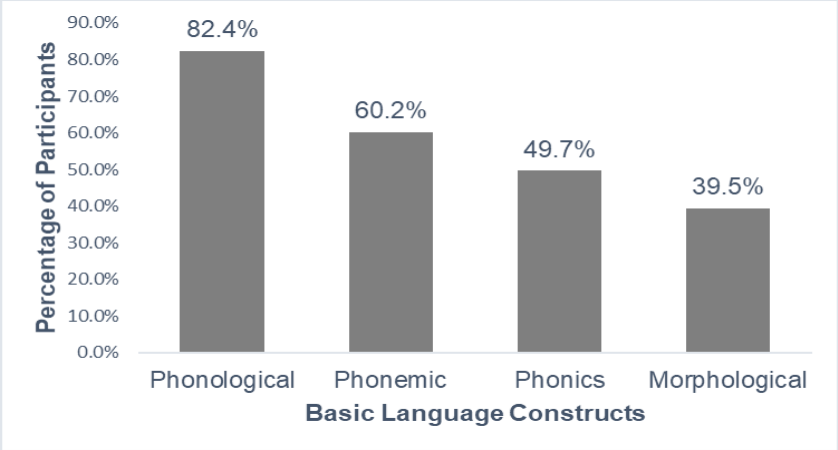
Basic literacy skills refers to foundational reading skills such as phonics, phonemic awareness, phonology, and principles of morphology (Castles et al., 2018; NRP, 2000). The Teacher Knowledge Survey had questions that were designated by kind either knowledge (12 items) or skill (26 items) and by type either phonemic (13 items), phonological (eight items), phonics (nine items), or morphological (eight items) (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012b). Knowledge questions were designed to assess explicit knowledge and skill questions assessed implicit knowledge (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012b). Using descriptive statistics, data was analyzed to determine the areas of basic literacy skill constructs that were the strongest overall, by kind, and by type with this set of secondary teachers of ELLs. Further, data was analyzed to determine any correlations between teachers' perceptions and their knowledge of basic language constructs.

**Overall Areas.** Taking the items on the Teacher Knowledge Survey and grouping them by type (phonological, phonemic, phonics, and morphological), the researcher then calculated the mean percentages of answers correct for each group type: phonological at 82.4% ($M$ = .8719, $SD$ = .335), phonemic at 60.2% ($M$ = .6031, $SD$ = .489), phonics at 49.7% ($M$ = .4983, $SD$ = .50), and morphological at 39.5% ($M$ = .4174, $SD$ = .494). These results indicated that teachers in this study showed generally better knowledge or understanding of phonological and phonemic concepts (both knowledge and skill), but relatively weak understanding of phonics and morphological concepts (both knowledge and skill). The phonological constructs are more than double that of morphological constructs. Figure 3 graphically represents the percentage of answers correct by language

construct area.

**Figure 3**

*Percent Answers Correct of Basic Language Constructs*




**Skills vs Knowledge.** The questions were grouped by which kind of question it was: knowledge or skill. Those questions that were knowledge based required the respondent to have "explicit knowledge of a term or concept" and those that were skill based required "implicit ability to perform [a] task" (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012b, p. 165). The analysis indicated that knowledge questions were 49.2% correct ($M$ = .4961, $SD$ = .501), whereas, skill related questions were 60.7% correct ($M$ = .6281, $SD$ = .483). The respondents performed slightly better on skill related questions relying on implicit knowledge than those that were just explicit knowledge. However, it is critical to note that morphological and phonological areas only had one question that was knowledge based with the others of those types being skill based.

**Phonological Awareness.** Questions related to phonological type dealt with one's ability to manipulate sounds at a broader level such as identifying syllables (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012b). Taken all together, respondents answered correctly 82.4% ($M$ = .8719, $SD$ = .335) of the phonological type questions. As seen in Table 7, three of the

items had all those responding answer correct with two others having almost all respondents correctly answered. Items 30.2.s, 30.3.s, and 30.5.s asked for the number of syllables in the words 'heaven', 'observer', and 'pedestal' respectively and all respondents correctly identified two, three, and three as syllable counts for these words. Item 30.6.s also asked for the number of syllables in the word 'frogs' with only twenty-three (71.9%) correct responses (*M* = .7667, *SD* = .43), with the most common incorrect answer of two syllables instead of one. Item 34 had the lowest correct responses of this type at 43.8% (*M* = .4375, *SD* = .504) and was the only knowledge kind of question in the phonological type. Item 34 asked for the definition of phonological awareness with the most common incorrect answer being "using letter-sound correspondences to decode" (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012b, p. 169).

**Table 7**

*Phonological Item Responses of Teacher Knowledge Survey*

| Item | Type | Kind | n | *M* | *SD* | Incorrect | Correct | Sum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 30.1.s | Phonological | Skill | 30 | 0.9 | 0.305 | 9.4% | 84.4% | 27 |
| 30.2.s | Phonological | Skill | 30 | 1 | 0 | 0.0% | 93.8% | 30 |
| 30.3.s | Phonological | Skill | 30 | 1 | 0 | 0.0% | 93.8% | 30 |
| 30.4.s | Phonological | Skill | 30 | 0.9333 | 0.254 | 6.3% | 87.5% | 28 |
| 30.5.s | Phonological | Skill | 30 | 1 | 0 | 0.0% | 93.8% | 30 |
| 30.6.s | Phonological | Skill | 30 | 0.7667 | 0.43 | 21.9% | 71.9% | 23 |
| 30.7.s | Phonological | Skill | 30 | 0.9667 | 0.183 | 3.1% | 90.6% | 29 |
| 34 | Phonological | Knowledge | 32 | 0.4375 | 0.504 | 56.3% | 43.8% | 14 |

**Phonemic Awareness.** In the Teacher Knowledge Survey, phonemic awareness type questions assessed one's ability to not only perceive but also manipulate individual sounds (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012b, p. 165). Collectively, respondents answered 60.2% (*M* = .6031, *SD* = .489) of phonemic type questions correctly. Table 8 contains all phonemic question responses.

**Table 8**

*Phonemic Item Responses of Teacher Knowledge Survey*

| Item | Type | Kind | n | *M* | *SD* | Incorrect | Correct | Sum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20 | Phonemic | Knowledge | 32 | 0.9375 | 0.246 | 6.3% | 93.8% | 30 |
| 23 'box' | Phonemic | Skill | 32 | 0.0313 | 0.177 | 96.9% | 3.1% | 1 |
| 23 'grass' | Phonemic | Skill | 32 | 0.4375 | 0.504 | 56.3% | 43.8% | 14 |
| 23 'ship' | Phonemic | Skill | 32 | 0.6875 | 0.471 | 31.3% | 68.8% | 22 |
| 23 'moon' | Phonemic | Skill | 32 | 0.7500 | 0.439 | 25.0% | 75.0% | 24 |
| 23 'brush' | Phonemic | Skill | 32 | 0.5000 | 0.508 | 50.0% | 50.0% | 16 |
| 23 'knee' | Phonemic | Skill | 32 | 0.8438 | 0.369 | 15.6% | 84.4% | 27 |
| 22 'through' | Phonemic | Skill | 32 | 0.5938 | 0.499 | 40.6% | 59.4% | 19 |
| 24 | Phonemic | Knowledge | 31 | 0.4194 | 0.502 | 56.3% | 40.6% | 13 |
| 26 | Phonemic | Skill | 32 | 0.8750 | 0.336 | 12.5% | 87.5% | 28 |
| 27 | Phonemic | Skill | 32 | 0.6560 | 0.483 | 34.4% | 65.6% | 21 |
| 28 | Phonemic | Skill | 32 | 0.5000 | 0.508 | 50.0% | 50.0% | 16 |
| 35 | Phonemic | Knowledge | 32 | 0.2500 | 0.439 | 75.0% | 25.0% | 8 |

Secondary teachers in the study showed their understanding of what a phoneme is with 93.8% answering correctly (Item 20, *M* = .9375, *SD* = .246); however, their knowledge of what phonemic awareness is was much lower with only eight respondents answering correctly (Item 35, *M* = .25, *SD* = .439). Item 23 asked respondents to identify the number of speech sounds in seven words. Teachers completed this task with varying degrees of success. Words such as ‘knee’ and ‘moon’ yielded high correct response rates of 84.4% and 75% respectively. In words with consonant blends, such as ‘grass’ correct responses were much lower at 43.8%, with ‘brush’ and ‘through’ only at 50% and 59.4% correct respectively. Indicating the number of speech sounds for the word ‘box’ (3.1%, *M* = .0313, *SD* = .177) was the most missed item on the entire survey with only one correct response. Even though ‘box’ has four distinct speech sounds /bɔks/, 23 respondents (72%) indicated the correct answer was three. Items 27 and 28 asked respondents to manipulate sounds by reversing the order of them and only had 50% (*M* = .50, *SD* = .508) and 65.6% (*M* = .656, *SD* = .483) correct responses respectively. However, when asked

to identify a pair of words with the same initial sound (chef-shoe) in Item 26, the highest percentage of correct answers of phonemic skill questions was returned at 87.5% (*M* = .875, *SD* = .336).

**Phonics.** Just under half of the phonics type questions were answered correctly at 49.7% (*M* = .4983, *SD* = .50) by respondents. These questions gauged teachers' knowledge and skills related to letter-sound correspondences and the rules related to written language and decoding (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012b, p. 165). Items 21 (*M* = .9375, *SD* = .246) and 29 (*M* = .25, *SD* = .439) were skill related questions utilizing nonsense words and respondents has strikingly different outcomes with 93.8% and 25% (respectively) correctly responding. In Item 21, teachers were to identify similar vowel sounds between words/nonsense words, whereas Item 29 required application of skill regarding silent letters. Twenty-five respondents correctly identified a word with a "soft c" on Item 25 making this the highest percentage correct of knowledge level question of the phonics types (*M* = .7813, *SD* = .42). Items that asked to apply knowledge of phonics terms to actual words (Items 31, 32, 33) and specific rules of letter-sound correspondences in words (Items 36, 37) were answered with varying degrees of success. Item 33 which asked about open syllables had only seven respondents answer correctly at 21.9% (*M* = .2188, *SD* = .42) making this the lowest correct response rate of the phonics type. Similar items asked about knowledge of specific syllable types. Items 31 (*M* = .3226, *SD* = .4752) and 32 (*M* = .5625, *SD* = .504) had higher percentage of correct responses at 31.3% and 56.3% respectively showing an inconsistent pattern of phonics knowledge. A little over a third of respondents knew the rules governing the use of 'c' or 'k' for the initial /k/ sounds as seen in Items 36 (*M* = .4063, *SD* = .499) and 37 (*M* = .375,

*SD* = .492). All item responses for phonics type questions are found in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Phonics Item Responses of Teacher Knowledge Survey*

| Item | Type | Kind | n | *M* | *SD* | Incorrect | Correct | Sum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21 | Phonics | Skill | 32 | 0.9375 | 0.246 | 6.3% | 93.8% | 30 |
| 22 | Phonics | Knowledge | 32 | 0.6250 | 0.492 | 37.5% | 62.5% | 30 |
| 25 | Phonics | Knowledge | 32 | 0.7813 | 0.420 | 21.9% | 78.1% | 25 |
| 29 | Phonics | Skill | 32 | 0.2500 | 0.439 | 75.0% | 25.0% | 8 |
| 31 | Phonics | Knowledge | 31 | 0.3226 | 0.475 | 65.6% | 31.3% | 10 |
| 32 | Phonics | Knowledge | 32 | 0.5625 | 0.504 | 43.8% | 56.3% | 18 |
| 33 | Phonics | Knowledge | 32 | 0.2188 | 0.420 | 78.1% | 21.9% | 7 |
| 36 | Phonics | Knowledge | 32 | 0.4063 | 0.499 | 59.4% | 40.6% | 13 |
| 37 | Phonics | Knowledge | 32 | 0.3750 | 0.492 | 62.5% | 37.5% | 12 |

**Morphological.** According to Binks-Cantrell et al. (2012b), the morphological type questions in the Teacher Knowledge Survey assessed teachers' understanding and ability to use "units of meaning within a word to decode and/or comprehend" (p. 165). This is the area type that the secondary teachers had the lowest overall correctly answered questions of the four types assessed in the survey at just 39.5% (*M* = .4174, *SD* = .494). A summary of item responses is found in Table 10. Only 19 respondents (59.4%) correctly identified that a morpheme is a single unit of meaning in Item 38 (*M* = .5938, *SD* = .499). For the skill kind of questions, respondents were asked to identify the number of morphemes in seven different words. Teachers had difficulty with these items with only one item (Item 30.4.m) getting close to 60% of correct responses (*M* = .633, *SD* = .49) with the word 'spinster'. However, two words 'disassemble' (Item 30.1.m) and 'pedestal' (Item 30.5.m) had the lowest correct responses with 31.9% and 12.5% respectively. Only four participants correctly identified that 'pedestal' has two morphemes. Half of the respondents identified the correct number of morphemes in the words 'heaven' at one (Item 30.2.m, *M* = .5, *SD* = .509) and 'teacher' at two (Item 30.7.m, *M* = .5, *SD* = .509).

**Table 10**

*Morphological Item Responses of Teacher Knowledge Survey*

| Item | Type | Kind | n | *M* | *SD* | Incorrect | Correct | Sum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 30.1.m | Morphological | Skill | 30 | 0.2333 | 0.430 | 71.9% | 31.9% | 7 |
| 30.2.m | Morphological | Skill | 30 | 0.5000 | 0.509 | 46.9% | 46.9% | 15 |
| 30.3.m | Morphological | Skill | 30 | 0.4000 | 0.498 | 56.3% | 37.5% | 12 |
| 30.4.m | Morphological | Skill | 30 | 0.6333 | 0.490 | 34.4% | 59.4% | 19 |
| 30.5.m | Morphological | Skill | 30 | 0.1333 | 0.346 | 81.3% | 12.5% | 4 |
| 30.6.m | Morphological | Skill | 30 | 0.3333 | 0.479 | 62.5% | 31.3% | 10 |
| 30.7.m | Morphological | Skill | 30 | 0.5000 | 0.509 | 46.9% | 46.9% | 15 |
| 38 | Morphological | Knowledge | 32 | 0.5938 | 0.499 | 40.6% | 59.4% | 19 |

**Performance vs Perception**. In order to determine if there was a correlation between teacher self-perception of knowledge and performance on specific area types, the Pearson product-moment correlation was applied to data. The Likert-scale data from Item 19 about phonemic awareness ($M$ = 2.75, $SD$ = .842) and phonics ($M$ = 2.844, $SD$ = .8466) were correlated to teachers' performance on questions about phonemic awareness ($M$ = 7.469, $SD$ = 2.816) and phonics ($M$ = 4.469, $SD$ = 1.79) respectively. A significant correlation was found regarding both phonemic awareness ($r(30) = .391$, $p = .027$) and phonics ($r(30) = .432$, $p = .014$).

A similar data analysis was conducted using the Pearson product-moment correlation for Item 19 about vocabulary ($M$ = 3.218, $SD$ = .659) and the correlation to the performance on questions about morphological constructs ($M$ = 3.156, $SD$ = 1.969). There was no significant correlation found with a small effect size ($r(30) = .097$, $p = .597$).

Additionally, teacher self-perception of their knowledge of teaching literacy skills to ELLs (Item 19.07) was compared to teachers' overall score on the Teacher Knowledge Survey using Pearson product-moment correlation. Teachers' self-perception ($M$ = 2.65,

*SD* = .8654) as compared to their overall survey score (*M* = 21.688, *SD* = 6.36) did not yield a significant correlation, $r(30) = .320$, $p = .074$.

***Research Question 4: What areas of basic literacy development are most impacted for SLIFE?***

Data from the Phonics Inventory (PI) was obtained for high school ELL students who were in the English Language Development (ELD) courses. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic (NASEM, 2020), the District did not have all high school students who were below reading level take the PI in the spring. Instead, ELL students in the ELD course took the assessment during the following winter. Data represented student data at one point in the school year. Only 24 student scores were provided to the researcher for analysis. Of the 24 students in the data set, over half were female (54.2%) with just under half being male (45.8%). Four students were in grade11, with seven in grade 10, and 13 in grade 9.

**Accuracy.** In looking at letter recognition accuracy (11 items), all students identified at least 82% of the letters with accuracy, with six students accurately identifying all letters (*M* = 10.08, *SD* = .654). For the 30 sight word accuracy items, the mean score was 17.667 (*SD* = 5.70) with only 25% of students getting at least 70% of items correct. The items dealing with nonsense word accuracy (*M* = 19.292, *SD* = 3.368) had 33.3% of students accurately identifying at least 70% of the eleven items correctly.

Even though the data set was small, the distribution of accuracy scores are relatively normal with a slight negative skew (skewness = -.637; kurtosis = .753). A one-sample *t* test was conducted to determine if the mean score of the Total Accuracy Score was significantly different than 49 which is the highest score prior to moving into the

Advanced Decoder Status. The data set mean of 36.96 (*SD* = 8.307) was significantly different from 49 with α = 0.05, $t(23) = -7.102$, $p < .001$. The effect size $d = -1.45$ indicates a large effect size.

**Fluency.** In the Phonics Inventory (PI), fluency is scored using both speed and accuracy on the 30 items assessed (Wagner, 2011). For sight word fluency, the data indicated a mean of 3.958 (*SD* = 4.14) with only three students scoring a double digit score of 15, 12, and 10. There were 45.6% of students who either scored 0, 1, or 2 on sight word fluency. In looking at nonsense word fluency, it is important to note that these items assessed consonants and short vowels (Wagner, 2011). Nonsense word fluency (*M* = 5.25, *SD* = 4.396) was a little lower than sight word fluency with 38% of students scoring either a 0, 1, or 2. Only four students scored a double digit score of 17, 12, or 10 on this measure as well.

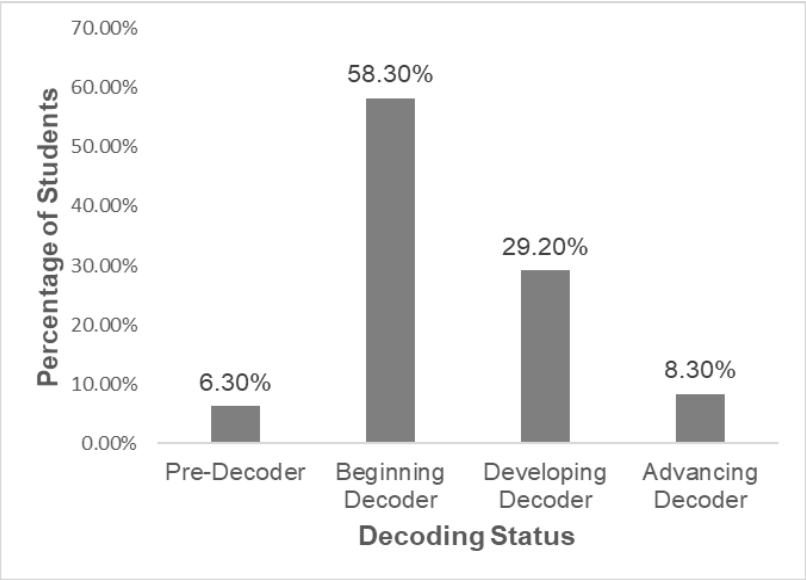
The overall fluency scores indicated relatively normal distribution with this set of data with a slight positive distribution (skewness = 1.11; kurtosis = 1.143) since the values fall just outside -1.0 to +1.0 (Huck, 2012). A one-sample *t* test was conducted to determine if the mean score of the Total Fluency Score was significantly different than 22 which is the highest score prior to moving into the Advanced Decoder Status. The Total Fluency Score (*M* = 9.208, *SD* = 8.172) showed a significant difference from 22 with a large effect size, $t(23) = -7.668$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.57$.

**Decoding Status**. Based on the outcomes of the Letter Names subtest, and the Sight Word and Nonsense Words subtests (both accuracy and fluency), the PI reports a Decoding Status of foundational reading skills (Wagner, 2011). The four levels of decoding status are pre-decoder, beginning decoder, developing decoder, and advanced

decoder (Wagner, 2011). Each level was converted to a number (1 = pre-decoder; 2 = beginning; 3 = developing; 4 = advanced) in order to determine statistical means of the decoding status levels (*M* = 2.417; *SD* = .7172; Mode = 2). As seen in Figure 4, pre-decoder was 4.3% (*n* = 1) and advanced decoder was 8.3% (*n* = 2) with beginning at 58.3% (*n* = 14) and developing at 29.2% (*n* = 7).

**Figure 4**

*Percentage by Decoding Status*




In this chapter, the researcher provided research findings from the data analyzed to answer the four research questions of the study. Data was analyzed from two sources: responses of high school teachers of ELLs on a Teacher Knowledge Survey, and responses of high school ELL students on a Phonics Inventory. Overall findings indicated that for some areas of basic literacy constructs (i.e. phonics and morphology), secondary teachers do not posess the knowledge or skills needed to provide instruciton for ELL students who overall fell into the beginning and developing decoder categories indicating the need for targeted phonetic instruction to improve literacy development.

# Chapter 5: Discussion

## Introduction

There is diversity within the English language learner (ELL) student group that continues to grow in schools within the United States (Hussar et al., 2020; NASEM, 2017); and a growing subgroup within this larger group are students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) (DeCapua et al., 2020; Potochnick, 2018; Salva & Matis, 2017; Samway et al., 2020). Potochnick (2018) found that of those students with interrupted schooling that come to the United States almost two-thirds arrive after the age of twelve, attend secondary schools, and are academically behind their peers by almost two grade levels. Specifically, secondary ELLs in the state and district, where this research study was conducted, continue to lag behind their non-ELL peers in literacy performance (FLDOE, 2019).

Research by the National Reading Panel (2000) posited that the elements of phonological awareness (including phonemic awareness), alphabetic principle (phonics), fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension must be part of any reading program that provides reading instruction which is supported by the simple view of reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) and other research (Castles et al., 2018; Scarborough, 2001). Further, Schmidt de Carranza (2017) indicated that because ELLs who are SLIFE represent various educational backgrounds and experiences, explicit instruction in foundational literacy may be needed; and Swanson et al. (2015) indicated that literacy development must be a focus in the secondary content classrooms just as it is in the primary grade classrooms. However, a gap in the research continues to exist on specific conditions needed for academic success for SLIFE, such as, basic literacy instruction in

secondary contexts.

**Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the extent to which teachers' perception and knowledge of basic literacy skills affects the teaching of these needed skills for secondary SLIFE in high school settings in South Florida. The researcher presents each research question with a succinct summary of findings from the present study seeking to answer each question with relevant findings from the data analysis.

***Research Question 1: What is the perception of secondary teachers of ELLs in regards to teaching of basic literacy skills for SLIFE reading and academic success?***

In response to Research Question 1, the high school teachers' perceptions indicated that they believe direct, explicit instruction of basic literacy skills is needed for language and skill development for SLIFE. However, there was not alignment of agreement when asked about indirect instruction of those same skills. Further, these teachers strongly reported that secondary ESOL teachers needed knowledge of basic literacy skills, and that they believed they had not been provided enough training or had enough knowledge to teach literacy skills to ELLs. Their perception of their knowledge of vocabulary and reading comprehension was the highest of all the elements of reading programs with phonemic awareness and phonics yielding a somewhat strong perception.

***Research Question 2: How prepared are secondary teachers of ELLs to teach basic literacy skills for SLIFE students?***

Data used to answer Research Question 2 indicated that preparation for teachers does make somewhat of a difference on their knowledge of basic language constructs as

measured by the Teacher Knowledge Survey (see Appendix B). The data analysis indicated that while there was some difference between teachers with various language proficiencies, those who taught at any elementary level, and the number of years a teacher had been teaching, there was no significant variance between these groups. However, the analysis indicated that for those who hold a reading endorsement and those who had taught at least one primary grade level (Kindergarten, 1st or 2nd) were much better prepared to know and teach basic literacy skills.

***Research Question 3: What areas of basic literacy skills knowledge are strongest for secondary teachers of ELLs?***

Research Question 3 was put forth to determine what specific areas of basic literacy skills knowledge were the strongest for this group of secondary teachers. The constructs that were the strongest were phonological and phonemic with morphological being the weakest overall. A strong correlation exists between teachers' self-perception of knowledge of phonemic awareness and phonics and their performance on these areas of the survey. However, a clear understanding of the difference between phonological and phonemic awareness was not evidenced. Items specific to skill (e.g. identifying syllables) were much stronger than knowledge items. When asked to identify specific speech sounds (phonemic awareness), respondents did so with vary degrees of success with words containing consonant blends, such as 'grass', 'brush,' and 'through,' proving this task to be difficult for most of the teachers. The item missed most often on the entire survey was identifying the number of speech sounds in the word 'box' which has a total of four phonemes since 'x' has two phonemes /ks/.

In terms of phonics skills and knowledge, almost all teachers were able to identify

medial vowel sounds and apply them to a different word as evidenced in the 'i' in 'find' (Item 21). Other phonics rules governing letter-sound correspondence (those needing explicit application of knowledge) were not shown to be as consistent in what the teachers did or did not know. Finally, the area of morphological constructs was overall the lowest area for all teachers in the study. While a majority of the teachers reported they knew a morpheme was the smallest unit of meaning (Item 38), they had great difficulty determining the number of morphemes within words. Words such as 'spinster' and 'teacher', which have two morphemes with one of those being a bound, derivational morpheme changing the verb to a noun, were strongest for the teachers. However, that was not the case with the word 'observer' which has three morphemes; though, it seems the teachers implicitly applied the same rule since a majority of teachers responded with two morphemes similar to the word 'teacher'. Knowledge of morphological structures was the weakest even though teacher perception of vocabulary knowledge was relatively high.

***Research Question 4: What areas of basic literacy development are most impacted for SLIFE?***

Research Question 4 indicates specifically areas of basic literacy development for SLIFE; however, since the district in the study did not have a systematic way to identify SLIFE students, the data represented any student identified as ELL in the English Language Development course. Overall, students had more success with accurately identifying letter names, sight words, and nonsense words. However, there was a significant difference between their overall accuracy performance and the minimum score needed to move into the advanced decoder status. In terms of fluency, the students had

much more difficulty in being able to apply the accuracy skills with speed needed to decode effectively. There was a much more significant difference (with larger effect size) between the mean fluency overall score and the score needed to move into advanced decoder status. This yielded overall results of a majority of students (87.5%) placing in the beginning and developing decoder status levels (see Table 11 for descriptions).

**Table 11**

*Descriptions of Decoding Status*

| Decoding Status | Description | General Criteria |
|---|---|---|
| Pre-Decoder | A student with little or no knowledge of letter names or letter-sound correspondences | • PI Fluency Score: 0-10<br>• Letter Names: less than 70% accuracy<br>• Nonsense Words: less than 50% accuracy on items that assess consonants and short vowels |
| Beginning Decoder | A student who can identify letter names but cannot decode fluently | • PI Fluency Score: 0-10<br>• Letter Names: at least 70% accuracy<br>• Nonsense Words: less than 50% accuracy on items that assess consonants and short vowels |
| Developing Decoder | A student who can fluently decode words with consonants and short vowels (CVCs) but cannot fluently decode more complex words | • PI Fluency Score: 11-22 |
| Advancing Decoder | A student who can decode with adequate fluency | • PI Fluency Score: 23-60 |

*Note*. Adapted from Table 1 found in Wagner (2011, p. 8).

## Interpretation of Findings

Teacher knowledge of and for whom they are providing instruction to each day is important for long-term student success (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). An interesting finding from this study was that 34% of those in the study were unsure of who were SLIFE in their classes or did not respond when asked. Furthermore, they were not

sure what percentages of students in their current classes were SLIFE. With little over a third of respondents knowing which students were SLIFE, this researcher ponders questions about how effective their instructional practices for students may actually be and if their perceptions may be skewed by this lack of knowledge.

Even though a majority of respondents were cognizant of the numbers of SLIFE in their current classes, the findings of this research study indicate that secondary teachers believe secondary SLIFE students do need explicit instruction in basic literacy skills in order to be successful academically and to develop needed language skills (Haager & Osipova, 2017), particularly as they relate to reading and literacy development (Custodio, 2011; Umansky et al., 2018). There were strong perceptions that these skills can also be developed through social interactions with peers (Vygotsky, 1978; Wong Fillmore, 2009). Indirect or decontextualized instruction was not perceived to be effective methods for basic literacy skills development (Castles et al., 2018; NPR, 2000). Interestingly, the same teachers, who teach these students, did not feel they have been prepared even though overall they indicated that they can teach literacy to ELLs (MacNevin, 2012; Marrero Colón, 2018). Over 80% of respondents hold an ESOL Endorsement which requires basic knowledge of linguistic features; however, that endorsement did not seem to impact the overall outcomes for teachers. Those with a reading endorsement showed markedly better performance on the overall survey, indicating that this specific preparation can and does have an impact on teachers' knowledge of basic literacy skills and constructs (Babinski et al., 2018; Carlisle et al., 2011). It is also important to note that those teachers' with experience teaching in at least one primary grade level performed significantly better on the survey indicating that they may be better prepared

for teaching of basic literacy skills. Both of these qualifications were even more significantly impactful than even knowing a language other than English. These findings solidified the need for teachers to have experiences with basic literacy skill instruction in order to be fully prepared to leverage these skills in instructional practices for ELL students (Ingram, 2017; MacNevin, 2012; Marrero Colón, 2018; Moats, 1994; Moats & Foorman, 2003).

Phonological awareness is the groundwork for other literacy development and a critical tool for teachers and students alike in order to have the ability to discriminate between syllables within words (August & Shanahan, 2006; ILA, 2019). This is an area that teachers in the study performed well in indicating strong knowledge of phonological constructs. Further, teachers' self-perception of their phonemic and phonics knowledge did align with their performance on these types of questions on the survey. Phonemic awareness requires the ability to discriminate various phonemes (Lovelace-Gonzalez, 2020; Gunter et al., n.d.) and, as evidenced in the survey, can be complicated with discrete item application (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Gunter et al., n.d.). Phonics is a bit more of a complex skill dealing with letter-sound correspondence rules and how those are applied in literacy development (NPR, 2000).

Of significance, the ability for teachers to discriminate the number of morphemes within words was of greatest difficulty. However, vocabulary development and understanding how to build words are critical tools for all learners, but specifically for secondary learners (Cisco & Padrón, 2012; Lin, 2012; Tamimi Sa'D & Rajabi, 2018); and the mismatch between teachers' self-perception of vocabulary knowledge and their knowledge of morphological constructs was unexpected. It could be that secondary

teachers had higher self-perception of vocabulary knowledge because they understood vocabulary instruction to be the broader context of word meaning (Miller, 2009) applied to various contexts (i.e. the word *table* is can be found in a home, but a *table* is also place to display data). While this may be the case, knowing how the smaller units of meaning (morphemes) combine to provide larger word meaning is critical for long-term vocabulary development for students (Castles et al., 2018; Claravall, 2016; Kraut, 2015).

When analyzing student level data, a majority of students fell into the beginning and developing decoder status (Wagner, 2011). For students at these levels, explicit phonics instruction is needed such as consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) patterns and/or consonant blends in order to work on developing their fluency rates (Wagner, 2011). Since students are able to more accurately identify sight words but are not able to fluently identify nonsense words, more basic phonological decoding skills may be needed (Wagner, 2011). For the student who fell into the pre-decoding status, more specific work on phonemic awareness and phonological awareness is needed to ensure progress and movement toward language development skills (Wagner, 2011). Additionally, the student level data indicated that students are in need of specific and explicit skill development of basic literacy skills in order for them to develop the other areas of reading, such as, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (NRP, 2000).

**Context of Findings**

While there is a dearth of research in regards to secondary teachers' knowledge of basic language skills and constructs, the research done with primary or elementary teachers indicates interesting similarities. The researcher provides context of how the current research study contributes to the body of research regarding teachers' knowledge

of basic literacy skills for the secondary context as it relates to ELLs and SLIFE.

***Teacher Preparation***

Similar to Spear-Swerling and Alfano's (2005) study of elementary level graduate students, where teachers with high-backgrounds of preparation and experience demonstrated higher performance of knowledge of basic language constructs, teacher preparation such as having a reading endorsement (in this study) had a significant impact to overall performance. Additionally, other studies (Moats, 1994; Pittman et al., 2019) found factors such as years of teaching experience did not necessarily yield more positive results on surveys assessing teacher knowledge of basic literacy skills. In contrast, Washburn et al. (2011) did find that first year teachers had significantly lower outcomes in the area of phonics, but significantly higher scores in the area of morphology than others in the study. Additionally, Spear-Swerling and Chessman (2012) found that teacher experience and certification level did have an influence on teacher knowledge. Of note, studies (see Carlisle et al., 2011; Cunningham, 2015) have uncovered that collaborative, ongoing, focused, intentional professional development in the areas of basic literacy skills can actually improve teachers' knowledge and impact instructional practice in the classroom. The current study adds to the body of research indicating that teacher preparation, whether prior to teaching or while teaching, can have significant positive impacts on teacher knowledge and even student outcomes (Babinski et al., 2018; Carlisle et al., 2011; DaSilva Iddings & Rose, 2012; Piasta et al., 2009).

***Domains of Literacy Constructs***

There continues to be a body of research indicating teachers, specifically elementary/primary level ones, do not have the knowledge or skills needed to teach

reading (Chapman et al., 2018; Cunningham, 2015; Joshi et al., 2009a; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Pittman et al., 2019; Washburn et al., 2011). The survey of teacher knowledge of basic literacy skills and concepts used in this study with secondary educators came from Binks-Cantrell et al. (2012a; 2012b). Chapman et al. (2018) utilized this same survey and elements of the survey were found in surveys in other research as well (Pittman et al., 2019; Washburn et al., 2011; Washburn et al., 2016). Other research has been conducted utilizing different questions to assess application of content knowledge in addition to basic knowledge and skills of elementary teachers (Carlisle et al., 2011; Moats, 1994; Moats & Foorman, 2003). Findings in this study mirror that of other studies regardless of survey type (Carlisle et al., 2011; Chapman et al., 2018; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Pittman et al., 2019; Washburn et al., 2011) indicating that the areas of phonological and phonemic awareness are strongest for teachers and the area of morphology presents the most challenge. These findings have also been reflective of instructors at the graduate and preservice levels (Bos et al., 2001; Joshi et al., 2009a; Moats, 1994). The ability of respondents to utilize implicit knowledge of phonological skills, such as, syllable counting, was evidenced at similar high levels not only in this study but also in other research (Bos et al., 2001; Joshi et al., 2009a; Pittman et al., 2019; Washburn et al., 2011). Of note, participants in this study who incorrectly indicated the number of syllables in the word ‘frogs’ tended to choose that it has two syllables which is a similar finding in research done by Washburn et al. (2011).

When asked to identify the number of phonemes in words, elementary teachers performed highest with words such as ‘ship’, ‘moon’, and ‘knee’ (Washburn et al., 2011) which was the same finding for the secondary teachers in the current study. Due to the

simplistic nature of these words, it is possible that respondents are using their implicit knowledge and skills to identify the phonemes, similarly seen in Pittman et al. (2019). However, when there was a more complex phonemic awareness skill being tested, such as ‘x’ being comprised of two phonemes /k/ and /s/, respondents had much more difficulty in this study and in other studies as well (Cunningham et al., 2004; Joshi et al., 2009a; Moats, 1994; Washburn et al., 2011).

Teachers need both implicit and explicit knowledge in order to teach reading (Joshi et al., 2009a; Pittman et al., 2019), particularly as it pertains to letter-sound correspondence and phonics skills (NPR, 2000). Items that required explicit knowledge of phonics, such as, the principle governing the use of the letter ‘c’ or ‘k’ for the initial sound /k/ were not only challenging for the secondary teachers in this study, but were also for educators in studies conducted by Moats (1994), Cunningham et al. (2004), Spear-Swerling and Cheesman (2012), and Washburn et al. (2016).

Related to the findings of this study, the area of morphology and the various aspects related to morphological principles has been shown to be the most challenging for educators in various contexts and settings (Chapman et al., 2018; Moats, 1994; Moats & Foorman, 2003; Pittman et al., 2019; Washburn et al., 2011; Washburn et al., 2016). In this study, most of the items related to morphology required participants to count the number of morphemes in words. Participants scored lowest on the words ‘disassemble’ and ‘pedestal’ which is a similar finding to Pittman et al. (2019). Interestingly, the highest score in the study came with the word ‘spinster’ and that same word was the lowest in Joshi et al. (2009a). However, with other words with similar morphological structures, such as ‘teacher’ and ‘observer’, educators in both this study and Joshi et al.

(2009a) were not able to apply the principles of morphology in equal measure with more getting 'teacher' correct than 'observer'. Unlike other studies (Pittman et al., 2019; Washburn et al., 2011) that also included items that assessed morphological analysis of words (i.e. prefixes, suffixes, or root words) where participants yielded somewhat better results, this survey was limited to counting morphemes only.

***Self-Perception versus Performance***

Cunningham et al. (2004) indicated that elementary teachers had higher self-perceptions of their phonemic awareness and phonics skills and knowledge than their actual knowledge as measured on a basic literacy skills knowledge survey. In contrast, the findings of this study were more in line with other research (Spear-Swerling & Alfano, 2005) indicating that there was a correlation between teachers' performance and their self-perception in regards to phonemic awareness and phonics. Related, Ramos (2019) found that secondary teachers' perceptions of phonics-based strategies for high school readers was inconsistent noting that some of the explicit phonics strategies caused frustration for students. However, in this study, a high percentage of respondents' perceptions were in agreement/strong agreement that explicit phonics instruction was needed for SLIFE literacy development (Items 18.04, 18.12). Of note, the teachers' self-perception of both their knowledge of teaching skills compared to their overall survey knowledge and their self-perception of vocabulary knowledge compared to their survey knowledge of morphological principles were found to have no correlation. This indicates that teachers' self-perception of their abilities and their actual knowledge is not the same which is a similar finding as Bos et al. (2001) and Cunningham et al. (2004).

## Implications of Findings

Learning to read is not natural (Trieman, 2018); and further, it is a complex process requiring implicit and explicit knowledge of various linguistic properties (Castles et al., 2018). In order for students of any age to acquire the skills of reading, those in charge of that instruction must have the knowledge of the various linguistic features and the processes in order to provide effective instruction. Based on these facts, there are several implications and recommendations derived from this study.

### *Working Knowledge of SLIFE*

Research continues to indicate that ELL students with limited or interrupted formal education not only are increasing within the United States K-12 educational system (Custodio & O'Laoughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a), but that they continue to lag in academic success (Potochnick, 2018). However, it is evident based on the responses of those in this study, that there is not a clear understanding of which students in their classes may even be identified as SLIFE. One critical element of ensuring an environment is poised for culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015) is knowing who students are (including their backgrounds) and developing relationships with them. It is recommended that the researcher's state develop a common definition of SLIFE and that the district develop processes and procedures for identifying those students who meet the qualifications of SLIFE. Having systematic processes for identification will also aid in disaggregating student achievement data in order to develop interventions and programs specifically for the SLIFE student group. Additionally, it is recommended that secondary teachers be provided explicit professional development in identifying SLIFE, SLIFE potential educational needs, and ways to

support their academic and language development.

***Teacher Preparation***

The participants in this study have taught for an average 16.5 years (ranging from 2 years to 34 years) with a majority (81%) having the ESOL Endorsement/Certification. However, it was not necessarily years of teaching experience or even having obtained the ESOL Endorsement/Certification that yielded any significant difference in regards to overall teacher knowledge of basic literacy constructs. The finding that those who held a Reading Endorsement had better knowledge of basic literacy constructs is critical because without that specific training it may be that secondary teachers are not fully equipped to provide basic literacy skill instruction for any student, but specifically ELLs and SLIFE.

An interesting finding of this study, is that teachers who had experience teaching a primary grade (Kindergarten, 1st, or 2nd) also performed significantly better on their overall knowledge of basic literacy skills. Studies (Joshi et al., 2009a; Joshi et al., 2009b; NCTQ, 2018; Salinger et al., 2010) have shown that many elementary education teacher preparation programs lack fundamental instruction in the five essential components of effective reading instruction (Castles et al., 2018; NPR, 2000) and some exclude the Simple View of Reading all together (Buckingham & Meeks, 2019). While the simple fact that a teacher had experience teaching in a primary grade may have impacted this outcome, it may not be because they hold a degree or certification in elementary education. Additionally, the overwhelming similarities of teacher knowledge (or lack thereof) of phonology, phonemic awareness, phonics, and morphology between this study of secondary teachers of ELLs and various studies of elementary teacher educators were

alarming (Bos et al., 2001; Chapman et al, 2018; Cunningham et al., 2004; Moats, 1994; Pittman et al., 2019; Washburn et al., 2011; Washburn et al., 2016). While participants in this study perceived overall their knowledge of basic literacy skills was sufficient (Item 18.08), the findings did not bear that out as seen with the non-correlation of self-perception and teachers' overall knowledge (see Item 19.07). Secondary teachers in this study did not have significant knowledge of basic literacy constructs. It is profoundly evident that educators who are teaching students to read, regardless of age, should have deep understanding of both implicit and explicit knowledge/skills of basic literacy skills. Further, this knowledge may not be able to be acquired in the current traditional teacher preparation, licensing/certification, or endorsement programs.

***Knowledge of Basic Literacy Constructs***

There is a presumption in this study indicating that in order for a teacher to be able to utilize knowledge or skills they must first possess that knowledge or skill; which is another way of stating the Peter Effect (Applegate & Applegate, 2004). Student level data presented in the study indicated ELLs at the high school level may be able to accurately identify letter names, sight words, and nonsense words with vary degrees of success. However, there is a clear indication that students in the English Language Development courses will need more explicit instruction in the *constrained literacy skills* of basic literacy (Paris, 2005) such as phonology, phonics, and morphology in order to become more fluent readers and ultimately *good comprehenders* (O'Conner et al., 2019). In order for this to occur, secondary teachers of ELLs need specific knowledge of basic literacy constructs.

Piasta et al. (2009) found that teachers with specific literacy knowledge provided

higher levels of instruction for students and were able to provide more explicit, direct instruction of certain skills such as decoding. Further, this yielded higher student achievement when the specific literacy knowledge was explicitly utilized within instructional practices (Piasta et al., 2009). Related, Carlisle et al. (2011) found that there was some relation to teachers' knowledge of linguistic content and student reading comprehension particularly as it related to 1st grade reading scores. While it may not be statistically significant, there does seem to be evidence (Carlisle et al., 2011; Piasta et al., 2009) indicating that the stronger a teacher's knowledge of linguistic skills (phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, and morphology) the better prepared they will be to leverage that knowledge to provide explicit instruction for students. Specific to ELL language development, other research (Friend et al., 2009; Pittman et al., 2019) indicated that stronger teacher knowledge of basic literacy skills can positively impact student achievement. The implication of this study further adds to the body of research indicating that, specifically, secondary teachers of ELLs may have some implicit knowledge of linguistic constructs, but may not have the full knowledge and skills necessary to provide strong, explicit instruction for students when needed. Of particular concern, is in the linguistic area of morphology.

Knowledge of morphological relationships (or morphological awareness) refers to one's ability to manipulate morphemes and understand the structure of words; and this knowledge underpins many reading processes (Castles et al., 2018; Kraut, 2015). For words that have one morpheme (i.e. *bat*, *boy*, *ball*), the understanding of the similar sounds does not help in knowing the meaning of these words and the relationship between the printed word and its meaning must be learned (Castles et al., 2018).

However, approximately 80% of the English words contain more than one morpheme and once students develop morphological awareness to build up and deconstruct words, this knowledge can be applied in various contexts ultimately impacting reading ability (Castles et al., 2018; Pittman et al., 2019).

In a study of undergraduate L2 English speakers, Kraut (2015) found that while L2 speakers can and do improve their morphological awareness, this skill did not become automatic for them as it does for native speakers of English. However, Kraut (2015) argued that the ability of L2 learners to decompose words to their morphological components yields faster word recognition and ultimately faster reading and fluency. Further, explicit teaching of morphological structures, including practice with composing and decomposing words, should be a part of an ELL's instruction (Kraut, 2015). These findings are significant and related to the current study in that undergraduate ELLs and secondary ELLs tend to be closer in age supporting the argument that explicit instruction in morphological awareness (Castles et al., 2018) can be beneficial for secondary ELLs' vocabulary and reading development. The current study has found that secondary teachers of ELLs may not strongly possess the knowledge and skills related to morphological constructs in order to provide effective and explicit instruction to positively impact student reading achievement (Piasta et al., 2009; Carlisle et al., 2011). A strong recommendation based on this study's research is for secondary teachers of ELLs and SLIFE to increase their linguistic knowledge specifically as it relates to morphological constructs.

***Professional Development and Resource Development***

A key finding of this study is that those teachers who either taught at the primary

level and/or had a reading endorsement were found to have stronger knowledge of basic literacy concepts and skills indicating that the more experience or exposure one has with basic literacy concepts the better able they are to have knowledge of those concepts (Babinski et al., 2018; Carlisle et al., 2011; Friend et al., 2009) though this may not translate directly to instructional practices or student outcomes alone (Piasta et al., 2009). However, many of the secondary teachers of ELLs (particularly those in this study) do not have this background knowledge that they can leverage when providing instruction for ELLs and/or SLIFE. In order for reading achievement outcomes to improve for ELLs and SLIFE, secondary teachers of ELLs need to develop stronger linguistic knowledge about basic literacy constructs, as well as, effective strategies for teaching basic literacy skills in secondary contexts (see Appendix C for recommended resources). Further, it is recommended that this professional development be sustained, collaborative, and job-embedded with critical reflective practices to be most effective (Babinksi et al., 2018; DaSilva & Rose, 2012; Russell, 2014). One such model to accomplish this specifically as it relates to increasing knowledge of basic literacy skills is the *Teacher Study Group* (see Cunningham & O'Donnell, 2015).

Research indicates that the development of basic literacy skills is critical for the development of reading comprehension; however, this should be a part of a balanced instructional literacy program (Castles et al., 2018). Oral language development is directly related to phonological and phonemic awareness skill development and must be a part of the secondary literacy program. Additionally, for secondary SLIFE, literacy development programs must be culturally responsive (DeCapua, 2020; Gay, 2018) while also honoring what students already know from previous experiences. It is recommended

that secondary teachers of SLIFE utilize approaches such as the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (see Appendix D) or the Language Experience Approach (see Appendix E) when developing literacy programs for secondary SLIFE students incorporating basic literacy skill development.

## Limitations of the Study

All research designs have some limitations to them (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019); and as such, the researcher sought to mitigate such limitations through statistical control, as well as, minimizing as many threats to validity as possible (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). While general conclusions can be drawn from the current study, there are other limitations of the study discussed in order for those conclusions to be placed in the correct context for future research.

### *Control*

As Edmonds & Kennedy (2017) indicated, for the validity to be solidified in quantitative methods, control must be attended to through five areas: manipulation, elimination, inclusion, group assignment, or statistical procedures (p. 13). Since this is non-experimental research, statistical procedures is the only element of control to be applied (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). The use of specific statistical procedures to observational data can support causal inference (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017).

### *Validity*

In addressing threats for non-experimental research, threats to external validity, construct validity, and statistical conclusion validity must be addressed (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). To mitigate sample characters as a threat to external validity, this design utilized a probability sampling strategy (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). A

systematic sampling of the overall survey respondents was intended to be utilized for the data analysis; in this way, every other response would be included in the data survey (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). However, due to the size of the data set, systematic sampling was not utilized; and as such, the interpretation of results must be confined to the study itself.

Threats to construct validity were important to minimize as the entire construction of the survey could pose a threat. Specific alignment of the survey elements to the research questions was one way the researcher minimized the threat to construct validity (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Additionally, the survey was given to five participants from the sample population for feedback prior to sending out to all other high school teachers in the school district to minimize construct validity (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). After feedback was given, slight adjustments were made (e.g. for education level, both B.A./B.S. were included instead of just B.A. as was in the original survey) for ease of respondents. Timing of the measurement (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017) is a large threat to construct validity. To address this threat, the survey was open for only three weeks and took place in the middle of the fall semester. In this way, there was some control over other outside conditions, which may have impacted the responses by participants.

To mitigate against the threat of statistical conclusion validity (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017), the researcher worked to align the survey questions to ensure that they measured what they presumed to measure. Each section directly aligned to a research question to strengthen validity. Additionally, a portion of the survey had been utilized in other studies (see Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012b; Chapman et al., 2015; Washburn et al.,

2016) and had been found to be constructed reliably in those studies. During the data analysis process, the Bonferroni adjustment technique was utilized to adjust the significance level to minimize statistical conclusion validity (Huck, 2012). Further, to strengthen validity overall, the researcher strove for at least 60% response rate from the population surveyed. However, there was much lower response rate of only 45 respondents which is a response rate of approximately 30%. It is hypothesized that due to teacher exhaustion due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Singer, 2020) there was a lower response rate from secondary teachers.

***Limitations***

All research designs have some limitations to them (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In this non-experimental research with a survey approach and explanatory design, there are a few limitations that must be highlighted. Due to the sample size of only 32 teachers, there are limitations about how the results can be applied to all secondary teachers of SLIFE. However, general conclusions are able to be drawn from the explanation of the results and their relation to secondary SLIFE and teachers of those students. In addition, there are some limitations in the findings due to the fact that the threat timing of measurement to construct validity was not able to be mitigated fully. There may have still been events that occurred during the survey window or even the impact of Covid-19 (NASEM, 2020) on the teachers that were beyond the researcher's control. Further, the student data set only represented one small group of high school ELLs from one point in time during the Covid-19 pandemic and as such is not representative of all secondary ELLs in high school. However, for the students with less than two years of English instruction in the United States (those in the student data set),

some general conclusions can be drawn about the linguistic needs of these students and potentially others like them.

Another limitation is that the survey was completed in private on the teachers' own time and there is no way to ensure reference materials were used. However, similar to Pittman et al. (2019), this may have yielded higher scores overall but the findings of the survey did not reflect that outcome. General conclusions from the study are able to be drawn and explained specific to the perception of secondary teachers' toward instruction of basic literacy skills for SLIFE, as well as, the teachers' knowledge and skills as it relates to basic literacy skills constructs. However, it is important to note that self-reporting can yield social desirability bias where respondents report what they feel is more acceptable and not their actual self-perception (Dillman, 1978).

Moreover, explanations about SLIFE students' level of basic literacy skills needs may be able to be generalized, but since the student level data presented was not specific to SLIFE some caution should be taken when making any larger claims than those presented. While there are some limitations in creating direct correlations between teachers' knowledge and skill level and perception of basic literacy skill development, considerations for current usage of findings for instructional purposes are evident.

**Future Research Directions**

The current study sought to understand teachers' perception and knowledge of basic literacy skills and how that may affect the teaching of these needed skills for secondary SLIFE in high school settings. Research has indicated teachers (both preservice and in-service at the elementary level) do not have the necessary knowledge or skills of basic literacy constructs (see Chapman et al., 2018; Piasta et al., 2009; Washburn

et al., 2011) in order to provide instruction of these skills to their students. The findings of this study further support previous research (such as Ramos, 2019; Pittman et al., 2019) and specifically discuss the areas of need in the secondary context for SLIFE. However, further research continues to be needed in this field as it relates to instructional practices at the secondary level for ELLs and SLIFE.

The researcher's recommendations for future research include: a) to expand the current study, b) to analyze application of teacher knowledge; c) to examine teacher preparation, d) to further determine student outcomes, and e) to determine student knowledge. The first recommendation for future research is to examine if similar findings are evident within a larger body of high school level teachers of ELLs utilizing the same Teacher Knowledge Survey found in this study or in Binks-Cantrell et al. (2012a). This could include different size districts in the same state or other larger urban districts throughout the United States. Additionally, it would be interesting to see if similar findings are evident for similar teachers of ELLs at the middle school level utilizing similar surveys. A second area of future research could explore how other teacher knowledge surveys of basic literacy skills that incorporate more application of skills (e.g. Moats & Foorman, 2003; Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012) relate to the findings of this study using a similar high school teacher of ELLs population. Since there is a distinct difference between having knowledge of something and being able to apply that knowledge (or skill) in context, this area for future research is critical.

The third recommendation for future research is to explore teacher preparation programs similar to the NCTQ (2018), but specifically for teachers of English language learners at the secondary level. There could be an analysis to see if the five areas of

reading instruction (Castles et al., 2018; NPR, 2000) or the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) are included in either undergraduate ESOL programs or in ESOL Endorsement Programs. Since the current study was completed in Florida, future teacher education program analysis could be done within the state of Florida or in other comparative programs around the United States.

The fourth area for future research would be to explore the impact of explicit instruction of basic literacy skills (such as morphological awareness) on secondary SLIFE student achievement. Using an experimental between group design (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017), researchers could apply explicit instruction of these skills over time to various groups of SLIFE students in order to determine the effectiveness of the intervention on overall student achievement. Finally, a fifth area for future research would be to explore what areas of basic literacy skills (phonology, phonemic awareness, phonics, or morphology) are most impacted for SLIFE based on their country of origin and time learning the English language. Understanding that all languages have a variety of different linguistic features and structures which differ from the English language (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020; Swan & Smith, 2001), this recommendation would be to determine which specific basic literacy constructs are impacted either negatively or positively based on the native language or L1 of SLIFE as they acquired English.

**Conclusion**

The study that was conducted and described here has added to a growing body of research about teacher perception and knowledge of basic literacy skills, and specifically highlighted areas related to secondary teachers who teach ELLs and SLIFE. Further, it provides insight into possible factors for why secondary SLIFE may not be developing

reading skills or achieving as well academically as others in their peer group. Secondary teachers who do not fully possess the prerequisite knowledge and skills of linguistic constructs may not be able to apply effective instructional practices to support the development of those constructs with their students. If academic achievement for ELLs and SLIFE at the secondary level is to improve, we must first ensure those charged with providing instruction and learning opportunities for these students have the correct knowledge, skills, and tools to do so. It is important to note that just as the ability to read and develop an additional language are complex processes, so are the variety of challenges and issues related to teacher knowledge, instructional practices, and student outcomes and in particular at the secondary level. However, these complexities and challenges cannot be allowed impede the growth of students. Researchers, teacher preparation program designers, curriculum and professional development creators, and other educational stakeholders should take note and seek to apply recommendations to improve the academic outcomes for secondary ELLs and SLIFE.

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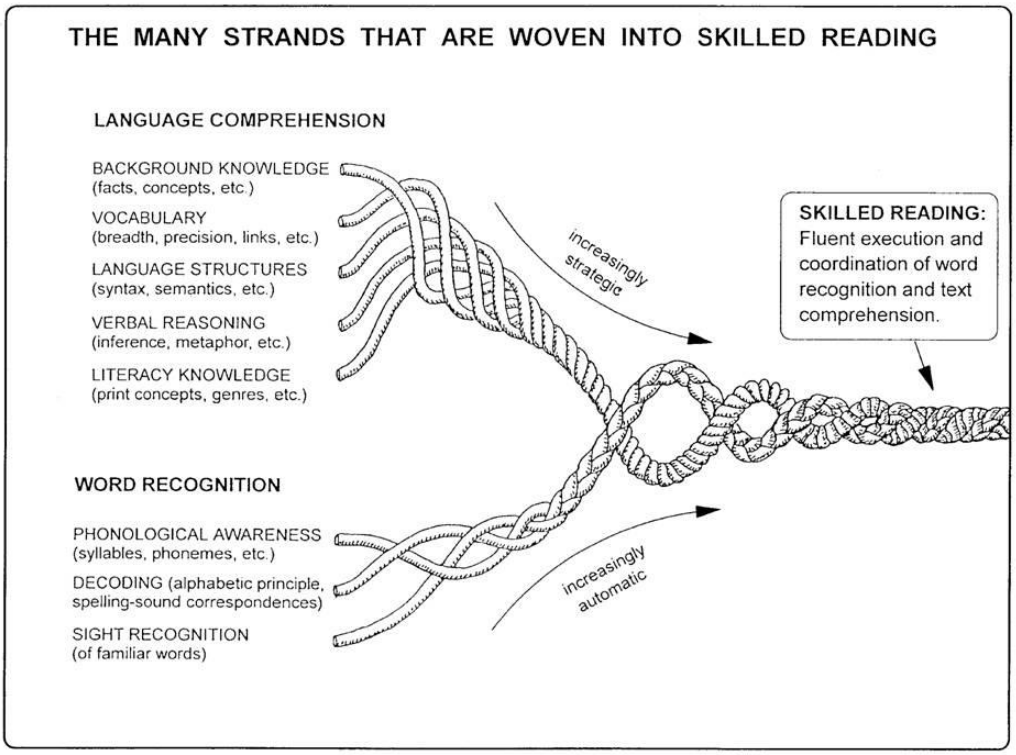
Appendix A

Scarborough's Reading Rope

**Scarborough's Reading Rope**




*Note.* The image originally appeard in the following publication: Scarborough, H.S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook for research in early literacy* (pp. 97-110). Gilford Press.

Appendix B

Teacher Knowledge Survey

# Teacher Knowledge Survey

Teacher Knowledge Survey

**Thank you for agreeing to take a one-time, anonymous survey. The survey will take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete.**

**The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which teachers' perceptions and knowledge of basic literacy skills affects the teaching of these skills for secondary ELLs with limited or interrupted formal education in the high school setting.**

**As such, you are encouraged to complete this survey on your own without the help of others or support materials such as the internet or other reference materials.**

Teacher Knowledge Survey

Personal Data

1. What is your gender?

- ○ Female
- ○ Male
- ○ Non-binary/third gender
- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Prefer to self-describe

2. What is your age?

3. How long have you lived abroad consecutively in a country where a language other than English was primarily spoken?

- ○ Never
- ○ 1-3 weeks
- ○ 1-6 months
- ○ 7 months- 1 year
- ○ 1 - 2 years
- ○ 2+ years

4. If you speak an additional language other than English, which term defines your proficiency in that language? [*Definitions of proficiency adapted from the U.S. Department of State (n.d.).]

- ○ Elementary Proficiency (Able to satisfy routine travel needs)
- ○ Limited Working Proficiency (Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements.)
- ○ Minimum Professional Proficiency (Able to speak the language with sufficient accuracy to participate in most conversations on social, and professional topics.)
- ○ Full Professional Proficiency (Able to use the language fluently and accurately related to professional needs.)
- ○ Native/Bilingual (Equivalent to that of an educated native speaker.)
- ○ I do not speak a language other than English.

## Teacher Knowledge Survey

### Training and Prior Education

5. Which term indicates your current level of education?

- ○ B.A./B.S.
- ○ B.A./B.S. +15 credits
- ○ M.A./M.S.
- ○ M.A./M.S. +15 credits
- ○ PhD/EdD

6. How many university courses related to teaching ESL have you completed? (e.g. Second Language Acquisition, ESL, Reading, etc.)

- ○ 0
- ○ 1-2
- ○ 3-5
- ○ 6-8
- ○ 9+

7. What, if any, professional development or formal course work have you had that was specific to teaching of basic literacy skills? (e.g. Wilson Just Words, Orton Gillingham, etc.) Please list them.

8. What certifications or endorsements do you hold?

- [ ] Early Childhood
- [ ] Elementary
- [ ] Secondary English
- [ ] ESOL
- [ ] Reading
- [ ] Gifted
- [ ] Secondary Social Studies
- [ ] Secondary Mathematics
- [ ] Secondary Science
- [ ] Other (please specify)

## Teacher Knowledge Survey

### Previous Teaching Experience

9. Overall, how many years have you been teaching in schools?

10. In those years, how many years have you had English Language Learners (ELLs) in your classroom?

11. In your career, what grade levels have you taught? (Choose all that apply.)

- [ ] PK
- [ ] K
- [ ] 1st
- [ ] 2nd
- [ ] 3rd
- [ ] 4th
- [ ] 5th
- [ ] 6th
- [ ] 7th
- [ ] 8th
- [ ] 9th
- [ ] 10th
- [ ] 11th
- [ ] 12th

## Current Teaching Responsibilities

12. What subject(s) do you currently teach?

- [ ] English Language Development (ELD)
- [ ] English Language Arts
- [ ] Intensive Reading
- [ ] Physical Education
- [ ] Developmental Language Arts through Reading (DLA-R)
- [ ] Arts/Music
- [ ] Mathematics
- [ ] World Language
- [ ] Science
- [ ] Other (please specify)

13. What grades(s) do you currently teach?

- [ ] K-5
- [ ] 6-8
- [ ] 9-12

14. How many of your classes currently have ELLs in them? (Please indicate as # out of #. For example, 2 out of 5 classes taught.)

15. Of the students you teach, approximately what percentage are ELLs?

- ( ) 0-20%
- ( ) 21-40%
- ( ) 41-60%
- ( ) 61-80%
- ( ) 81-100%
- ( ) Not sure

16. How many of your classes currently have SLIFE (students with limited or interrupted formal education) in them?

17. Of the students you teach, approximately what percentage are SLIFE?

- ( ) 0-20%
- ( ) 21-40%
- ( ) 41-60%
- ( ) 61-80%
- ( ) 81-100%
- ( ) Not sure

## Personal Perception

**SLIFE = students with limited or interrupted formal education**

**Basic literacy skills = foundational reading skills such as phonics, phonemic awareness, decoding**

18. Rate the following statements as STRONGLY DISAGREE, DISAGREE, NEUTRAL/NOT SURE, AGREE, STRONG AGREE.

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral/Not Sure | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Secondary SLIFE develop phonemic awareness without explicit instruction. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Phonics skills should be taught directly to secondary SLIFE for language acquisition. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Secondary SLIFE's reading ability is directly related to their phonics skill development. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Basic literacy skills should be explicitly taught to secondary SLIFE. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Secondary ESOL teachers should know basic literacy skills for SLIFE instruction. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Secondary SLIFE will develop basic literacy skills without direct instruction of those concepts. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Secondary SLIFE develop basic literacy skills through social interactions with peers. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Training I have received has prepared me to teach SLIFE basic literacy skills. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| My knowledge of basic literacy skills is sufficient for instructional practices. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| SLIFE develop basic literacy skills most effectively through indirect instruction. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| For SLIFE success, separate (de-contextualized) instruction on phonics skills is needed. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

## Teacher Knowledge Survey

### Knowledge and Skills

19. Please evaluate (using MINIMAL, MODERATE, VERY GOOD, EXPERT) your knowledge of:

| | Minimal | Moderate | Very Good | Expert |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Phonemic Awareness | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Phonics | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Fluency | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Vocabulary | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Comprehension | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Children's literature | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Teaching literacy skills to ELLs | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Using assessment to inform reading instruction | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

## Teacher Knowledge Survey

20. A phoneme refers to

- ○ a single letter.
- ○ a single speech sound.
- ○ a single unit of meaning.
- ○ a grapheme.
- ○ no idea

21. If tife is a word, the letter "i" would probably sound like the "i" in

- if
- beautiful
- find
- ceiling
- sing
- no idea

## Teacher Knowledge Survey

22. A combination of two or three consonants pronounced so that each letter keeps its own identity is called:

- silent consonant
- consonant digraph
- diphthong
- consonant blend
- no idea

## Teacher Knowledge Survey

23. How many speech sounds are in the following words? For example, the word "cat" has 3 speech sounds 'k'-'a'-'t'. Speech sounds do not necessarily equal the number of letters.

| | |
|---|---|
| box | |
| grass | |
| ship | |
| moon | |
| brush | |
| knee | |
| through | |

24. What type of task would the following be? "Say the word 'cat'. Now say the word without the /k/ sound."

- blending
- deletion
- rhyming
- no idea
- segmentation

Teacher Knowledge Survey

25. A "soft c" is in the word:

- Chicago
- city
- cat
- none of the above
- chair
- no idea

Teacher Knowledge Survey

26. Identify the pair of words that begins with the same sound:

- joke-goat
- chip-chemist
- chef-shoe
- no idea
- quiet-giant

Teacher Knowledge Survey

**The next 2 items involve saying a word and then reversing the order of the sounds. For example, the word "back" would be "cab."**

27. If you say the word, and then reverse the order of the sounds, ice would be:

- easy
- sigh
- sea
- no idea
- size

28. If you say the word, and then reverse the sounds, enough would be:

- fun
- one
- phone
- no idea
- funny

## Teacher Knowledge Survey

29. All of the following nonsense words have a silent letter, except:

- bamb
- knam
- wrin
- phop
- shipe
- no idea

## Teacher Knowledge Survey

30. For each of the words on the left, determine the number of syllables and the number of morphemes. **(Please be sure to give both the number of syllables and the number of morphemes, even though it may be the same number.)**

| | # of syllables | # of morphemes |
|---|---|---|
| disassemble | | |
| heaven | | |
| observer | | |
| spinster | | |
| pedestal | | |
| frogs | | |
| teacher | | |

31. Which of the following words has an example of a final stable syllable?

- wave
- bacon
- paddle
- napkin
- none of the above
- no idea

Teacher Knowledge Survey

32. Which of the following words has 2 closed syllables?

- [ ] wave
- [ ] bacon
- [ ] paddle
- [ ] napkin
- [ ] none of the above
- [ ] no idea

Teacher Knowledge Survey

33. Which of the following words contains an open syllable?

- [ ] wave
- [ ] bacon
- [ ] paddle
- [ ] napkin
- [ ] none of the above
- [ ] no idea

34. Phonological awareness is:

- the ability to use letter-sound correspondences to decode.
- the same as phonics.
- the understanding of how spoken language is broken down and manipulated.
- no idea
- a teaching method of decoding skills.

## Teacher Knowledge Survey

35. Phonemic awareness is:

- the same as phonological awareness.
- the ability to use sound-symbol correspondences to read new words.
- the understanding of how letters and sounds are put together to form words.
- no idea
- the ability to break down and manipulate the individual sounds in spoken language.

## Teacher Knowledge Survey

36. What is the rule that governs the use of 'c' in the initial position for /k/?

- 'c' is used for /k/ in the initial position before e, i, or y
- none of the above
- the use of 'c' for /k/ in the initial position is random and must be memorized
- no idea
- 'c' is used for /k/ in the initial position before a, o, u, or any consonant

## Teacher Knowledge Survey

37. What is the rule that governs the use of 'k' in the initial position for /k/?

- 'k' is used for /k/ in the initial position before e, i, or y
- none of the above
- the use of 'k' for /k/ in the initial position is random and must be memorized
- no idea
- 'k' is used for /k/ in the initial position before a, o, u, or any consonant

## Teacher Knowledge Survey

38. A morpheme refers to:

- a single letter.
- a grapheme.
- a single speech sound.
- no idea
- a single unit of meaning.

# Appendix C

## Resources for Basic Literacy Skills and Supporting Secondary SLIFE

**Resources for Basic Literacy Skills and Supporting Secondary SLIFE**

| Resource Information | Brief Explanation of Resource |
|---|---|
| *Literacy Foundations for English Learners: A Comprehensive Guide to Evidence-Based Instruction* (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020) | Provides information about basic literacy skills (including spelling and writing) that are essential to literacy development for ELLs. Can be used in a book study group as there are application and extension activities included. |
| *Research-Based Methods of Reading Instruction for English Language Learners* (Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007) | Provides information about the five components of literacy with specific examples of classroom application for ELLs. Additionally, multiple lists of words such as "two-phoneme and three-phoneme words" (p 26) and "most common rimes" (p. 46) provide usable information for secondary teachers of SLIFE. |
| *Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers* (Moats, 2020) *and Speech to Print: Language Exercises for Teachers Workbook* (Moats & Rosow, 2020) | Provides explicit and practical knowledge about basic literacy constructs (phonetics, phonology, orthography, morphology, syntax, and semantics) to build teacher knowledge. The Workbook provides opportunities for educators to practice and apply skills learned and can be done through professional development and study groups. |
| *Early Reading Accelerators Content Collections (K-2)* (Achieve the Core, 2021) https://achievethecore.org/collection/9/early-reading-accelerators-k-2 | Provides specific information about foundational and basic literacy skills that can build teachers' knowledge. While the resource is focused on K-2, the information and knowledge gained can be applied at the secondary level. Specific ideas for ELLs and remote learning are provided. |
| *Phonics Instruction for Middle and High School ELLs* (Robertson, 2009) https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/phonics-instruction-middle-and-high-school-ells | Provides practical strategies for using phonics instructional practices for secondary ELL students. |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Reading 101 for English Language Learners* (Robertson, 2019) https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/reading-101-english-language-learners | Provides information to build teacher knowledge on basic literacy skills and their implications for ELLs. While the information is geared toward early elementary levels, the knowledge and skills addressed can be applied at the secondary level. |
| *Integrating Morphological Knowledge in Literacy Instruction* (Claravall, 2016) | Provides a framework and practical suggestions for developing morphemic analysis with students. While the focus is for teachers of students with disabilities, practical tips for any teacher are provided. |
| *Learner English: A Teacher's Guide to Inference and Other Problems* (Swan & Smith, 2001) | Provides discussion on linguistic features of other languages (e.g. Chinese, Dutch, Spanish, etc.) and their differences from English using basic literacy skill knowledge. Knowledge gained can inform instructional practices. |
| *Essential Linguistics: What You Need To Know to Teach Reading, ESL, Spelling, Phonics, Grammar* (Freeman & Freeman, 2004) | Provides discussion about various basic language constructs including phonology, phonics, and morphology as it relates to ELLs. Additionally, there are extension activities and discussion questions for group study. |
| *Relevant Linguistics: An Introduction to the Structure and Use of English for Teachers (2nd Ed.).* (Justice, 2004) | Provides a practical guide for building knowledge and skills about phonology, phonics, morphology, and syntax. Included are multiple practice exercises to build knowledge and application of skills. |
| *Boosting Achievement: Reaching Students with Interrupted or Minimal Education* (Salva & Matis, 2017) | Provides specific resources and practical instructional practices for working with SLIFE. Additionally, resources for providing a balanced approach to literacy instruction utilizing basic literacy skills are provided. |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Meeting the Needs of SLIFE: A Guide for Educators* (DeCapua et al., 2020) | Provides information about working with and supporting SLIFE, and provides ideas on developing basic literacy skills for SLIFE at the secondary level. Additionally, resources such as "Common English Sight Words" (p. 49) are provided for educators. |
| *Students with Interrupted Formal Education: Bridging Where They Are and What They Need* (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017) | Provides information about working with SLIFE and creating instructional programs for this student group of ELLs. Specific instructional practices for developing basic literacy skills is also included. |
| *Supporting Latino Students with Interrupted Formal Education: A Guide for Teachers* (Digby, n.d.) | Provides a practical guide for supporting and providing instruction for SLIFE students at the secondary level. Practical solutions for instruction and literacy development are provided. |
| *SIFE Manual: Bridges to Academic Success.* (NYSDOE, 2019) | Provides various practical instructional strategies to specifically utilize in the instruction of SLIFE students. Additionally, information about developing literacy for SLIFE is included. |
| *Interactive Guide to SLIFE* (MDESE, 2019) https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/slife/content/index.html#/ | Provides an interactive online overview of SLIFE and instructional supports that can be used to support literacy and language development. |

Appendix D

Mutually Adaptive Language Paradigm

## Mutually Adaptive Language Paradigm

SLIFE are as diverse a student group as the larger ELL group with students coming to the United States from all over the world and who not only learn to speak a new language but also learn to read and write in this new language in order to be successful in the secondary school context (Marrero Colón, 2018). For SLIFE, the difference and dissonance between their native schooling versus schooling in the United States can be greatly different (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010b). SLIFE must acclimate to a new culture (both community and school) as well as the more individualistic orientation of the Western-style schooling in the United States (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011b; Zacarian & Haynes, 2012).

In order to support SLIFE as they make this transition to the United States and attend to their new academic expectations, DeCapua & Marshall (2011a; 2011b; 2015) posited an "asset-based, culturally responsive instructional model" (DeCapua, 2020, p. 51) called the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP). MALP is not a collection of instructional practices or strategies, but rather a framework to support the adaptation of priorities of both teachers and students (SLIFE) to understand what is essential and what can be adapted (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a, 2011b; DeCapua, 2020). The three components of MALP are "accept conditions from SLIFE", "combine process from SLIFE and U.S. Schools", and "focus on U.S. learning activities with familiar language and content" (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, p. 53). In accepting conditions, teachers focus on both creating immediate relevancy for SLIFE and ensuring that there is interconnectedness in the learning (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a). As teachers work to combine processes, they support students moving from shared responsibility to more

individual student accountability and from more oral traditions to writing tasks based on these oral accounts (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a). Finally, there is a focus on decontextualized learning activities that support academic ways of thinking utilizing relevant content (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a; DeCapua, 2020).

DeCapua and Marshall (2011a) posited the MALP Checklist that teachers can utilize to apply the principles of MALP in meaningful ways in the classroom (see Figure 5). The MALP framework recognizes the unique knowledge that SLIFE enter the classroom with, builds upon that knowledge fostering the interconnectedness of learning experiences, while also supporting the transition to more academic tasks in order for SLIFE to be successful within the U.S. school context (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011a; 2011b; DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; DeCapua, 2020).

**Figure**

*The MALP Checklist*

| **Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm-MALP<br>Teacher Planning Checklist** |
|---|
| **A. Accept Conditions for Learning** |
| A1. I am making this lesson/project immediately relevant to students.<br>*Explain.* |
| A2. I am helping students develop and maintain interconnectedness.<br>*Explain.* |
| **B. Combine Processes for Learning** |
| B1. I am incorporating shared responsibility and individual accountability.<br>*Explain.* |
| B2. I am scaffolding the written word through oral interaction.<br>*Explain*. |
| **C. Focus on New Activities for Learning** |
| C1. I am focusing on tasks requiring academic ways of thinking.<br>*Explain.* |
| C2. I am making these tasks accessible with familiar language and content.<br>*Explain.* |

*Note*. Adapted from DeCapua & Marshall (2011a, p. 68).

Appendix E

Language Experience Approach

## Language Experience Approach

For language minority students, word recognition skills and similar foundational literacy skills must be in place for full literacy development and reading comprehension (August & Shanahan, 2006). The Language Experience Approach (LEA) is a highly effective method that utilizes ELLs own experiences and language (Hoover et al., 2016; Salva & Matis, 2017).

LEA is not a new approach to teaching students in general or even English language learners. This approach was first introduced by Huey (1908) and developed in the 1960s and 1970s as a way to teach young elementary students to read (Hall, 1972; Taylor, 1993). Since that time, this approach has be utilized to support ELLs in their oral language and literacy development (Hall, 1972; Taylor, 1993; Moustafa & Penrose, 1985; Hoover et al., 2016; Salva & Matis, 2017). Hall (1970, 1972) found that LEA was an effective way to meet the psychological and linguistic needs of ELLs; and further, Taylor (1993) utilized LEA for adult ELL students to create appropriate texts for adults who have low-literacy skills.

Although there has been some criticism (Moustafa & Penrose, 1985) of LEA as a method for ELLs, more current research (Dankaro, 2015; Hoffner, 2004; Hoover et al., 2016; Salva & Matis, 2017) find that LEA's use of personalized experiences for literacy development supports literacy development while building students' self-identity. Other research (Hoffman, 2019; Molyneux & Hiorth, 2019; Stewart et al., 2018) indicated that, particularly for students from refugee or immigrant backgrounds, pedagogical practices that leverage students' lived experiences and are of high-interest are effective means to developing language and literacy. Related, Krashen and Terrell (1983) indicated that

texts used by ELLs should be at an appropriate level and be interesting which is supported by the LEA methodology of instruction.

LEA is flexible enough to be used in small groups, pairs, or whole group settings and integrates the four domains of language (Hoover et al., 2016; Taylor, 1993). "Vocabulary from the text can be starting places for teaching various word recognition approaches, such as the alphabetic principle, phonics, sight words, or morphological awareness" (Hoover et al., 2016, p. 104). Dankaro (2015) found that using LEA in a ten-week intervention program in Nigeria with newcomer students significantly increased sight word recognition. In a different context, Hoffner (2004) found that using an adaptive version of LEA improved a high school student's confidence in reading and improved fluency. Hoffner (2004) noted that in the LEA, due to the nature of the approach, respect for secondary students is an embedded feature particularly when learning grade level content or foundational literacy skills.

Students' *funds of knowledge* (González et al., 2005) or what they bring with them to the classroom is the basis of the LEA approach (Hall, 1970, 1972). Additionally, this interactive, culturally relevant methodology not only allows for foundational literacy skill development but also for content specific language and vocabulary development as well (August & Shanahan, 2006; Castles et al, 2018; Chenowith, 2014; Dankaro, 2015; Hoover et al., 2016; Huang, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995; NASEM, 2017).

***Characteristics of the Language Experience Approach***

While LEA can be used in a variety of contexts and settings (Hoover et al., 2016), there are some basic characteristics that are attributed to this approach. Hall (1970) describes common elements to LEA as being student composed, integration of the four

domains of language, learning and teaching are communicative and creative, and the products are personalized. During the LEA process, students collaboratively discuss a shared experience, the teacher writes that account out for all to see, and then this text becomes the basis for other literacy activities (Hall, 1970; Hoover et al., 2016; Salva & Matis, 2017). The shared experience can be one that students have had previous to coming to the learning environment or one that is co-created within the confines of the classroom. Examples of shared experiences could be: leaving one's country, living in an apartment, living through a hurricane, attending a field trip, playing with a younger sibling, and/or viewing the same photo or video.

The following steps for LEA are adapted from research (Hall, 1970; Dankaro, 2015; Moustafa & Penrose, 1985; Salva & Matis, 2017; Taylor, 1993):

1. With the teacher, students describe a shared experience. Students are listening to others and orally describing the event.

2. The teacher writes exactly what is being dictated on chart paper for all in the class to see. This will become the text used for literacy development and practice.

3. First, the teacher models by reading the text aloud and tracking the text visually. Next, the students read the text aloud with the teacher in unison at least one time but up to three depending on the length of the text. The students then read the text again with partners each taking turns reading the text.

4. The teacher utilizes the text for the development of basic literacy skills and vocabulary development.

5. Each student receives a copy of the text and practices reading the text individually.

6. For two days, steps 3-5 are repeated; then on the third day, the process would start over again. After several weeks, students have several texts with which to practice reading independently. The teacher can continue to utilize these texts to focus on foundational literacy skill development. Drawing specific examples of phonological, phonemic, phonics, or morphological skills from the co-created text.

Through the process of co-creating shared experienced texts, students begin to develop foundational literacy skills through explicit teaching while having the opportunity to develop oral language, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension through context rich, culturally relevant literacy activities.