

RURAL HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF AN INVERTED
INTERVENTION MODEL TO SUPPORT ENGLISH LEARNERS: A MULTIPLE
CASE STUDY

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to Dr. Lory Haas with gratitude for unfailing support and expert guidance through my dissertation journey; and dedicated to my mother, my siblings, my children, and my grandchildren as the bearers of the love and joy of my life.

ABSTRACT

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Purpose

“Rural high school teachers’ perceptions of an inverted intervention model to support English language learners: A multiple case study” explored the perceptions of rural high school teachers regarding: (a) adequacy to offer content-area instruction to English learners embedded in mainstream classrooms; (b) adequacy of pre-service and professional development training intended to provide instructional strategies suitable for English learners in content-area classrooms; (c) district support for content-area instruction for English learners; (d) the impact of rurality on classroom compositions and intervention needs; and, (e) the impact of high-stakes, state-mandated tests on the academic outcomes of English learners in rural high school content-area classrooms.

Method

This qualitative, multiple-case study included rural high school content-area teacher participants providing instruction in mathematics, science, and social studies and a regional education service center expert in English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual education. Data were collected from an initial participant questionnaire, individual participant interviews, a group participant interview, and an individual interview with a regional ESL/bilingual education expert.

Findings

Themes emerging from data analyses adequately addressed research questions and purpose of the study, indicating a need for the provision of contextualized

professional training, organized district support, and involvement of teachers in campus, district, regional, and state policy decisions intended to provide support for the instruction of English learners embedded in mainstream, content-area classrooms.

KEY WORDS: Content-Area Teachers; English Learners (ELs); Professional Development; Regional Education Service Center; Response to Intervention (RTI); Rural High Schools; State-Mandated Testing

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The academic successes and the developmental achievements of high school learners are significantly linked to the quality of instruction and the emotional support provided by teachers (Goldhaber, 2016; Klusmann, Richter, & Lüdka, 2016; Wentzel, Russell, & Baker, 2016). High school teachers orchestrate the academic instruction of increasingly diverse populations (Goldhaber, 2016). Professional development and professional support of content-area high school teachers must be expanded to achieve the successful implementation of differentiated instruction providing effective literacy and language-learning instruction for diverse learners (Hansen-Thomas, Richens, Kakkar, & Okeyo, 2016; Luttrell, 2011). Training and support are especially critical to rural high school teachers providing literacy and language instruction embedded in content-area classrooms (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Bozburun, 2011; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Luster, 2014; Menken, Hudson, & Leung, 2014).

Teachers in rural schools often face unique challenges such as lower-than-average salaries; geographic isolation; a high percentage of low socioeconomic status (SES) learners; and expanded responsibilities assigned to a small staff (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Cho & Reich, 2008; Decapua & Marshall, 2009; Greenough & Nelson, 2015; Jimerson, 2005; Jordan & Forbis, 2004). Rural content-area teachers are often expected to embed literacy and language instruction within content instruction without the benefit of adequate professional training or trained support personnel (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Rubenstein-Avila & Lee, 2014). Bozburun (2011) described how the rural district in which he taught found a low-cost means of meeting legally mandated requirements for

English as a second language (ESL) certification of teachers providing instruction to English learners (ELs) by identifying all other teachers as co-teachers practicing under Bozburun's ESL certification. Bozburun (2011) explained, "The school did not provide any kind of training for my new position. Neither the lead teachers nor I knew what to do in the classroom" (p. 27).

The expectation that rural high school teachers provide adequate literacy and language instruction to diverse learners in content-area classrooms without adequate training or support is more likely to meet with disappointment and frustration than with any measure of consistent success (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Jimerson, 2005). Gaining a deeper understanding of the perceptions of rural high school educators regarding meeting the needs of ELs in content-area classrooms may produce deeper insight into the steps required to move toward more consistent academic successes. This study focused on rural high school teachers with regard to the perceived ability to effectively teach ELs in content-area classrooms; the perceived adequacy of training and resources provided in rural districts in support of EL instruction; and the perceived stresses resulting from attempts to embed literacy and language instruction within content-area classrooms, particularly in a policy-driven climate aimed at standardization as a means of closing achievement gaps (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Jimerson, 2005; Reardon, 2011).

Background of the Study

The current study emerged from my personal experiences as an English language arts (ELA) teacher in a rural high school in which a lack of time for planning and reflection acted as harbingers of stress. Further, limited time for collaboration with colleagues created a sense of isolation. Concerns arose, in particular, from my

observation of academic outcomes for many ELs who attended district schools for multiple years without learning to speak, read, or write in English with the proficiency required to thrive in content-area classrooms—all the while being subjected to repeated attempts to pass state exit exams. As a practitioner and as a researcher, I found myself curious as to what other rural high school teachers perceived regarding the instruction of ELs in mainstream classes. Are the levels of classroom support and professional training available in rural districts perceived as adequate to the task of embedding language learning into mainstream classrooms? Are specific instructional strategies perceived as effective techniques for integrating differentiated language instruction into content curriculum? What are the perceived effects of repeated failures of ELs on exit exams?

Statement of the Problem

In 2004, Walker, Shafer, and Liams predicted that teacher attitudes toward instructing ELs in mainstream classrooms will “significantly deteriorate” (p. 132). Researchers suggested several inciting factors in the posited decline of teacher dispositions toward the instruction of ELs in mainstream classes. The four key issues cited by researchers included: (a) continued growth of diverse language speakers in the United States; (b) lack of adequate teacher training directed at EL instruction within mainstream classrooms; (c) increased settlement of immigrants and refugees in areas with smaller populations and fewer school resources; and, (d) legislation that holds schools and teachers accountable for the academic outcomes of ELs—a factor that may result in a “backlash against the very students the legislation is supposed to help” (Walker et al., 2004, p. 132).

As researchers predicted, language diversity in the United States rose from the 2004 population of 52.7 million speaking a language other than English to 63.2 million in 2014 (Ryan, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2016a; Walker et al., 2004; Zong & Batalova, 2016). Many rural areas experienced an increased influx of immigrants, especially rural areas located in the Southeast and in the Midwest (Hertz & Zahniser, 2016; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2016; Walker et al., 2004). Researchers indicated that, although a large percentage of teachers harbored positive attitudes toward teaching ELs in mainstream classes, many teachers felt ill prepared to embed language instruction into content matter or to differentiate content instruction to meet language learner needs (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; O'Brien, 2011; Rubenstein-Avila & Lee, 2014). High school teachers in rural districts may be especially hampered by a lack of support and training available to promote the successful instruction of ELs in mainstream classes (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Luttrell, 2011). Considering researcher predictions concerning the impact of EL populations in the United States, teacher perceptions regarding effectively teaching ELs in rural mainstream classrooms were worthy of investigation (Klusmann et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2004; Wentzel et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to use a qualitative research methodology to facilitate a better understanding of the perceptions of rural high school teachers. Further, a multiple case study design supported an in-depth exploration of rural teacher perceptions regarding the ability to effectively deliver language instruction to ELs in the context of rural content-area classrooms (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; McMillan & Wergin, 2010). Specifically, the study focused on: (a) teacher perceptions of the level of

professional training and district resources allotted to the instruction of ELs in content-area classrooms; (b) teacher perceptions of strategies that support effective language instruction in content curriculum; (c) teacher perceptions of stress or burnout related to the instructional demands resulting from EL instruction in content-area classrooms; and, (d) teacher perceptions of the effects of state-mandated exit exams on the educational outcomes of ELs.

Significance of the Study

The study was intended as a means of developing a deeper knowledge and understanding of the perceptions of rural high school teachers regarding the instruction of ELs in mainstream classrooms and seeking to determine commonalities or themes in reported perceptions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The development of common themes supported the transferability of study results by revealing possible means for improving academic outcomes for ELs (Morrow, 2005). Discovering the perceived stresses of rural high school teachers suggested the means of reducing stress and increasing the retention of qualified teachers in rural districts (Ingersoll, 2001; Klusmann et al., 2016; Phillips, 2015). Further, the perceptions of teachers concerning effective strategies for differentiating instruction for language learners in content instruction contributed to the body of strategic tools useful to other practitioners (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Finally, teacher perceptions concerning the impact of state exit exams on the academic outcomes of ELs, particularly in cases in which limited language acquisition hinders accurate assessment of content acquisition, suggested changes that would enhance EL assessment policies (Luster, 2014; Menken et al., 2014; Wixom, 2015).

Framework for Classroom Intervention Models

Tiered intervention models emerging from The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) provided a framework for instruction that relies on progress measurement data intended to assess student performance rather than data obtained from IQ tests and other measures intended to assess student deficiencies (Jaeger & Pearson, 2017; Lovett et al., 2008; Meltzer, 2001). The study, building on the existing conceptual framework of embedded tiers or levels of intervention, posed an *inverted intervention model* in which the largest percentage of learners in a mainstream classroom demonstrated a need for supplemental small group or individual instruction, while the smallest percentage of learners demonstrated on-grade-level skills and abilities (Jaeger & Pearson, 2017; Lovett et al., 2008; Meltzer, 2001). An inverted intervention model illustrated the composition of many rural high school content-area classrooms (Lovett et al., 2008; Theodori & Theodori, 2014). Further, this model highlighted the critical need for ongoing teacher training and for adequate district support to realize the successful instruction of ELs in rural content-area classrooms (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Additionally, an inverted intervention model highlighted the need for a reevaluation of policy-level mandates that have thus far been largely unsuccessful in closing achievement gaps (Lauen, & Gaddis, 2016; Melnick, 2016; Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

Constructivist theory supported an inquiry into the perceptions of rural high school teachers with a focus on content-area instruction (Krashen, 1987, 1988; Piaget, 1985; Vygotsky, 1986). Constructivism serves as an umbrella covering a broad range of

suppositions regarding the mechanisms of learning connected by a common understanding of learning as a process of knowledge construction (Bruner, 1963; Mason, 1993; Piaget, 1971, 1985; Vygotsky, 1986). Piaget (1985) contributed to the theory of constructivism with a focus on the cognitive processes involved in learning and on the developmental stages supporting learning; whereas, Vygotsky (1986) advanced the theory of constructivism with a focus on the social processes involved in learning and on the means by which learners exceed developmental stages when supported by an expert model. Modern constructivist theory emerged from cognitive and social learning theories as a loosely unified understanding of the connections made within the processes of learning. Such connections include: (a) the connections of prior knowledge to new knowledge; (b) the connections of individual learners to co-learners; (c) the connections of ideas across disciplines; and, (d) the connections of second language acquisition to academic content acquisition (Krashen, 1987, 1988; Peterson, 2012; Scholnik, Kol, & Abarbanel, 2006).

Piaget (1977) decried “the divide between academic departments in the sciences and the humanities” (Peterson, 2012, p. 885), as comprehension builds on prior knowledge often gleaned from cross-disciplinary conceptualizations. The process of schema building provides a model for cognition in which a learner either *assimilates* new information into a pre-existing schema or *accommodates* new information by repairing or replacing an existing schema (Piaget, 1985). According to Piaget (1985), cognitive *disequilibrium* provides the driving force for assimilation and accommodation. Longfield (2009) described disequilibrium as “discrepant events—demonstrations that produce unexpected outcomes—...used to capture students’ attention and to confront their

beliefs” (p. 266). Thus, an educator relying on a constructivist framework seeks to build on existing knowledge and to provide sources of cognitive disequilibrium to activate schema-building processes in learners (Schcolnik et al., 2006).

Vygotsky (1978) focused on the significance of language, social context, and social interaction in the processes of learning construction. Vygotsky (1978) posed a *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) as a collaborative social space that offers learners the support of a *more knowledgeable other* (MKO) with the possible result of exceeding developmental limitations of the learner. Learning that takes place within the ZPD as supported by the MKO is described as “development...through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Wood et al. (1976) described the learning supports available within the ZPD as *scaffolding* or differentiated support provided until a task is mastered and can be repeated by a learner without support. Practitioner applications of Piaget’s (1985) cognitive learning stages reflect assessment of learner readiness; whereas, applications of Vygotsky’s (1986) social constructivist theory shifts practitioner focus from measures of readiness to emergence of learner skills within the ZPD.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study: (a) What are the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to personal ability to successfully manage the instruction of ELs in a mainstream classroom?; (b) What are the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to effective strategies for the integration of language instruction into content curriculum?; (c) What are the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to professional training and development provided in support

of the integration of language instruction into content curriculum?; (d) What are the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to district resources available in support of the integration of language instruction into content curriculum?; (e) What are the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to stress associated with the instructional demands involved in providing literacy and language instruction in content classrooms reflecting an inverted intervention model?; and, (f) What are the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to the effects of state-mandated exit exams on the academic outcomes of ELs?

Definition of Terms

The following terms were important to the study; therefore, the definitions below are provided to the reader for clarity and consistency.

Authenticity Criteria

Authenticity criteria refer to five characteristics supporting the trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Morrow, 2005; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008). Authenticity criteria include the following: (a) *fairness*, indicating equitable representation of diverse values; (b) *ontological authenticity*, indicating researcher recognition of growth in participant dispositions; (c) *educative authenticity*, indicating expansion of participant dispositions to accept diverse values; (d) *catalytic authenticity*, indicating growth of participant dispositions leading to action; and, (e) *tactical authenticity*, indicating empowerment of participants to act on growing dispositions of acceptance (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Morrow, 2005; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2008).

Bilingual Instructional Models

Bilingual instructional models fall on a continuum moving from subtractive, immersive approaches to additive, dual-language approaches (Menkin, 2013; Morse, 2005; Ruiz, 1984). Subtractive language models are driven by the goal of assimilating ELs as rapidly as possible into the dominant language (Menkin, 2013; Ruiz, 1984). Additive language models are undergirded by the goal of achieving bilingualism (Morse, 2005; Murphy, 2014; Ruiz, 1984).

Dual-Language

The term *Dual-Language* (DL) represents instructional goals that diverge from subtractive language models (Murphy, 2014). While the goals of subtractive models include phasing out instruction in a native language, DL supports an additive approach in fostering ongoing instruction in two languages (Kim, Hutchison, & Winsler, 2015; Murphy, 2014). DL presents in one of two sub-forms: (a) *one-way DL* in which only ELs are enrolled in DL courses; and, (b) *two-way DL* or *two-way immersion* (TWI) in which both ELs and native English speakers are enrolled in DL courses (Kim et al., 2015; Murphy, 2014).

English as a Second Language

The term *English as a Second Language* (ESL) represents a school environment in which a subtractive EL program provides temporary English language instruction within a regularly scheduled pull-out or push-in program for ELs who also attend content-area classes conducted in English (Kim et al., 2015; Murphy, 2014). Pull-out programs refer to supplemental services offered to students in a setting removed from the

classroom; whereas, push-in programs refer to supplemental services offered to students within the setting of a regularly scheduled classroom meeting (Dawson, 2014).

Limited English Proficient (LEP) and English Learner (EL)

Federal policy designates language learners that have not fully acquired English as *limited English proficient* (LEP) learners; however, researchers and practitioners often identify such individuals as *English learners* (ELs) in the interest of applying a less deficit-oriented label (Kim et al., 2015; Spees, Potochnik, & Perreira, 2010). Consistent identification of language learners lends to clarity and signals the underlying attitude of the researcher or practitioner toward the population of interest (Kim et al., 2015). For the purposes of this study, English learners were identified as ELs.

Rural Schools

The study required a definition of what constitutes a rural school. Prior to 2006, the United States Census Bureau identified a rural locale simply as not urban (Greenough & Nelson, 2015). Geographic Information System (GIS) technology allowed the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to develop an expanded definition of rural that incorporates proximities to *urban centers* or settled areas with a population of 50,000 or greater, and to *urban clusters* or settled areas with a population between 25,000 and 50,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Based on NCES data, a rural population may be sub-classified as: (a) *fringe rural*, indicating a locale situated between 2.5 miles and 5 miles from an urban cluster; (b) *distant rural*, indicating a locale situated between 5 miles and 25 miles from an urban area or between 2.5 miles and 10 miles from an urban cluster; or, (c) *remote rural*, indicating a locale more than 25 miles from an urban center and more than 10 miles from

an urban cluster (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The current NCES system resulted in the classification of 30,773 out of 95,121 public schools as rural schools serving more than 24% of all public-school students (Greenough & Nelson, 2015). The ability to identify a rural school by proximity or remoteness supported an increased understanding of possible advantages to rural locales, such as small student-to-teacher ratios, and possible challenges to rural locales, such as recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff (Greenough & Nelson, 2015; Scott & McMurrer, 2015).

Structured English Immersion

The term *Structured English Immersion* (SEI) represents a school environment in which a subtractive EL program includes temporary instruction in a first language with the goal of transitioning ELs into English-based instruction as rapidly as possible (Fazio & Lyster, 1998; Gort, deJong, & Cobb, 2008; Newcomer, 2015).

Transitional Bilingual Education

The term *Transitional Bilingual Education* (TBE) represents a subtractive language approach offering temporary instruction both in English and in a native language with the goal of phasing out instruction in a native language following the primary grades (Kim et al., 2015; Murphy, 2014).

Delimitations

Delimitations in the study included the selection of a qualitative research methodology with a multiple case study design and the selection of rural high school teachers as participants (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Stake, 2005). A qualitative multiple case study supported the collection of data relevant to the research questions and to the

cultural milieu of a rural high school (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Stake, 2005). The focus on rural high school teachers as study participants stemmed from my personal experiences as a rural high school teacher, as well as from my desire to seek the perspectives of rural high school teachers in response to the research questions. The findings provided insight as to experiences and perspectives more specific to high school teachers in rural areas versus larger school districts.

Limitations

Although the concept of “first do not harm” is generally associated with ethical practices in the field of medicine, educational researchers also bear an enhanced responsibility for ethical comportment, as educational research may logically be supposed to exert a possible impact on the development and wellbeing of children and young people. An ethical approach to qualitative research demands researcher evaluation of limitations imposed by threats to the trustworthiness of a study that may arise during the design of a study, as well as during the processes of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Benge, Onwuegbuzie, & Robbins, 2012; Morrow, 2005).

Key threats to the trustworthiness of the study included *researcher bias* and *reactivity* (Benge et al., 2012; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Researcher bias describes a threat to study trustworthiness that occurs when the values of a researcher are unconsciously transmitted to participants or to data collected from participants (Benge et al., 2012). The threat of researcher bias was mitigated in the study through member checking of transcribed interviews to ensure accuracy and representativeness of participant responses (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additional steps taken to address researcher bias in the study

included triangulation of data and methods, researcher maintenance of a reflexive journal throughout all stages of the study, and peer review at the data collection and the data analysis stages of the study (Anfara et al., 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Reactivity in the form of the *Hawthorne effect* presented an additional threat to the trustworthiness of the study that resulted from a possible belief of study participants that specific responses were expected (Landsberger, 1958; Morrow, 2005; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). The threat of reactivity was reduced in the study by describing study protocols to participants to assure anonymity and confidentiality (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). The researcher assumed a neo-positivist approach to interviews by maintaining neutrality with the goal of uncovering participant values via verbal and nonverbal modes of communication (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Roulston, 2010).

Further, data triangulation and methodological triangulation contributed to the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the study (Anfara et al., 2002; Denzin, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of methods included the collection and analysis of questionnaire data, individual interview data, group interview data, member checking data, and reflexive journal data (Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of data included data collected from rural high school teacher participants and from a regional educational service center expert as an individual participant, as well as data collected from a group interview (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Kimchi, Polivka, & Stevenson, 1991; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Assumptions

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) posited, “Assumptions are so basic that, without them, the research problem itself could not exist” (p. 62). The study rested on three basic assumptions. First, there was an assumption that participants responded to interview questions openly and honestly. To ensure participant transparency, I explained study procedures dedicated to protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents.

A second assumption was that study participants were representative of the population that is the focus of this study, specifically, rural high school teachers. To verify this assumption, participants completed an initial questionnaire (Connelly, 2013). Questionnaire data provided verification of participant status, as well as contributing to methodological triangulation (Anfara et al., 2002).

A further assumption made regarding this study was that qualitative data cannot be generalized (Benge et al., 2012). Due to lack of generalizability of data collected during the study, steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of study results (Morrow, 2005). As a facet of study trustworthiness, transferability of the study allows readers to consider the applicability of the study (Morrow, 2005).

Organization of the Study

The study was organized into six chapters: (a) introduction; (b) review of the literature; (c) methodology; (d) presentation of data; (e) analysis of data; and, (e) discussion, implications, and recommendations. Chapter I included the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions. The study organization supported an understanding of the relevance of the study, a demonstration of a gap in the literature

that provided a rationale for conducting the study, an elucidation of study methodology, a description of the results of data collection and analyses addressing research questions, and a discussion relating the implications of the study in present and in future investigations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

A review of the literature enables a researcher to encapsulate existing disciplinary knowledge surrounding a research topic and to examine the theoretical and conceptual bases for conducting a study (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016; Roberts, 2004). Further, a review of the literature provides insight into the extant literature related to a specific topic within a discipline and allows a researcher to detect any gaps in previous research that lend merit to the pursuit of a research topic (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016; Roberts, 2004). Finally, a review of the literature provides a researcher with an opportunity to synthesize previous research providing additional insight into a topic and building a framework for the selection of study questions, study methodology, and study organization (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016; Roberts, 2004).

This study addressed the topic of high school teacher perceptions of the instruction of ELs in rural, content-area classrooms—a research topic that filled a gap in existing knowledge as demonstrated by a thorough review of the literature. The synthesis of previous literature within the review contributed to the selection of research questions, research methodology, and research organization. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study were consistent with the disciplinary knowledge revealed during the literature review.

Theoretical Framework and Second Language Acquisition

The constructivist-driven repositioning of learners represents one of the most significant shifts in contemporary education, signaling a movement away from a

traditionalist approach of knowledge transmission to passive learners to a transformative approach of knowledge construction by active learners (Peterson, 2012; Scholnik et al., 2006). Practical application of constructivist theory transforms nearly every element of education from classroom environments to curricular choices (Peterson, 2012; Scholnik et al., 2006). For example, learners receiving knowledge from an expert are generally seated in desks arranged in rows; however, constructivist theory lends to positioning learners in pairs or small groups to facilitate collaboration within the ZPD (Peterson, 2012; Piaget, 1977; Scholnik et al., 2006; Vygotsky, 1986; Wood et al., 1976).

Contemporary applications of constructivist theory also transform second language learning approaches from the process of transmitting hierarchical principles of language to learner construction of language within the contexts of previous experiences and day-to-day demands for language growth (Krashen, 1987, 1988). A constructivist language acquisition approach supports meaningful language practice in which learner errors are viewed as part of the natural learning process rather than as prompts for teacher corrections (Krashen, 1987, 1988; Scholnik et al., 2006). In addition, language construction may be understood as the integration of both general and content language into contextualized learning opportunities (Krashen, 1987, 1988; Scholnik et al., 2006).

However, a caution should be noted regarding the application of constructivist language acquisition theory (Krashen, 1987, 1988; Vygotsky, 1986). The 20th century resurgence of constructivism spurred a large-scale rejection of drill-based learning activities associated with behaviorist theory—a rejection that may limit imitation as an instructional methodology despite its pivotal role in constructivist learning theory (de Guerrero & Commander, 2013; Skinner, 1938; Vygotsky, 1986). Imitation as a

thoughtful and purposeful activity leads to *entrenchment*, or the internalization of language skills resulting from “constant exposure to linguistic models,” (de Guerrero & Commander, 2013, p.436). As constructivist language acquisition processes, imitation and entrenchment are viable approaches in the context of mainstream learning experiences in which peer and expert models support reading, writing, listening, and speaking development within the ZPD (Gándara & Orfield, 2012; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986; Wood et al., 1976).

In addition to peer and expert models, a constructivist-influenced classroom environment ideally provides comprehensible instruction within the processes of language acquisition, thereby facilitating the ability of learners to progress at a reasonable pace (Gándara & Orfield, 2012; Krashen, 1988). Further, a continued development of proficiency in a native language generally produces the most successful academic outcomes for ELs (Cummins, 2000; Krashen, 1988). Bilingual development provides “the most accurate predictor of success in end-of-high school exams” (Malone, 2012, p. 6)—a fact that contradicts the subtractive methodologies currently implemented in most language learning programs (Cummins, 2000; Malone, 2012).

In making reasonable applications of constructivist learning theories to language acquisition processes, schema building should be initiated by drawing on a learner’s prior knowledge to make connections between new concepts and culturally relevant experiences (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Piaget, 1929). Activating a learner’s prior knowledge supports comprehension (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Piaget, 1929). Therefore, a teacher must be prepared to acknowledge and accentuate the diverse backgrounds of all learners despite the

complications of linguistic and cultural barriers that may exist between ELs and monolingual teachers (Flores & Smith, 2009).

Teachers are often expected to build cultural bridges and to embed second language instruction into content instruction with little to no professional preparation for such accomplishments (Butti, 2015; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Pawan & Craig, 2011). In many cases, rural classrooms are situated “in under-resourced educational systems, and where the classroom teachers receive minimal, if any, training” (Malone, 2012, p. 7). Despite such challenges, constructivist language acquisition theory supplies theoretical support for embedding literacy and second language instruction into content area instruction (Franquiz & Salinas, 2013; Krashen, 1987, 1988; Schcolnik et al., 2006; Vygotsky, 1986).

Historical Context of Bilingualism

In addition to shifting theoretical foundations, second language education in the United States reflects evolving historical contexts. Although English rapidly gained priority as the language of policy in American society and government, early bilingualism percolated within immigrant enclaves, and bilingual education spread throughout the North American continent at points where German, Dutch, Scandinavian, Norwegian, Swedish, French, and Russian settlements dotted the landscape (Brown, 1992; Ramsey, 2009). In the southwest, the Spanish language maintained a significant public role until the Mexican-American War in 1846 (Akkari & Loomis, 1998). However, the bilingualism fostered in local schools reflected the political and economic clout of specific immigrant groups and, therefore, did not extend to indigenous peoples or disenfranchised groups such as African Americans (Akkari & Loomis, 1998).

Many factors dampened the early practice of bilingual education in United States schools (Ramsey, 2009). Arriving on the heels of a late 19th century financial depression, a wave of early 20th century immigration coinciding with the forces of economic industrialization, social urbanization, and educational centralization diminished the impact of grass roots bilingual instruction on public education (Ramsey, 2009). Post WWI anti-German sentiment aligning with national isolationism dealt an additional blow to bilingual education during the early 20th century (Akkari & Loomis, 1998).

Sociopolitical forces unleashed during the Civil Rights era challenged some of the earlier setbacks to bilingual education (Kim et al., 2015). Although schools were not initially required to provide bilingual education under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965), the Title VII amendment to ESEA, commonly known as the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, served to allocate federal funds specifically for bilingual language education (Gunderson, 2008; Kim et al., 2015). Additionally, the landmark United States Supreme Court *Lau v Nichols* (1974) ruling delineated that equal treatment for students included receiving instruction in a language comprehensible to those students (Kim et al., 2015).

In 1988, in the wake of a rapidly growing immigrant population, California voters passed Proposition 227, effectively limiting language education programs to subtractive models intended to rapidly assimilate ELs into the English language (Gunderson, 2008). The successful passage of California's Proposition 227 spurred similar legislation in Arizona and Massachusetts (Gunderson, 2008). At the federal level, Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) effectively reversed the emphasis of the Bilingual

Education Act (ESEA, 1968) in favor of programs intended to support language learners in achieving English language proficiency as speedily as possible (Kim et al., 2015).

Ruiz (1984) described shifting attitudes toward the instruction of ELs in the United States as a reflection of alternating sociopolitical views of language as a problem, as a right, and as a resource. Early bilingual practices in education reflected an understanding of language as a resource; federal education legislation defined language as a right; and more recent state and federal policies approached bilingualism as a problem (Akkari & Loomis, 1998; Brown, 1992; Gunderson, 2008; Kim et al., 2015; Ramsey, 2009). The high dropout rates of ELs compared to native English-speaking peers does present a societal problem (Callahan, 2013; Morse, 2005). However, the problem appears to be generated largely because of societal attitudes toward bilingual education in which the “research-practice gap is wide and resources and political will are low for promising practices to be systematically implemented” (Tung, 2013, p. 2). Of note, the passage of the California Multilingual Education Act (2016) demonstrated a move away from a focus on English acquisition toward bilingual language acquisition. This shift in policy lends support to research evidence that bilingual language acquisition increases academic outcomes for learners; however, very few additive bilingual programs exist in United States schools (Cummins, 2000; Malone, 2012).

The position of the United States within a global economy suggests the inherent wisdom in developing effective approaches to education from the perspective of bilingualism as a national asset (Glassman & Hassett, 2003; Ruiz, 1984). Yet, language education in the United States generally features subtractive models such as structured English immersion (SEI); English as a Second Language (ESL) pull-out or push-in

programs; and transitional bilingual instruction (TBI) programs that offer various levels of language learning support with an end goal of assimilation (Fazio & Lyster, 1998; Gort et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2015; Murphy, 2014; Newcomer, 2015). Additive language models such as dual language (DL) and two-way immersion (TWI) programs are applied in about 2,000 of the approximately 98,000 public schools operating in the United States (Gross, 2016; Kim et al., 2015; Murphy, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). A plethora of conglomerate issues must be addressed to approach bilingualism as an asset, as the complexities, costs, and difficulties of pursuing DL or TWI often present roadblocks to additive language programs (Lara-Alecio et al., 2005; Ruiz, 1984; Tung, 2013).

Educational Context of Bilingualism

Subtractive language program models also present challenges. First, correctly positioning second language learners within the educational system requires the proper identification of ELs, the appropriate application of language proficiency assessments, and the effective establishment of school-to-home communications (Shim, 2013; Dorner, 2012; Wixom, 2015). Further, the explicit development of teacher dispositions and the professional training of teachers of ELs constitute important factors in successful second language instruction (Flores & Smith, 2009; Wixom, 2015; Yoon, 2007, 2008).

English Learner Positioning

DeCapua and Marshall (2009) describe the background experiences ELs bring into the classroom as being positioned along a continuum of low-context to high-context cultures with specific orientations to “time and space, verbal and nonverbal messages, social and gender roles, interpersonal relationships, and social and legal organization” (p.

161). Considering diverse EL backgrounds, Title III of ESEA (1965) commissioned individual states with developing the adequate means for correctly identifying ELs; assessing language proficiency; providing modified classroom instruction; and reaching out to EL parents.

Individual state responses to ESEA (1965) guidelines display both similarities and differences. For example, most states identify ELs via parental completion of a Home Language Survey (HLS) followed by an assessment of English language proficiencies (Goldenberg & Rutherford-Quach, 2012; Wixom, 2015). Further, all states respond to ESEA (1965) regulations by imposing an annual assessment of ELs in reading, writing, listening, and speaking proficiencies. Federal law also requires all states to provide two years of monitoring following an English learner exit from an EL program to continually assess adequate levels of English proficiency (ESEA, 1965).

Programs for establishing communications with the parents of ELs, while important to EL successes, exhibit far less continuity from state to state (Shim, 2013; Wixom, 2015). Beginning with enrollment in school, the successful identification of ELs may depend on clearly communicating the general purpose of and the specific questions within an HLS (Goldenberg & Rutherford-Quach, 2012; Wixom, 2015). Furthermore, parents must understand how to effectively navigate an educational system to make informed decisions on behalf of children (Dorner, 2012; Shim, 2013).

Budgets intended to meet federal guidelines for EL services also vary (Verstegen & Knoeppel, 2012; Wixom, 2015). Funding for EL services stemming from federal grants provided through Part A of Title III of the ESEA (1965) is inconsistent and does not sufficiently meet the costs of EL services, leaving states and districts to absorb

additional costs (Verstegen & Knoeppel, 2012; Wixom, 2015). Struggling districts may respond to a lack of resources by diverting funds from EL services to general education services or by preemptively exiting ELs from language programs (Verstegen & Knoeppel, 2012; Wixom, 2015). The practice of preemptive exiting from language programs demonstrates a disregard for evidence that second language learners require approximately two years to achieve basic communication skills and approximately five years to achieve academic language proficiency (Berg, Petró, & Greybeck, 2012; Brown, 1992; Cummins, 1979; Hughes, 2011). Ideally, local flexibility in budgeting should be tempered by accountability for acceptable academic outcomes for ELs (Verstegen & Knoeppel, 2012; Wixom, 2015).

Teacher Dispositions

Even in cases in which districts receive adequate funding for EL services, the academic successes of ELs may be hindered by inadequate teacher preparation (Samson & Collins, 2012; Wixom, 2015). Certainly, teacher preparation must begin with the development of a disposition to view diverse learner backgrounds as assets rather than as deficits (Flores & Smith, 2009; Yoon, 2007, 2008). Yoon's (2007) qualitative case study of a middle school teacher's practices indicated a connection between teacher dispositions toward ELs in the classroom and the ability of ELs to self-identify as "resourceful and intellectual" (p. 221). Yoon (2008) also provided evidence that teacher dispositions appear to affect the frequency of interactions between ELs and native-speaking peers.

Flores and Smith (2009) examined the dispositions of 564 teachers ranging from primary through secondary levels via a multivariate analysis of survey data. Data analysis

identified four factors that significantly correlate with positive teacher attitudes toward the instruction of ELs: (a) the level of teacher dispositions toward ELs; (b) the quality of teacher value for and nurture of ELs; (c) the level of acceptance teachers mete out to native English speakers and to ELs; and, (d) the level of responsibility teachers absorb or assign to others with regard to the academic failures and successes of ELs. Study results supported the concept that EL successes may depend, in part, on teacher dispositions (Flores & Smith, 2009).

Teacher Preparation

Positive teacher dispositions do not constitute the whole of adequate preparation required to effectively teach ELs within the structure of a mainstream classroom. Flores and Smith (2009) asserted “it is simply not enough that teachers have positive beliefs and attitudes...teachers must possess the appropriate theoretical, pedagogical, and cultural knowledge” (p. 328). Consider the first-year experiences of a teacher entering a high school English language arts (ELA) classroom (Knotts, 2016). Despite a strong pre-service commitment to a critical theory approach to education, the teacher reported “losing a sense of self, losing hope and losing sight” (Knotts, 2016, p. 221). Regardless of teacher dispositions, inclusive high school classroom settings create contextual challenges that surpass the mere desire to promote academic successes in diverse learner populations (Knotts, 2016).

Second language instruction embedded in content-area classrooms is more fully addressed through the development of supportive teacher dispositions in tandem with sufficient teacher training (Lopes-Murphy, 2012). However, research evidence indicates that, while many teachers harbor positive attitudes toward the inclusion of ELs in

content-area classrooms, most content-area teachers receive insufficient preparation for the instruction of ELs (Lopes-Murphy, 2012; Reeves, 2006; Rubenstein-Avila & Lee, 2014; Walker et al., 2004). Many states require specialized certification for ESL teachers, but “requirements for mainstream teachers to have training in ELL [English language learner] instruction methods vary widely” (Wixom, 2015, p. 8). A few states and districts within states require mainstream teachers to undergo some form of pre-service development of EL teaching methodologies or, in some cases, require all teachers to obtain certification in ESL education (Wixom, 2015).

ESL certification in some states may be obtained through examination without the completion of specialized coursework and, by whatever means obtained, does not necessarily guarantee adequate preparation to address the often highly differentiated needs of high school ELs in a mainstream classroom (Lopes-Murphy, 2012; Texas Education Agency, 2017a). The broad array of English proficiencies represented by high school ELs presents the greatest instructional challenge to rural secondary content teachers—teachers that are the least likely to be prepared for teaching literacy and language skills (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Lopes-Murphy, 2012).

Geographical Context of Bilingualism

The paucity of professional training in the instruction of ELs available to rural high school teachers is reflected by the fact that most educational research dedicated to contextualized learning focuses on urban learning environments (Schafft, 2016). Rural schools house approximately a quarter of the students enrolled in public schools and face challenges similar to those faced by urban institutions, including inequitable funding; high poverty rates; low school performance; diverse student needs; and difficulties

attracting, developing, and retaining highly qualified teachers (Johnson et al., 2014; National Education Agency, 2012; Schafft, 2016). Despite the shared challenges among urban and rural schools, a recent search of a few top-ranked education research journals yielded 64 articles with a focus on urban schools and only five articles with a rural focus (Schafft, 2016). Furthermore, many universities offering degree specializations in urban education neglect to offer specializations in rural education (Schafft, 2016).

Policymakers also exhibit a disregard for the unique needs of rural schools (Schafft, 2016). Many of the existing federal programs aimed at providing aid and assistance to rural schools focus largely on helping rural schools meet federal guidelines rather than on making contributions to place-based assistance suitable to the values of rural schools (Jimerson, 2005; Schafft, 2016). According to Jimerson (2005), federal policy-making intended to standardize educational outputs “tends to overlook the reality of rural places” (p. 4).

A unique challenge to rural schools and communities arises from the pressures often applied when a rural high school graduate must make the decision to remain in a rural community or to leave in the pursuit of more attractive economic opportunities (Bishop, 2004; Theodori & Theodori, 2014). Such choices may result in economic, political, and educational losses to a rural community, as well as losses to the individuals leaving a rural community—losses “which may include a loss of rural identity, the stress of leaving an established social network, and feelings of anger and emptiness” (Theodori & Theodori, 2014, p.105). Preparing learners in a contextually realistic manner provides support for economic realities and choices rural students often face (Bishop, 2004; Theodori & Theodori, 2014; Waite, 2013).

Rural Teacher Responsibility and Accountability

Rural content-area teachers also face place-based realities that may include inordinate levels of responsibility and accountability (Bishop, 2004; Jimerson, 2005). Increased responsibility stems from membership among a small staff expected to fill multiple roles, and elevated levels of accountability result from statistical anomalies in the high-stakes assessment of small student populations (Jimerson, 2005). Statistical anomalies occur when academic progress is represented by changes in small units of data (Jimerson, 2005). In other words, the measurement of adequate progress in a small rural school may hinge on the academic outcomes of a handful of students (Texas Education Agency, 2016; Jimerson, 2005). State testing policies and other performance indices for ELs in tandem with the unsupported instruction of ELs in content-area classrooms lends some credence to the scenario predicted by Walker et al. (2004) in which the attitudes of teachers may decline in the face of increasing demands for accountability.

Inverted Intervention Models in Rural Classrooms

The professional evaluation of rural teachers often hinges on successful instruction within classrooms representing exceptional challenges (Jaeger & Pearson, 2017; Lovett et al., 2008). An influx of minorities and low-income Whites in rural communities frequently coincides with a receding population of success-driven individuals leaving rural communities in search of educational and career opportunities elsewhere (Bishop, 2004; Schafft, 2016; Theodori & Theodori, 2014). Demographic shifts may overwhelm a rural school by preserving a population over-represented by low SES learners (Borman & Dowling, 2010; Walker, 2012). The growth of EL populations

in rural content-area classrooms already taxed by a large percentage of learners with basic literacy needs may result in poor academic outcomes (Johnson et al., 2014).

The 2004 passage of IDEA generated the Response to Intervention (RTI) model and similar tiered intervention approaches that support the differentiated instruction of diverse learners in mainstream classrooms (Jaeger & Pearson, 2017). RTI-style intervention models typically include the data-based placement of learners within mainstream classrooms in tiers as follows: (a) Tier 1 representing approximately 80% of learners in a given classroom identified as on-level learners and, therefore, targeted for research-based instruction in core content; (b) Tier 2 representing approximately 15% of the learners in a classroom exhibiting difficulties with Tier 1 instruction and, therefore, targeted for supplemental small group instruction with frequent progress monitoring; and, (c) Tier 3 representing approximately 5% of classroom learners demonstrating difficulties with Tier 2 instruction and, therefore, targeted for supplemental individual instruction (Jaeger & Pearson, 2017; Lovett et al., 2008; Swanson & Vaughn, 2011). An inverted intervention model—a model that frequently represents the composition of rural high school content-area classrooms—illustrates a disproportionate need for individual instruction and presents multiple instructional challenges (Swanson & Vaughn, 2011).

First, simply finding time in a typical school day to provide supplemental instruction, regular progress monitoring, and analysis of progress-monitoring data presents substantial challenges to content-area teachers (Swanson & Vaughn, 2011). Further, a lack of trained aides or interventionists in a rural district exerts strain on a classroom teacher attempting to single-handedly provide adequate instruction for learners with a wide scope of diverse needs (Scott & McMurrer, 2015; Texas Adolescent Literacy

Academy, 2010). Finally, specific professional skills must be added to content expertise to prepare a content-area teacher to successfully provide language and literacy instruction (Butti, 2015; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Malone, 2012; Swanson & Vaughn, 2011).

Professional development must include foundational content knowledge and instructional skills adequate to providing differentiated instruction using research-based techniques (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011). “Setting purposes for reading; previewing and predicting; activating prior knowledge; monitoring, clarifying and fixing; visualizing and creating visual representations; drawing inferences; self-questioning and thinking aloud; summarizing and retelling” (Duke et al., 2011, p. 64) represent only a few of the strategies that may be employed in differentiated instruction. A teacher must select strategies that match the learning processes common to a content-area and specific to a set of learner needs (Duke et al., 2011). Providing instructional differentiation may involve developing ease and consistency in the use of approaches such as a gradual release of responsibility model, described more simply as an “I do, we do, you do” (Levy, 2007, p. 2) model. A gradual release of responsibility allows an instructor to scaffold evidence-based strategies by: (a) describing a strategy and its applications; (b) modeling a strategy; (c) incorporating collaborative practice of a strategy; (d) facilitating the guided practice of a strategy; and, (e) assessing the independent use of a strategy (Duke et al., 2011).

Learners may require content-area instruction embedded with Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention strategies to progress academically at a reasonable rate (Swanson & Vaughn, 2011). Instructional objectives in Tiers 2 and 3 integrate fundamental elements of literacy instruction that may include the development of phonemic awareness, phonics,

vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Fu, 2004; National Reading Panel, 2000; Swanson & Vaughn, 2011). Few content-area teachers are prepared to offer instruction in rudimentary literacy skills (Butti, 2015; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Malone, 2012).

According to Téliz and Mantley (2015), ELs “require more personal attention from teachers” (p. 115). Rural content-area teachers of ELs must consider the learner’s language learning stage, prior educational experiences, and cultural expectations to effectively identify and meet learning needs (Berg et al., 2012). The instructional strategies used specifically to support EL learning in content areas might include the following: providing clear oral instructions while avoiding idioms; supporting vocabulary development with an emphasis on cognates and context; incorporating manipulatives and graphic illustrations into instruction; and modifying instructional materials, such as textbooks, presented to ELs (Berg et al., 2012; Téliz & Mantley, 2015).

Finally, rural content-area teachers must establish an effective balance between academic content instruction and language process instruction to deliver a standards-based curriculum that meets or exceeds state and federal accountability guidelines (Learned, Stockdill, & Moje, 2011). Such guidelines frequently incorporate general curricular standards along with specialized configurations of standards tailored for diverse populations such as ELs, gifted learners, and college and career-oriented learners (Texas Education Agency, 2017b). This study sought to examine the perceptions of rural high school teachers regarding the challenges presented by the instruction of ELs in content-area classrooms often characterized by an inverted intervention model. Understanding teacher perceptions of teaching ELs in rural content-area classrooms

presented an important step in understanding how to better meet the needs of diverse learners.

Needed Research Based on Literature Review

Previous studies have been conducted to examine teacher dispositions, beliefs, and professional development needs related to the instruction of ELs (Berg et al., 2012; Cho & Reich, 2008; Flores & Smith, 2009; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Pettit, 2011; Polat & Mahlingappa, 2013; Reeves, 2006; Short & Martin, 2005; Tran, 2011; Walker et al., 2004). However, gaps in the literature existed with regard to the general topic of rural education and, specifically, with regard to the topic of rural high school content-area teacher perceptions related to: (a) perceived abilities to provide effective instruction for ELs in content-area classrooms; (b) perceived levels of professional development and district resources available for EL instruction in content-area classrooms; (c) perceived levels of stress resulting from providing instruction of ELs in content-area classrooms; and, (d) perceived consequences of the effects of state-mandated exit exams on the academic outcomes of ELs (Schafft, 2016). This study was intended as a means of addressing gaps in the literature and of providing qualitative research pertinent to current educational issues.

Summary

Chapter II included an introduction; the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that supported the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the selection of a qualitative methodology; and a review of the literature with demonstrated gaps that supported the relevance of the study. The literature review addressed the historical,

educational, and rural contexts of the study. Chapter II illustrated the study as a valuable contribution to the body of literature in the field and to study participants.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Research questions emerging from the study purpose and the theoretical framework influenced study methodology. Connecting questions to methodology is supported by the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2016) in an assertion that educational research “embraces the full spectrum of rigorous methods appropriate to the questions being asked...” (p. 1). Selection of a qualitative study methodology also related directly to the following characteristics of study methods: (a) data collection conducted in the natural setting of a rural high school; (b) in-depth data analysis; and, (c) observations that supported both the unique and the common characteristics of the perceptions of rural high school teachers about the instruction of ELs in content-area classrooms (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

The study relied on *grounded theory* methods by which qualitative field data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted to uncover the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to the instruction of ELs in content-area classrooms (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Individual teacher interview data were analyzed as single units within a multiple case study design as “small samples of people nested in context” (Dickerson et al., 2014, p. 113). Study methodology and design created a forum in which teachers, assured of confidentiality, spoke openly to have their voices heard.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study: (a) What are the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to personal ability to successfully manage the instruction of ELs in a mainstream classroom?; (b) What are the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to effective strategies for the integration of language instruction into content curriculum?; (c) What are the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to professional training and development provided in support of the integration of language instruction into content curriculum?; (d) What are the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to district resources available in support of the integration of language instruction into content curriculum?; (e) What are the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to stress associated with the instructional demands involved in providing literacy and language instruction in content classrooms reflecting an inverted intervention model?; and, (f) What are the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to the effects of state-mandated exit exams on the academic outcomes of ELs?

Research Design

The multiple case study arose from a qualitative paradigm and from a phenomenological stance open to both the uniqueness and the “essence” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 385) of high school teacher perceptions about the instruction of ELs in rural content-area classrooms (McMillan & Wergin, 2010; Stake, 2005). Further, the multiple case study proceeded within grounded theory methods of systematic data collection, analysis, and interpretation to facilitate the emergence of rural high school teacher perceptions regarding the instruction of ELs in content-area classrooms (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967; Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The methods of data collection supported openness of participant responses considering study protocols for confidentiality (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Methods of data analysis supported trustworthiness via data triangulation (Anfara et al., 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Overall, the study methods supported the careful collection of data and the thoughtful analysis of the underlying significance of the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014).

The conceptual framework of the study played an important role in the design of the study. Building on the existing conceptual framework of embedded tiers or levels of intervention, the study posed an inverted intervention model in which the largest percentage of learners in a mainstream classroom demonstrated a need for supplemental small group or individual instruction, while the smallest percentage of learners demonstrated on-grade-level skills and abilities (Jaeger & Pearson, 2017; Lovett et al., 2008; Meltzer, 2001). The study design reflected an inverted multiple case study research process in identifying themes emerging from data collected first from individual questionnaires and interviews, followed by data collected from a group interview, and concluding with data collected from a regional representative reflecting a broad, regional perspective.

Sample Selection

Study participants included rural high school content-area teachers and a regional education service center expert in literacy and bilingual/ESL instructional and intervention strategies selected via *purposive sampling* (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Purposive sampling was undertaken to uncover “useful manifestations of the

phenomenon of interest...aimed at insight about the phenomenon” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 378). Data collected from participants were intended to illuminate the phenomenon of the perceptions of rural high school teachers regarding the instruction of ELs in content-area classes characterized by an inverted intervention model.

Participants were also recruited via *homogenous sampling* “based on membership in a subgroup or unit that has specific characteristics” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007a, p. 112). Participants in the study shared the characteristics of teaching at the high school level in a rural school district and of teaching content-area classes with Els embedded in mainstream learner populations. An educator from a regional education service center working with secondary teachers from several regional district high schools was also recruited to participate in a final interview to determine consistency of themes among other rural high school teachers regarding teaching diverse populations in content-area classrooms. Pseudonyms were used to eliminate identifying factors for participants or references to a district or region in which participants worked. Homogenous sampling also supported the formation of participants in a group interview (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007a).

Participants

Participants were recruited from a southeastern Texas, rural fringe, Title I high school and from a regional education service center (ESEA, 1965; Greenough & Nelson, 2015). After gaining Sam Houston State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, three rural high school teachers providing instruction in the areas of mathematics, science, and social studies were individually approached and asked to consider participation in the study. The purpose of the study was explained, participant

questions were addressed, and a formal consent form was delivered and collected in person. At the time of consent, participants completed a brief, researcher-developed, initial questionnaire (see Appendix A for initial questionnaire). The questionnaire elicited demographic data identifying educational background and teaching experience and included open-ended questions ascertaining participant preparation and experience regarding teaching diverse populations (Connelly, 2013; Janesick, 2004). All contact with participants took place after the school day, and interviews were conducted in an off-campus location conducive to participant ease, confidentiality, and openness in responding to interview questions. Additionally, participants were asked to share personal email information for contact purposes to coordinate interview dates and times. A face-to-face meeting with an expert from a regional education service center was scheduled, during which a consent form was delivered and collected, and an individual interview was conducted.

Interviews

Teacher participants engaged in individual interviews, during which open-ended questions were asked and answered and reasonable follow up questions arose from participant responses to interview questions (Janesick, 2000). Questions posed during a group interview were semi-structured, open-ended questions focused on study research questions and shaped by merging and comparing data obtained from an initial questionnaire and individual interviews (Connelly, 2013; Janesick, 2004). Group interview questions were formulated to encourage unique participant contributions while maintaining attention to topics of discussion related to the research questions (Byers et al., 2014; Janesick, 2004). Follow-up questions served to elucidate individual participant

responses and to encourage co-contributions among participants (Dickerson et al., 2014; Janesick, 2000; Roulston, 2010). Conducting a group interview supported the trustworthiness of the study via catalytic and tactical authenticity criteria, revealing growth in participant dispositions to accept diverse values and in empowerment to act on growth (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Morrow, 2005; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2008). An interview with a regional education service center representative also contributed to study trustworthiness and transferability in eliciting responses representative of rural high school teachers across regional districts (Morrow, 2005).

Data Collection

Data collection in this study centered on teachers employed at a small, fringe rural, Title I high school located in the southeastern region of Texas (ESSA, 2015; Greenough & Nelson, 2015). Recruitment of rural high school teachers as participants supported the study emphasis on teacher perceptions regarding the instruction of ELs integrated into a rural student population. Selection of teachers from a Title I high school supported the study focus on an inverted intervention model (ESEA, 1965). Recruitment of a regional education service center representative enhanced study transferability by providing connections among teachers from other area rural high schools. The regional education service center representative worked with several rural districts in the region and had the opportunity to hear the voiced concerns of many teachers. Data connected to the regional education service center representative were collected as a final interview to determine if themes emerging from individual teacher interviews and a group interview were consistent among teachers in other rural high schools.

Data collection in the study was completed in stages, facilitating review of data collected at various points, determining areas of further exploration needed, and noting data saturation “when information occurs so repeatedly that the researcher can anticipate it and whereby the collection of more data appears to have no additional interpretive worth” (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009, p. 4). Participants were initially asked to respond to a brief questionnaire that solicited demographic data to identify educational background and teaching experiences and that included open-ended questions to ascertain participant experiences teaching diverse populations (Connelly, 2013; Janesick, 2004). The initial questionnaire was researcher developed and was hand-delivered so participants were able to write directly in the questionnaire and return it. The initial questionnaire was used to determine more specific areas for further exploration in individual interviews and in a group interview (Connelly, 2013; Janesick, 2004; Roulston, 2010). Questionnaire data also enhanced thick description in data analysis (Connelly, 2013; Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013).

Data from the initial questionnaire were analyzed, coded, and compared to shape open-ended, descriptive questions for use in individual interviews (Janesick, 2004). Reasonable follow-up questions arose from participant responses to interview questions (Janesick, 2000). Recorded interviews were transcribed using standard transcription marks and member checked for accuracy and representativeness of respondent remarks (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997).

Data Analysis

Data from the initial questionnaire were merged and analyzed for both common and unique participant characteristics and contributed to shaping individual and group interview questions and to identifying emerging themes (Janesick, 2004). Individual and group interview data were transcribed using standard transcription marks and member checked for accuracy and representativeness (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transcribed interviews were made available to participants, and participants were encouraged to review transcribed data to provide clarification of meanings and to supply any added information.

Transcribed and member checked data were analyzed in units, with each individual interview representing a single unit or case and group interview data representing a single unit or case (Morgan, 1997). First, data were analyzed using a constant comparison approach supported by three stages of data coding (Glaser, 1965; Miles et al., 2014). Data were analyzed using computer-assisted word-count analysis to determine significant words indicated by frequency of use and to assign open codes to chunks of meaningful data (Miles et al., 2014). Following computer-assisted word count analysis, key-word-in-context (KWIC) analysis was conducted in which open coded data were assigned axial codes determined by meaning emerging from the context of surrounding words (Miles et al., 2014). Building on the results of word-count analysis and KWIC analysis, data identified as significant by frequency and contextualized meaning were assigned identifying or selective codes by the researcher (Miles et al., 2014).

Following the three-step analysis and coding of transcribed interview data, classical content analysis was conducted in which codes assigned to data were analyzed to identify emergent ideas or themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The researcher analyzed coding by reviewing and comparing transcriptions to electronically-generated analysis to ensure data were thoroughly analyzed. Themes emerging from the coded data were supported by three points of reference: (a) participant clarifications of or extensions to data; (b) researcher analysis based on careful consideration of interview data, participant clarifications, and researcher field notes; and, (c) fellow researcher assistance acting in the role of an outside reviewer to provide additional insight. The multiple points of data analysis provided methodological triangulation (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

A discussion of the results of data analyses undertaken in the study was enhanced by deep and thick descriptions that included the characteristics of verbal and nonverbal communication taking place during individual and group interviews (Geertz, 1973; Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Such descriptions emerged from transcription marks and field notes providing details relating to the characteristics of participant verbal expressions, facial expressions, and body language (Ekman, 1999; McNeill, 1992; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Deep and thick descriptions supported the transferability of study data by allowing readers to consider the applicability of the described data (Geertz, 1973; Morrow, 2005).

Audio Taping

Individual interviews were recorded via a digital audio recording device and a secondary digital audio recording device used as a back-up measure. Recorded interviews

were transcribed using standard transcription marks and member-checked to ensure accuracy and representativeness of respondent remarks (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997). Transcribed interview data were hand-delivered to and picked up from participants. The group interview and the regional representative interviews were also recorded using primary and secondary digital recording devices and were transcribed using standard transcription marks. Interviews took place at an off-campus location convenient to participants and in an environment more conducive to speaking freely about personal perceptions and experiences. Teacher-participant interviews were conducted during summer months, supporting more relaxed reflections on the past school year and on student end-of-course test scores.

Credibility, Trustworthiness, and Transferability

A qualitative case study necessarily employs the researcher as the research instrument—a factor that introduces threats to study trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2003) provided detailed threats to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability that result from the researcher acting as the research instrument. The trustworthiness of this study was bolstered by demonstrably building the qualities of trustworthiness throughout the study (Morrow, 2005).

At the stages of data collection and analysis, trustworthiness in the study was maintained via rigorous methods (Morrow, 2005). Data collection commenced with an initial questionnaire administered to gather basic demographic data and brief descriptions of participant experiences teaching diverse students (Connelly, 2013). The initial questionnaire was followed by recorded formal interviews and a recorded group interview featuring predetermined, open-ended, descriptive questions and follow up

questions (Janesick, 2000). In addition, a reflexive journal qualitatively traced or audited the construction of researcher impressions and experiences throughout the study process (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2012; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b). Following data collection, analysis began with transcribing recorded interviews using standard transcription marks followed by member checking of transcriptions for accuracy and representativeness of content (Manning, 1997). Transcribed and member-checked data were coded and analyzed for emerging themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Applying the described methods of data collection and analysis supported study trustworthiness via the triangulation of questionnaire data, individual interview data, group interview data, and reflexive journal data (Creswell, 2014; Denzin, 1970; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Further, reflexive journal data supported an ongoing audit of researcher biases and provided a means of qualitatively recording study organization and development (Borg, 2001; Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b; Ortlipp, 2008). Finally, data collected from a reflexive journal aided in composing thick descriptions that supported transferability between the study data and readers (Geertz, 1973, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Researcher reflexivity also enhanced study authenticity criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2008). Study authenticity criteria promoted equitable representation of values; iterative growth throughout the processes of the study; representation of the divergent values of interviewees; increased awareness of divergent viewpoints; and the ability to collect, document, follow up on, and collaboratively assess data from an increased understanding of both cohesive and divergent values (Guba &

Lincoln, 1989; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). Study trustworthiness was undergirded during data collection and analysis by the ethical handling of individual and group interview data, including: (a) the audio recording and storage of interview and focus group data; (b) the transcription of interview data; and, (c) the member checking of transcribed data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were threaded throughout each stage of the investigative process, including the pre-study stage, the beginning stage, the data-collection stage, the data-analysis stage, and the data-reporting stage (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, the following ethical safeguards were applied to the study: (a) pre-study actions included gaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval; (b) beginning actions included disclosure of the study purpose as beneficial to participants; (c) data collection employed respectful and non-deceptive practices, including gaining participant permissions and member checking of transcribed interview data for accuracy and representativeness; (d) data analysis supported multiple perspectives while maintaining respondent anonymity through the use of pseudonyms and the protection of identifying data; and (e) data reporting was characterized by the avoidance of falsified data or plagiarism; the appropriate assignment of credit to researcher, participants, and advisers; the adequate sharing and storage of data; and the ability to provide proof of ethical compliance upon request (Creswell, 2014). Key objectives in the study included maintaining ethical practices and conducting a study in a manner that benefited participants and learners.

Summary

Included in Chapter III were an introduction and the research questions driving the study, as well as a description of the qualitative case study design, including methods

of sample selection, data collection, and data analysis. Also, study credibility, trustworthiness, transferability, and ethical considerations were described as the means of effectively addressing the research questions and establishing credible, dependable, and confirmable findings.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to collect data for analysis to facilitate a better understanding of the perceptions of rural high school teachers regarding the ability to effectively deliver language instruction to ELs in the context of rural content-area classrooms (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; McMillan & Wergin, 2010). Data from an initial questionnaire and from individual and group interviews were collected from three rural high school teacher participants, as well as from an individual interview with a regional education service center representative.

Procedures

After Sam Houston State University IRB approval, participants were recruited from a southeastern Texas, rural fringe, Title I high school and from a regional education service center (ESEA, 1965; Greenough & Nelson, 2015). Teacher participants were recruited as rural high school teachers providing instruction in the content areas of mathematics, science, and social studies. The regional education service center representative provided expert educational support in the areas of ESL and bilingual instruction.

Initial contact with a regional education service center expert took place during a scheduled face-to-face meeting at the education service center. Teacher participants were individually approached face-to-face and asked to consider participation in the study. The purpose and design of the study was explained, a formal consent form was delivered and collected, and a brief, initial questionnaire was completed. Additionally, teacher

participants were asked to share personal contact information to coordinate interview dates and times.

Teacher participant interviews were conducted in an off-campus location conducive to participant ease, confidentiality, and openness in responding to interview questions. Individual participant interviews and a group interview were conducted in a reserved library located at a church. The church library offered free public access and a quiet, private setting for confidential interviews. The library was reserved under the notation of meeting and not noted as an interview. Interviews were conducted during the summer at dates and times convenient to participants. The final individual interview with a regional education service center specialist was conducted at a convenient date and time and in a confidential and convenient location agreed upon by the participant.

Background of Participants

The ages of the three teacher participants ranged from 30 to 55 years of age. Teacher participants included a male U.S. history teacher with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science; a female science teacher with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and minors in Psychology and Sociology; and a female mathematics teacher with a Bachelor of Science degree in Education with a minor in Mathematics and a Master of Education degree in Instructional Leadership. All teacher participants held state teaching certification in respective subject areas of instruction. Teacher participant instructional experience ranged from 5 to 17 years in respective content-areas of instruction, with an average of 11 years teaching experience represented by all participants. At the time of the study, teacher participants had been employed at their current teaching assignments for 5 to 10 years with an average of eight years of experience in the same teaching position.

Teacher participants provided rural high school content-area instruction representing core subject areas that included Algebra I, Biology, and United States History. The mathematics and biology teacher participants reported providing instruction in subject-area electives. The social studies teacher participant reported providing instruction in Advanced Placement (AP) history with the objective of preparing students for an end-of-course AP history examination. All teacher participants reported providing instruction in core subject areas intended to prepare students for state-mandated, high-stakes, end-of-course testing.

Participants reported being responsible for providing instruction in mainstream content-area classrooms in a rural high school that served grades 9 through 12 and with a total student population of 341 representing 8.5% SPED, 5.9% gifted and talented (GT), and 6.7% EL sub-populations (The Texas Tribune, 2017). The history teacher participant reported teaching a total of 115 students during six class periods of history, as well as coaching football during the fall semester and coaching powerlifting during the spring semester. The science teacher participant reported teaching a total of 74 students during six class periods of biology, a total of 26 students during a single class period of honors-level biology, and a total of 12 students during a single elective class period of Environmental Science. The mathematics teacher participant reported teaching 85 students during six class periods of Algebra I and seven students in a single elective course of Financial Mathematics. As illustrated in Table 1, participants reported personal and professional data supporting study purposes.

Table 1

Demographic Data of and Teaching Experience of Participants

Participants/Teaching	One Katrina	Two Fredrik	Three Kristin	Four Christina
Degree(s) earned	BS -Education; Minor in Mathematics; M Ed –Instructional Leadership	BA –Political Science	BS -Biology; Minors in Psychology and Sociology	BA-Spanish Minor in Business
Certifications	Standard State Teacher Certification, Mathematics, Grades 1-12	Provisional State Teacher Certification, Social Studies, Grades 8-12	Provisional State Teacher Certification, Life Sciences, Grades 8-12	Standard State Teacher Certification, Bilingual Education, Grades 1-12
Years Teaching	17	6	10	12 elementary, 13 regional center
Years Teaching in a Rural School District	9	6	10	n/a
Grade Levels taught throughout career	6-12	9-12	9-12	Elementary Education, Adult Education
Grade Levels currently teaching	9-12	9-12	9-12	Education Specialist- Title III, Part A

(continued)

Participants/Teaching	One Katrina	Two Fredrik	Three Kristin	Four Christina
Subject(s) Taught	Mathematics, Algebra 1 Financial Mathematics	US History, AP History	Biology, Honors Biology, Environmental Science	Elementary Education, Adult ESL, Regional Special Services
Number Students	92	115	112	n/a

Teacher participants also reported receiving in-service and professional development training regarding the instruction of all special populations present in mainstream classrooms. The mathematics teacher reported receiving additional pre-service training regarding the instruction of ELs. The history and science teachers reported receiving limited pre-service training via alternative certification courses regarding the instruction of special populations in mainstream classrooms.

The mathematics teacher reported district support via limited access to a Spanish-speaking instructional aide available for ELs. The science and history teacher participants reported no district support staff available during classroom instruction. The mathematics and science teachers reported student access to an Internet-based language instructional program. The science teacher also reported student access to language translation support by means of a cell phone application.

In response to the initial questionnaire, teacher participants expressed individual perceptions regarding the biggest challenge facing a content-area teacher. The mathematics teacher cited working with SPED students as the biggest challenge. The science teacher cited a lack of learner scholastic foundations, including insufficient vocabulary and study habits, as the biggest perceived challenge in content-area instruction. The history teacher cited student engagement as the biggest perceived challenge in content-area instruction. The science teacher added the unauthorized use of cellular phones as an additional perceived challenge to providing content-area instruction.

Participant One

At the time of an individual interview, Katarina (pseudonym) had successfully earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Education with a minor in mathematics; earned a

master's degree in Instructional Leadership; obtained state certification to teach mathematics for grades 1 through 12; and acquired 17 years of classroom teaching experience in middle school and high school mathematics. The most recent nine years of Katarina's teaching experience occurred in a rural school district which, for the purposes of anonymity, will be called Rural Acres ISD. Katarina's position at Rural Acres High School included serving as the chair of the high school mathematics department; teaching 85 students in six courses of Algebra I; and teaching a single elective in Financial Mathematics with an enrollment of seven students.

Katarina responded to interview questions in calm and clear tones. Katarina's steady and measured narrative was accompanied by occasional slow, deliberate hand gestures. Responses to interview questions included well-developed, detailed insights.

Katarina described her instructional strengths as "experience and patience" and "a deep mathematical foundation" that offered insight as to whether a student is "on track" and as to whether a method is "mathematically sound." Katarina also described flexibility in learning from students "new methods and new ways of working things...that they've learned and want to share." Katarina stressed the importance of "keeping an open mind in problem solving...always adjusting." Katarina emphasized, "There's no one way to solve a problem." Katarina's instructional strengths were bolstered by flexible approaches with iterations of instruction using multiple modalities. Katarina explained, "Many students are visual and tactile learners these days, so just to hear the instructions like we did when I was in school is just not enough for them."

Katarina also emphasized a combination of simplicity and repetition--asking students to type up "little bullets of instructions...a little checklist for them to go down."

Katarina explained some students are annoyed by the repetitious nature of her instruction and complain they “get it the first time.” Katarina asserted, however, some learners do not “process it until the second or third time they hear it.”

Strategies used specifically to support the instruction of ELs included use of “vocabulary cards with graphs and pictures that will show the word in English and in Spanish...and word walls...done in Spanish and English--as many visual things as you can get.” Katarina mentioned professional training supporting instruction of ELs, including three pre-service ESL courses and participation in a variety of relevant professional development workshops. Katarina recalled a pre-service internship experience providing pull-out instruction for ELs that spurred her to acquire the ability to “translate numbers and mathematical operational terms from English into Spanish.” Katarina pointed out the instructional benefits of her limited ability to speak in Spanish, stating:

It helps that I know a little Spanish, especially in math with my numbers and the operational words in Spanish...I do translate as many of the instructions that I can. Or, if they’re working a problem in class, I’ll shift and ask the question in Spanish, so I can see they’ll really perk up because they know I’m expecting...a Spanish student to answer this...most of them have answered this year in English...I think it helps that I’m meeting them kind of halfway...and I enjoy trying to speak it myself.

When asked about the greatest challenges in teaching mathematics to ELs, Katarina stated, “It’s the same challenge that I see with my non-English learners...the students are at different levels mathematically.” Katarina elaborated, “It’s just having

students at different mathematical levels...the low the high...but there's everything in between there too."

Katarina conflated instructional challenges in teaching ELs with the challenges of teaching all populations of learners; however, her perception of instructional challenges unique to teaching ELs pertained to preparing students for state end-of-course testing. Katarina asserted state exams presented ELs with "a major disadvantage because the emphasis on word problems makes the test more of a reading test...they have to dig out of that word problem, and the word problem usually does try to trap them in some way." Katarina defined the traps in the word problems as "distractors...extra information that could throw them off" and leave them without the "hints and clues they need to solve that problem."

Katarina explained the impact of a language-heavy mathematics test on EL successes:

There were four language learners in one class. One of them came to us very recently and spoke no English, but he was a stronger math student than the other three...he would actually learn the math process and then teach it to the other three students; whereas, they would translate things from English to Spanish for him. I had one of them...that did pass the first time we took the test...and it was not the stronger math student. The student with the higher English skills...and the medium math level was able to pass.

Katarina described how state-mandated testing affects the attitude and work ethic of ELs "because they know they need to pass that to graduate." Katarina explained further, "The students I'm working with are very determined to pass it...they want to be

successful.” According to Katarina, the “language barrier” presented a challenge for ELs and, while not leaving ELs “disheartened” or in “a hopeless state,” did necessitate “to be successful...they are going to have to work much harder to overcome the barrier.”

When asked about the benefits of teaching in a rural community, Katarina intertwined positive and negative elements, beginning with a description of how growing up in Rural Acres drove her to leave the area but also provided valuable professional experiences. Katarina explained:

Like most other students that grow up in Rural Acres, I wanted to get out--there's nothing to do here. I did leave for 15 years and taught in large districts. I'm thankful for the experiences that I had in other districts because, if I had started teaching in Rural Acres...I don't know if I would have gotten the support I needed as a first-year teacher...the district that I started in had loads of support through curriculum coordinators. And then I did work in a large school district where...99% students were African American...and it was a great experience...but I wanted to come back to the community that helped me and gave so much to me...because education was so important in my life...and I want to help these kids realize they are not stuck. A lot of them feel they're stuck in Rural Acres and they'll never get out. But education is a key for them.

Katarina recalled, when she first returned to teach in Rural Acres, she asked a student about his goals for after high school. The student responded, “I'm going to be like my uncle and just draw disability and sit around at home.” Katarina asserted, “I went to school with that uncle...this person was very capable of becoming a productive citizen and doing a lot for society and for his family but chose not to--life is about choices.”

Katarina continued to explain:

I have a brother who ended up in drugs and died because of it...I have a brother who went to drugs and ended up in prison twice...and a sister who went into the military and did a lot with her life--turned her life around. We grew up in this town poor...nothing to do...my mom had an eighth-grade education...my step-dad had a 10th-grade education...my parents didn't pay for me to go to college...but I fought hard and made the grade so I could get scholarships and go to college...we didn't have computers back then...it meant that I was reading dictionaries and encyclopedias all summer to learn more...and they may think that's silly and crazy, but you have to have that desire to learn.

Katarina also described how her background experiences as a student in Rural Acres schools developed her view of the important role that educators play in the lives of students:

So it's just working together as educators to motivate these students...for the most part our students at Rural Acres are going to have to fight for it...they're not getting the motivation at home--not all of them are...and I would not have gone to college if it had not been for my principal in high school...my principal pulled me aside my junior year...he got the forms...and I filled them out on my principal's desk, and he mailed them in...My parents didn't know anything about going to college...and I didn't know anything about going to college...but it was a principal that pulled me aside and said "you're going to college."

Katarina expressed additional perceived benefits of living and teaching in a rural community as follows:

Connections are much deeper...I like more of the parent involvement and the community pride...the art teacher that's coming back this year is a student I taught in algebra maybe 10 years ago...an aide, who I taught when she was in seventh grade, was to help translate...it's awesome to see students working as aides and coming back as teachers to our community.

When asked about downsides to working in a rural district, Katarina pointed out her previous student returning to serve as a language aide "was very often called to be a substitute...I would say she was in our room about 10% of the year." In addition to limited staff, Katarina mentioned ELs were removed from math instruction during summer school to "work on vocabulary using the *Rosetta Stone* program," which left them with only four days of math instruction before sitting for a second administration of the state algebra test." Katarina asserted, the district did not "support them [ELs] enough to come into our country and learn our language."

Katarina also perceived the rapid spread of information in a small town as providing both positive and negative challenges. Katarina stated, "News travels fast, but we need...the positive things in our school--we need that information to travel fast." Katarina added, "We need someone that's more organized than me to keep people in the loop...to keep everybody connected."

Participant Two

At the time of the interview, Kristin (pseudonym) had successfully earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology; was certified to teach Life Sciences for grades 8 through 12; and possessed 10 years of experience as a high school science teacher, including two years at Rural Acres High School. The courses Kristin was teaching at

Rural Acres High School included an honors-level biology course with 26 students, five mainstream biology courses that included a total of 74 students, and an elective Environmental Science course with 12 students. Kristin addressed interview questions with succinct and decisive responses featuring clipped phrases delivered with a dynamic and authoritative tone. Kristin punctuated her remarks with occasional hand gestures emphasizing verbal remarks.

Kristin recounted her professional strength as a personal interest in science, explaining, “My degree was in my subject matter--something that I love. In my spare time, when I’m not teaching, [I’m] hunting and looking and doing and coming up with new ideas and new innovations to use in my classroom.”

Kristin described her most successful instructional strategies as “hands on--anytime I do hands on, they seem to get it...and with science, that’s easy to do.” When asked about strategies she used with ELs, Kristin responded, “I’m going to be honest, I’m at a loss. I’ve gone to some workshops, and I’ve tried to utilize them, and it’s been incredibly difficult.” Kristin also remarked the district provided no support personnel to assist in EL instruction in biology.

In response to follow up questions about difficulties in offering classroom instruction in biology to ELs, Kristin pinpointed vocabulary as the primary obstacle. Kristin stated, “They don’t have the basics of the English vocabulary...in biology you actually learn more words than you do if you were learning an entire language...and with them having a zero basis, it’s twice as hard.” Kristin explained further:

It’s like little bitty pieces of the puzzle to make the big picture and, when there’s no foundation, it’s just a bunch of puzzle pieces...it’s like someone who is trying

to read Greek...they have no idea, and you can't really help them other than what you do throughout the year.... the particular students I had this year spoke little to no English, so they don't have a basis of the English vocabulary. They're great at copying down words, but actually going above and beyond just copying one word to a piece of paper, I find has done very little for them.

With regard to the state end-of-course exam in biology, Kristen asserted, "I think it's a total waste of time to expect these kids to pass a standardized test as English language learners when they have very little vocabulary groundwork done. Impossible. I don't see it happening." When asked what the impact of the tests might be on ELs, Kristin replied, "I think the long-term impact would be that they do not master, and they end up being a statistic as a dropout and actually going on to work as a manual laborer."

Kristin described the rural district in which she worked as providing no support for ELs. Kristin asserted:

Nobody knew about the *Rosetta Stone* existing on the high school level...until summer school...and it was one week when we finally got it, so they had a week period...then one of the kids, he's supposed to be doing his *Rosetta Stone*; however, the technology was not working, so he was watching *Fast and Furious*. To expect students to master the language in a week is totally impossible.

Kristin offered positive feedback regarding teaching in a rural community, stating:

These are your neighbors, your friends...these are their children and their grandchildren...I think the benefit would be being able to get support from home...we're all on the same team, and we all really want success for the student.

So, I kind of like the comradery, the hometown feeling, what's important to the students--they get to share with that. It's a win-win.

Kristin described the perceived downsides of working in a rural district as "lack of opportunity; lack of job growth...the inconvenience of having to travel to get what you need...without paying an arm and a leg for it in a rural area...the other downside would be...like life in any small town where you know everybody, and everybody usually knows your business."

Participant Three

At the time of the interview, Fredrik (pseudonym) had successfully earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Studies and was certified to teach social studies for grades 8 through 12. Fredrik's instructional experience consisted of teaching history at Rural Acres High School for five years while serving as a football coach in the fall and as a powerlifting coach in the spring. Seated in a relaxed posture with hands lying in his lap, Fredrik responded to interview questions in quietly delivered chunks of descriptive narrative.

When asked what his strengths were as a history teacher and as an athletic coach, Fredrik replied:

I'm relatively organized...I put a lot of work into it... I'm relatively knowledgeable on the subject through study and just because of my own personal interest in the subject...I get to see my kids a lot more than the normal teacher does...I get several hours building relationships that other teachers don't get...a lot of them really relate better...and I feel they work harder for me just because of the relationship outside of the generic classroom...I have a special relationship with

my powerlifting kids...I get a lot of girls...I am the most positive father figure they have...a lot of girls flock to me and kind of latch on to me...I have a close relationship with my female athletes...I'm careful with that relationship...a lot of them come to me with issues they would take to a father figure.

When asked about successful instructional strategies used in the classroom, Fredrik replied:

I try to mix things up as much as possible...it's history so I lecture a lot--you've got to talk about it...I feel I am a pretty strong lecturer...I show how the stuff I'm talking about still translates as important today...so that's my favorite thing to do because it gets me talking...it gets them talking. Just the conversations is where they learn the most...I think I'm pretty good at making them interact...but I try to read something else--we always have documents that we're reading...and everything has had a documentary made about it...a lot of it is good stuff.

Regarding instructional strategies used to support ELs, Fredrik stated he “asked them a lot of questions to make sure they understand and just get them talking about the material--being more vocal.” In addressing the challenges in providing instruction for ELs in history, Fredrik provided the following explanation:

Clearly there are things they are comfortable with and things they are not...getting them to let down that shell and try something that they're not very comfortable doing...they may feel like because of that language barrier they may not want to read...they may not understand it...so, just getting them to understand that for this particular course you need to read...but I'm here for you, and I am going to help explain it...and that goes back to the trust and getting relationships.

Fredrik described inherent difficulties ELs faced in taking a state, end-of-course exam in history:

If they're not comfortable with the language, they're not going to do well...I'm a little bit skeptical...if we want them to be successful, we put them in the most comfortable situation...but we are also trying to encourage them to become more proficient in English...it's kind of a double-sided deal because we want them to become more proficient, but we also want them to be successful...there are certain words they need to get things across, and if you don't know them you can't explain yourself fully...so it's a big challenge, and it's a barrier that prevents them from being as successful as they could...we don't do enough to help our English language learners...they're not getting what they need.

Regarding the perceived benefits of teaching in a rural district, Fredrik stated, "I'm from Rural Acres, and I know a lot of these kids...I know their parents, so I have relationships I can fall back on." Fredrik addressed the disadvantages of a rural district, explaining, "Rural Acres is their little world, and it's hard to see outside of these borders...they don't realize there is a whole big world out there, and things going on besides what is happening here."

Group Interview

Response to Question 1

Following individual interviews, participants met for a group interview to expand and build on individual interview responses. At the beginning of the group interview, Katarina was asked to follow up on a statement in an individual interview in which she indicated she had been teaching mathematics from a young age. Katarina explained:

I was 11 years old. My mom wanted to get a job, and she needed her GED...the English part was no problem for her, but in math she struggled. I began working with her in the evenings...she passed and was able to get a job...it seems to me in my life I've been helping people pass anything related to math. I've just always been helping them pass that next milestone.

Fredrik added:

When I was in school, I just always enjoyed my history classes--and I was an athlete. So, whenever I got in school, I couldn't think of anything else I wanted to study; so, I studied history. And, I started thinking, "What am I going to do with this?" The only thing I could think of to do with a history degree was to teach and, of course, I wanted to coach. It's hard to say which one I wanted to do first, because I really enjoyed them both...and when I was still in high school, I started working the summer camps. I just really enjoyed working with the kids--interacting with them. So, I just decided that's what I was going to do.

Kristin interjected:

I had no inspiration to become a teacher. I'm really sorry about that. I had a degree in biology and double minors in psychology and sociology. I've always been a teacher of some sort growing up--a tutor. So, out of necessity and a world that's been turned upside down, I decided to do something with my life. Thus, I became a teacher.

Frederik pointed out teachers have summers off--a comment instigating an exchange among participants with both light-hearted and pointed remarks. Kristin

explained she “didn’t really think about summer school being off” and informed Fredrik, “I need to get you in mode of mind.”

Fredrik replied, “I’ve got my stuff, and history doesn’t really change--you just add to it.”

Kristin pointed out there are “new ways to get the message across.”

Fredrik responded:

I guess I’m a terrible person for doing it--I think about it a little bit--but on my summers, I play with my kids and relax. I feel like...the way I have my stuff right now is working, so I don’t really want to change anything. I mean, I’ve changed in the past; and I know I will change in the future because this thing we do is always changing.

Katarina joined the conversation, stating:

I’m going to a math conference in about a week. I’m learning new ideas to help certain groups of students. For the most part my students are doing well, but there are a couple of groups of students that I want to help more. So, I’m looking for new strategies.

Kristin interjected, “That’s what I’m trying to do during this summer--different ways to reach students that you have not been able to reach. New strategies, new technologies to implement.”

Fredrik responded, “Y’all are making me feel bad now.”

Response to Question 2

Participants were asked about training they received in college preparing them to help a struggling EL read and write. Fredrik and Kristin indicated they did not receive such training. Katarina explained her college prepared her, although not fully. Fredrik

noted he did not pursue an education focus in college and received alternative certification through “courses you could knock out in a week.” Fredrik also noted, although his college Spanish professor “harped on” learning a language through immersion, ELs need “pull-out programs.”

Kristin discussed working with ELs during summer school:

I found it very difficult to try and teach these students science. They were great at copying words down, but it was like me copying the Greek alphabet. I’m copying but, if I put it all together, I have no idea what it is saying. So, while immersion is good, we’ve got to use some strategies that will help these kids. In my classroom they segregate themselves--sit and speak their native language among themselves--and you have no idea because you are clueless as to what they are saying. If you go back there and check on them, and they’re supposed to be using a translator on their cell phone, they’re on social media. They put them on *Rosetta Stone*, and one student is watching *The Fast and the Furious*. It’s difficult to reach them, and I don’t know great strategies that work.

Katarina replied:

I feel they were learning in math class. I had little posters that say the words in English and has a picture if it’s a graph or the line of a slope, and it has the words in Spanish too to make that connection...it’s not math separate from English; we have to connect as much as we can for them to learn.

Kristin countered, “I think math would be different in the fact that numbers are numbers, and the content would be way more vocabulary in both our subject areas.”

Katarina replied, “Right. It’s just that in algebra, though, they do have a lot of new vocabulary.” Katarina explained further:

To help with their English, we were doing writing prompts for our warm up...they would copy the words, because I would set up the paragraph and just leave blanks for the words I was looking for. They would copy the paragraph...just to get them feeling the format...I don’t know if it helped, though.

Kristin replied, “Like my warm ups, they copied the writing prompts down perfectly every day. They were not answered, but they were copied.”

Katarina responded, “I would leave blanks and sometimes that would help. So I tried to focus on writing.”

Response to Question 3

Participants were asked what type of language program would be most effective for ELs. Fredrik felt “an actual, real pull-out program” would be highly effective. Fredrik added:

At the elementary school their answer is...to make teachers be ESL certified. I guess legally that works, but it’s really not going to do anything. You still have those kids sitting in a classroom full of people they don’t understand. And it falls to the teacher--I guess it’s not a bad thing, but my wife had to deal with it. She had a girl come in, and she knew no English. So, my wife had to double everything just to make sure she was getting what she needed. She would have to give the instructions to the other kids; then she would have to go off to the side with this other student and figure out a way to explain it to her...it worked because it was just one kid...but it could become problematic. Really, a pull-out program

would be best. Having an aide in your room all day or following them around--that seems like a waste of a body.

Katarina responded, "It depends if it's benefitting the student."

Response to Question 4

Participants were asked to discuss classroom intervention strategies regarding a tiered RTI model and observed intervention needs (Jaeger & Peterson, 2017; Lovett et al., 2008; Meltzer, 2001). A tiered RTI model reflects 80% of students in a mainstream, content-area classroom located in the bottom tier and demonstrating on-grade-level skills; 15% of students in a mainstream, content-area classroom located in the second tier and demonstrating a need for small group intervention; and 5% of students in a mainstream, content-area classroom located in the third tier and demonstrating a need for individual intervention (Jaeger & Pearson, 2017; Lovett et al. 2008; Meltzer, 2001). Participants were asked if the RTI model represented student compositions regarding intervention needs that they were seeing in their classrooms (IDEA, 2004).

Katarina replied, "Absolutely not."

Fredrik responded with a description of EL instructional approaches at Rural Acres Elementary School, stating:

I know this is not what they're doing at the lowest levels because, like I said--I know I keep going back to my wife because she talks about it all the time--she and one other teacher are the only ELL people. I mean, she's technically ELL certified. But all that means is that she has it on her certificate, so she and one other teacher get all of the ELLs...they have an ESL person, but my wife has said multiple times she never comes and gets them, never does anything with them.

Katarina addressed the student compositions in her classrooms, stating:

I think, overall, the classes I had last year would be more like 60% at the bottom and more at the top. But then there were some classes where this might have been 20% at the bottom...and so many more students need help, especially what they called our SPED class. You know, when 10 to 12 students are SPED in one class, then you don't have students that are high in math to partner them up or group them up to help them. And, if you don't have an inclusion aide that's there 90 to 100% of the time, they're just not getting the attention that they need to be successful.

Fredrik added, "The problem is with the number of kids that would need someone with them...we don't have the staffing for it. We've got 45 minutes, and there's only so much differentiation you can do in that time period."

Katarina interjected, "And that's why I'm looking for more strategies this summer. It's a problem when 15 of my students are SPED and 15 of them do not meet the minimum requirements to pass STAAR [State of Texas Assessments for Academic Readiness] ...there's a critical need right there."

Katarina continued, "This [model] would be an ideal set up for every classroom." Fredrik responded, "This would require researching, and that's not ours. Our administrators, counselors--it would require them to do more than just--okay, you're here, you're here..."

Kristin stated:

I've actually had one inclusion teacher in 10 years that I would consider an inclusion teacher. The rest were more like aides. They walk in your classroom and

sit down, and that's it. But this one teacher, her students had their own textbooks. She got a copy of my lesson plan. She knew what we were doing, and everything was on the up and up. She did nothing more than just walk around and assist students. She was an actual instructor. If I had to leave, she never missed a beat. Nothing stopped.

Katarina responded:

And I'm reflecting back over 17 years ago, the very first school that I taught in, they had inclusion, but they had a content mastery place for the student to travel to, and that was successful. One other inclusion aide since then...did the same thing. She had her room set up, and every student had their cubby with their folder--their textbook. She would modify all the tests, and they were also very successful--highly successful.

Kristin replied, "Well, this teacher was in the classroom with me...she would point things out."

Katarina stated, "Mine was too, if she found an easier way that she thought would make sense to the students. And we had that comfortable relationship."

Kristin observed, "It was more like co-teaching."

Katarina added, "I just called her this year to try to get her to come back over, but it looks like she won't move."

Response to Question 5

Participants were asked, considering student needs in their classrooms, if end-of-course testing was a feasible way to hold educators accountable for the quality of instruction provided to students. Kristin responded, "Oh, my gosh, no. I think we put too

much emphasis on being defined by a number--it's not like there's a whole lot of grey-- and I think it's unfair to students; and I think it's unfair to educators."

Fredrik cited instances in which students slept through the test, knowing they would have a chance to take it again later. Fredrik asserted the test "is not an indicator of what they are learning; of how we are teaching." Also, Fredrik expressed concern with how the test shapes his instruction, stating;

It is how we are defined, but it limits me so much. There are things I would like to elaborate on, but I can't do that because I have to teach this curriculum. And I have to move through it in a timely manner, so I can finish and have six weeks to review.

Katarina mentioned helping students develop a positive attitude toward the tests, stating she tells her students, "Whatever you want to do in life, there are tests you have to pass." Katarina added, "I don't know if it helps them any, but I hope it helps them take it more seriously."

Katarina also addressed the impact of end-of-course tests on teachers:

It puts a lot of pressure on teachers, these STAAR tests...it does take the fun out of teaching...it's just a very stressful time...you have to move along...I do miss just teaching all year long, and let them take a test at the end of the year and not have to stress and stop and review for six weeks...one thing I told myself in college was that "I will never teach to a test;" and a couple of years ago it hit me--I feel like I am teaching to a test.

Kristin responded, "Well, I think we all do because our accountability depends on those numbers."

Fredrik interjected, “Especially in the district we work for.”

Kristin continued:

I hate the fact that we’ve defined ourselves and our profession as a number on a test...and I think we set some of our students up for failure too. They internalize, well, I’m just an idiot; I’m lazy; I don’t have to; it’s no big deal; or, I’ve tried real hard, and I’ve failed.

Katarina interjected:

Yes, I think it’s done education a real disservice all the way around; and, at times, I feel it is lowering our standards for some of our students...the passing rate is 40%...to me that is not a passing rate.

Kristin commented:

We aren’t standardizing our teaching, so why are we standardizing a student? Not every one of my students is going to love biology like they love algebra or like they love history or like they love English...it’s just you realize that they are being given in a subject that 70% of them are not going to use at all.

Fredrik replied, “You have, like you said, those who like it, and those who don’t. So giving them all the exact same test...”

Kristin added, “It’s that ‘one size fits all.’ It makes them the same, and they’re not the same.”

Response to Question 6

Participants were asked for ideas for more effective measures of accountability in schools. Kristin posed, “We could measure progress and growth. Not that you passed or failed. Did you move beyond from where you were?”

Fredrik recalled:

When I was in high school it was the TOSS [Test of Semantic Skills] test...the big thing for me was, ‘If I pass this I won’t have to take the SAT [Stanford Achievement Test];’ because if you did well enough on the TOSS you didn’t have to take one of those other tests...and that’s the only reason I took it...we didn’t stress about it.

Katarina added, “I remember having this discussion in college, and we were talking about...portfolios for the students to show...you couldn’t turn a portfolio in for every student across the state of Texas--but maybe we could.”

Fredrik interjected:

And going back to accountability, which was the original question, the thing I always thought would be better would be to place more stress on the administrators. I mean, it’s their job to watch us and to make sure we are doing our jobs. I may be crucified for saying this, but I got one walk through all year. Mr. Krueger (pseudonym) poked his head in my room every once in a while, but that’s because they were looking for another kid. They weren’t in there to see what I was doing. So, having a more administrative presence--there could be your accountability. Having them in the room and making sure the teachers are teaching. Yea, they say they check our lesson plans; but all they do is go in and

make sure that they are there. They don't read them. And they could be the ones holding teachers accountable.

Katarina stated, "Well, your scores are up there; so, I think they have confidence in you."

Kristin asked, "Do we know the scores?"

Katarina replied, "Not the official ones for summer. We should be getting them back this week, though."

Kristin said, "Well, I'm not expecting...my expectations are extremely low of the four that actually did show up."

Katarina stated, "I think if all 10 of them that showed up are passing, it'll be at 80%.

I was at 70% passing because none of my SPED kids passed."

Kristin replied, "I think I was at 87%."

Fredrik stated, "I was at 87."

Katarina interjected, "See. We're at a number again."

Fredrik noted, "I'm a number, and I'm all excited about it. Crap. I'm a number."

Kristin stated:

Well, it's just that you look at these students and realize the foundation you are giving them is in a subject that 70 percent of them are not going to use at all. If I were able to get that 30 percent that thought, "This is what I want to do, and this is going to affect my future," that would be ideal. I think that is where we are failing students the most is not gearing them more.

Fredrik responded, "You are starting to sound Communist."

Kristin replied, “I don’t mind. It is socialism. It really is, you know. Guarantee. How many of your students that have come through your history class do you see as a future political player?”

Fredrik answered:

Not many. I’ve thought about this. I mean, if I’m teaching the New Deal, I think, “How many of these kids are going to come back in a few years and know what the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] is, or why it was important?” Yea, it’s good to know, but how are they going to use this in their daily life?

Kristin responded, “Most of them can’t even tell you who the Attorney General of the United States is right now, or anything about NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] or the current political climate.”

Fredrik inserted, “If it doesn’t show up on their Twitter feed.”

Kristin responded, “Yes, there you go. And maybe we need to rethink the way we teach. I’ve often thought about setting up a flipped classroom on Facebook or something.”

Fredrik added, “When I first got here, they encouraged us to do that. It’s just like everything else they encourage you to do for a year, then everybody forgets about it.”

Response to Question 7

As a final group interview topic, participants were asked to expand on previous comments made during individual interviews concerning the benefits of personal connections to students and to their families in a rural district. Participants were asked to clarify how those connections may or may not relate to their EL students. Fredrik responded:

It depends on the parent and the interest they take in their child's success...a lot of our ELL kids are moving here so they aren't established in the community. And a lot of them--this is going to sound bad; maybe it is--but just looking at the stereotype of that family, it's a matriarchal thing. The dad's working hard all the time. The mom has maybe several kids. A lot of the kids, when they come in and get comfortable, are the most successful kids that I've had. But some of them don't really care; they don't really learn. And I think that starts back at home. As a teacher it's hard to get a relationship with those parents. First of all, there's a language barrier...those parents are not immersed--they are not learning the language. So, it's difficult to get them to understand the urgency of what we do. And, it's just hard to establish that same relationship you have with the parents of a kid that I've known for 15 years. Even though it is a rural community and it has those benefits, it still is difficult with that culture, with that family.

Katarina added:

I do think they are very respectful and very hard working; and I, too, see the language barrier in communicating with their parents. Last year I called one of the young lady's parents--just a positive phone call to let them know what a great job she was doing. They were worried right away that she was in trouble. The school was calling, so they assumed something was wrong. So, I just gave them positive feedback about their daughter and how helpful she was in tutoring other students and helping them. They understood me enough. Well, they didn't really understand me. The daughter said she had to explain what the phone call was about.

Fredrik stated:

That's the problem. You don't know what they're telling that kid. I can call home, and the kid that's in trouble is the one translating. I can tell him, "Tell them what you did," and they are telling them that they are great.

Kristin added, "I think we need to understand culturally...I think we need professional development. We need not only more strategies and better strategies and ways to reach these kids but also more understanding of the cultural unit. We went to a quinceanera..."

Katarina interjected, "I've been too. It's beautiful."

Kristin stated, "It's Saturday."

Fredrik responded, "I forgot about it."

Kristin added, "You didn't go--shame on you. There's another one this Saturday."

Fredrik replied, "Maybe that's the one I was invited to."

Kristin continued, "And I just think because it was only my second one...it was just different than us. I think better understanding of the culture."

Katarina asked, "You didn't feel very welcome?"

Kristin answered:

Oh yes. But I do think maybe a little more professional development--just awareness. I was reading an educational book one time, and it may have been at alternative certification, where they had done a study with a group of Hispanic students. This guy had some kind of manufacturing company, and he had a lot of employees that were Hispanic. So, he decided that, instead of taking on that suit and tie, he started dressing casually. And it caused all kinds of problems, because

they looked up to him as the boss. So, it was all cultural in how they perceived him.

Fredrik was asked if there would be room in the sports program for a soccer team.

Fredrik replied:

We've tried. The kids have tried. The problem is that we don't have the funds. And we've pulled funds away from other sports to create a separate one; but, believe it or not, those kinds of things are expensive. The limited funds we have-- we use all of it every year. So, that's the only problem. That and the fact that where we are there are no other teams around us that play soccer--no schools our size. We have to play 5A and 6A schools, and it wouldn't work. The kids have talked about it; we've talked about it. It just can't be done. It's not feasible for us to do that. One possible solution is making it like a club. But then you have to find someone that wants to take on that extra responsibility. All of us coaches, we're already doing two, three sports. And that takes up a lot of time away from our families anyway. So, none of us really want to take on another sport. Then you have to have another teacher that wants to do it. There is a lot that goes with adding something like that. It is, actually, pretty difficult.

Regional Service Center Representative

Initial contact with a regional education service center representative with expertise in ESL and bilingual education was made to request a face-to-face interview. A convenient interview time was scheduled by the service center representative, and the interview was conducted in a location at the education service center convenient to the service center representative. A consent form was provided to the service center

representative, and appropriate consent was obtained from the participant before conducting the interview.

Interview questions consisted of open-ended inquiries intended to collect data reflecting a regional perspective regarding issues raised during teacher participant interviews. Crystal (pseudonym) answered questions in soft and smooth tones with an occasional use of “*high-rising terminals* (HRT), or the use of phrase-final rising tones” (Levin, 2016, p. 133). HRT appears to function as polite management of conversation; for example, in situations such as an interview in which socially-accepted practices of turn-taking may be suspended (Levin, 2016). Crystal employed gentle hand gestures to accentuate key points in her response to interview questions. Crystal’s responses to interview question delivered in a cohesive and non-halting manner created an overall tone of confident expertise and care regarding the inquiry connected to teachers, learners, and special populations of learners.

Response to Question 1

When asked how well rural high school teachers support EL learning, Crystal described many teachers arriving at the service center for training overwhelmed and fearful regarding providing instruction for ELs in a content-area classroom. Crystal explained many of the teachers possess misconceptions about providing instruction for ELs. Crystal asserted, “Many teachers I have trained have lots of strategies, and they begin to see the realization that these strategies will benefit ELLs as well...they see the impact they will have if used consistently.”

Crystal felt the fears of many teachers were mitigated upon the discovery that best practices in classroom content instruction supported EL instruction. Crystal described the

need for a continued use of “concrete instruction,” including making connections between languages and providing scaffolds such as “visuals, manipulatives, hands-on, and gestures, and vocabulary.” Crystal described such instruction as “how to see the similarities in the two languages and how to be the bridge.”

Crystal emphasized the relevance of content-area instructional strategies to providing instruction for ELs; however, she pointed out that few teachers understand language acquisition. Crystal asserted, “The key...the crux is to understand second language acquisition” and to learn “the timing to use the strategy.”

Crystal addressed concerns for content-area instruction among rural teachers in the region, as rural teachers often have less exposure to teaching ELs in a content-area classroom and often “feel ill-equipped.” Crystal pointed out that rural teachers, when “suddenly bombarded” with an EL in a content-area classroom, need to “take a step back” and remember the student “is a kid that has a different language...not an empty head.” Crystal suggested teachers use visuals and sentence stems to support ELs; however, she emphasized the importance of establishing relationships and connections with the learner, as well as encouraging conversation. Crystal stated, “I just try to help the teachers...they’re just as scared as the kids...you need to relax and have fun...laugh together, not at each other.”

Response to Question 2

When asked what kind of training would be especially effective for content-area teachers in support of EL instruction, Crystal reported the best training approach was to “build capacity within the districts” via the establishment of teacher cohorts serving as “the go-to” person on a regional campus. The training model Crystal suggested would

serve as a means of spreading expertise more efficiently and rapidly among campuses and would provide an opportunity for a respected member of a campus to affect change. Crystal emphasized the need to select a person for training that “peers will listen to...that has the ear of the administrators and principals.” The goal would be to train a respected teacher who would, in turn, train colleagues, who have already received training in content area practices, to serve ELs in content-area classrooms.

Crystal described the complexity of reaching special populations, particularly in rural settings. Crystal stated:

In the school system, there are ELLs who are GT students...there are students in the setting that are SPED, and those students are ELLs too...when we are in those rural settings, we get push-back because it’s only a handful of students. Every kid that comes through your classroom deserves an education...people come from all over the world to this country to get a free education...so, we have to figure out how we are going to be able to help them...we have to think about the way we structure our lessons...I need to have fun as a teacher. I’m addressing the TEKS [Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills]; but I love the lesson...I’ve created or that I’m expanding on.

Crystal addressed the difficulties for rural districts in providing training for teachers, including finding substitutes to cover for teacher leave and the fact that a rural content-area teacher “may be the only...teacher for that level.” Crystal described a common response to such challenges in teacher training as a practice in which many districts choose to “front-load staff development before school starts.” Crystal explained front-loading professional development creates tension for teachers, who feel “I am more

focused on getting ready and prepared to welcome the...hundred people that are going to pass through my doors...I'm just beginning school and just getting to know those kids."

Crystal emphasized the questions arise a month or more into the year, and professional development training would be optimal if provided in response to teacher questions and felt needs, particularly as teachers have varied learning styles and developmental levels.

Crystal mentioned conflicts arising with districts over professional development. Crystal described the practice of many districts in requesting specific training from the service center, only to experience a change of mind when the training date approaches. Crystal explained that, although needs assessments and data indicate the need for training in specific areas, "the principal's perspective will be different from the central office person, which will be different from the coordinator and the teacher--there are so many different levels."

Crystal described professional development experiences in which the central office, administrators, or principals have not communicated with teachers as unsuccessful experiences in which she has "a captive audience who don't want that or who don't understand...they've never had a conversation with them [teachers], so there's a disconnect." Professional development, according to Crystal, are successes "when they do talk to each other, and it's heaven...there's buy in. They [administrators] are actually empowering and showing that they're listening."

Response to Question 3

When asked about successful programs to support ELs in content areas, Crystal emphatically stated, "There's no program. It's people. It's training people and coaching.

And that takes more people.” Crystal reiterated the concept of developing cohorts for training, explaining:

You could coach by doing observations. You could take instructional coaches to coach them...that’s why I’m talking about training a cadre. Because a program is only as good as the person implementing it. Because there are oodles of apps and computer programs, but it’s the creativity of the person behind it.

Crystal emphasized the need for teachers to see a process before implementing it effectively. Crystal explained further:

Teachers want to know...to see what it looks like...so, I’ve been searching and scouring for YouTube videos that show good strategies and implementation in the classroom; because people want to know how and what it looks like. And there are people I follow on Twitter that are good at succinct pieces of information. So, I’ve just started to gather on my webpage, so I can get people to look at this.

Crystal reiterated the importance of investing in people rather than in programs, offering examples of students whose lives she affected. Crystal stated:

You love the kids. You love what you do. It’s your passion...and that’s why the teachers that stick around stay, because they’re not going to give up. And it doesn’t matter if it’s twenty or it’s a difference for one student.

Crystal described a recent effort to create a cohort of teachers for training. The training was successful; however, several factors affected the process. Crystal explained:

I had the cadre from several districts. I wanted to try it out and see if it would work. And it did exactly what we intended it to do...so they were fantastic in their

districts. But it was only a few districts. There are so many. We need people to stay put. I can't tell you how many times I've sent out notices for a training...and so many emails now are bouncing back...no way a district can have a plan and get better if they don't have the same group of people that have the buy in. Something is happening across the state; it's not just in this region. Our society is very mobile, and people can travel down the road. But then, they're not living in the community in which they're teaching. And how much connection is there in that? It makes it real difficult to expand and enhance because you don't have a base. And you need a team of strong players who are on the same base, and who want to move in the same direction.

Crystal mused on possible reasons for district turnover, mentioning monetary and personality issues as possible factors. Crystal, however, returned to her theme of the importance of relationships in successful education, stating, "I just feel like the communications need to be more open and honest. The trust needs to be built. It's all about relationship building." Crystal felt people sometimes leave without giving success a chance. Crystal asserted:

I think that people abandon ship too easily...Rome wasn't built in a day. I just know that, as an advocate for ELLs, there will never be a day that it's not a struggle. And, I'll continue to carry on as long as I can. If I grow tired and don't feel like I can--but, I haven't, and I've been doing this for 25 years now.

Response to Question 4

When asked about the impact of high-stakes, state-mandated, end-of-course exams on ELs, Crystal stated:

I understand why we need to have assessments like this. But it kind of feels like a game...if you have ELL students in the beginning and intermediate stages of English and you're getting them in the seventh- or eighth-grade, I feel like you can't play school the same way...you need to have some accelerated way of helping them. It's a different ball game from seventh-grade on up. So, you have to look at, just as you do in the lower grades, teachers being proficient at literacy and language. They need to have more focus on being able to address and respond to students that don't have all the literacy skills they need. And that's not only for ELLs. There are plenty of kids not proficient in the English language, and teachers not knowing how to address somebody that doesn't know how to read or write proficiently...the high school classrooms need to be sheltered. They need to be differentiated at those levels that we want them to be able to master.

Crystal spoke further about interventions and types of instructional strategies needed at the high school level, explaining:

It's a challenge, an extreme challenge. So, 90-minute blocks are better to me than 50 minutes, like some high schools. It's about quality, not quantity. And we need...to integrate this...if there is a student coming through my pod, they are mixed through mainstream students. But these core people are sheltered instructor trained...and they're connected in that way. So, if I'm writing in my social studies class, it's something that my English language arts person--we've developed those things together...and it's connected in that way...if I can go back to being an elementary teacher...I taught thematically because that's the only way I could reach all the objectives I was supposed to teach. And, I don't know why you

wouldn't want to do it that way anyway because of the connectedness. And it stays with them. What it has become is, 'Let's memorize this' not, 'What could you take and apply?' We need people that are problem solvers. We need people that can critically analyze...and come up with a game plan...even if you tried it for a unit of study...I'm going to guarantee you are going to see students motivated...let's give a real-world problem...for each of the areas.

Crystal explained the impact of failure to make connections in education, stating, "Their creativity is gone. We're killing it. We are killing the learning." Crystal admitted that teaching units of study takes time that teachers do not have, stating:

To be able to create, you need time. And, when you're tired and overworked, you cannot create. When you're overworked to produce and produce, and you don't have time to collaborate with others, to get ideas, to feed your soul, to feel human and not just a robot, you can't. You're human, and you fall down. We need to pamper with little things that build the morale...and then giving time to plan together and not heaping more and more on top of it...actually letting people teach.

Summary

Chapter IV included an introduction, the procedures used in data collection, the background of the study participants, and a presentation of data collected. The presentation included data collected from a participant questionnaire, data collected from individual interviews conducted with three content-area, rural high school teachers, data collected from a group interview conducted with the three teacher participants; and data

collected from an interview conducted with a regional education service center representative.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

Research questions and a participant questionnaire were used to establish an initial framework for data collection focused on the perceptions of rural high school teachers with regard to: (a) personal ability to effectively provide instruction to ELs in a mainstream classroom; (b) effective strategies for the integration of language instruction into content curriculum; (c) professional training and development provided in support of the integration of language instruction into content curriculum; (d) district resources available in support of the integration of language instruction into content curriculum; (e) stress associated with the instructional demands involved in providing literacy and language instruction in content classrooms reflecting an inverted intervention model; and, (f) the effects of state-mandated exit exams on the academic outcomes of ELs.

Data collected from an initial participant questionnaire were merged and analyzed to provide participant background information, to identify common and unique participant characteristics, and to help shape open-ended interview questions (Connelly, 2013; Janesick, 2014). Data collected from participant interviews were transcribed, member-checked, and analyzed to identify initial codes (Glaser, 1965; Miles et al., 2014). Computer-assisted word frequency and KWIC analyses were conducted to assist in coding data and in sorting coded data into categories (Miles et al., 2014). Charts were created using thematic headings to identify patterns, concepts, and outcomes emerging from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Miles & Huberman,

1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Themes emerging from coded data, as shown in Table 2, were used to organize a discussion of patterns and outcomes resulting from data analysis.

Table 2

Themes Emerging from Coded Data

Themes	Codes
Participant Background	Common and diverse participant characteristics Participant motivations in teaching
Content-area Instruction	Perceived instructional strengths EL instruction in content-area classrooms
RTI and District Support	Composition of content-area classrooms Language support programs Support staff
Testing and Accountability	Perceived impacts of high-stakes testing Perceived stresses of high-stakes testing
Rural Education	Benefits of rural education ELs and rural education Downsides to rural education
Regional Representative	Content-area instruction RTI and district support Testing and accountability

Data analysis processes reflected an inverted RTI intervention model, proceeding in tiered stages beginning with analysis of data culled from an initial teacher participant questionnaire and individual teacher participant interviews; moving to data collection from a group teacher participant interview; and ending with analysis of regional data collected in an interview with a regional education service center representative. The tiered approach to data collection and analysis reflected the conceptual model of the study and supported data triangulation and data saturation, as well as study

trustworthiness and transferability of outcomes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Morrow, 2005).

Patterns and Outcomes

Participant Backgrounds

Data analysis revealed common and diverse characteristics in participant backgrounds. Common characteristics of participants included long-time residence in the community of Rural Acres, current employment at Rural Acres High School, and expressed personal interest in subject areas of instruction. Diverse participant characteristics included gender, age, educational attainments, types of teacher certification, types of teacher training, number of years teaching experience, number of school districts of employment, and number of years teaching experience in Rural Acres ISD.

Katarina was a female mathematics teacher in her 40's. Katarina earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in education and obtained standard teacher certification. Katarina's 17 years of experience teaching mathematics in five school districts included teaching in two large districts and in three rural districts. Kristina taught for seven years at Rural Acres Middle School and two years at Rural Acres High School.

Kristin was a female biology teacher in her 50's. Kristin earned a bachelor's degree in biology and obtained alternative teacher certification. Kristin's 10 years of experience teaching biology in two rural high schools included three years teaching experience at Rural Acres High School.

Fredrik was a white male in his 30's. Fredrik earned a bachelor's degree in social studies and obtained alternative teacher certification. Fredrik's teaching experience included six years teaching history at Rural Acres High School.

Fredrik and Kristin reported pre-service alternative certification courses as providing minimal teaching preparation and reported in-service training experiences as inadequate for providing effective language instruction for EL populations in mainstream classrooms. Katarina reported university pre-service training experiences and an excellent induction year experience as adequate preparation for teaching and for providing instruction for EL populations in mathematics; however, Katarina reported in-service training as inadequate preparation for providing instruction for SPED populations in mathematics. Quality of pre-service training appeared to be a key factor in generating participant perceptions of ability to provide adequate instruction for ELs in a mainstream classroom. Data illustrated in Table 3 indicate the impact of pre-service and in-service training on participant perceptions of adequacy to provide instruction for special populations in content-area classrooms.

Table 3

Participant Education and Training

Participant One, Katarina	Participant Two, Kristin	Participant Three, Fredrik
<p>“I took three ESL classes...I worked...in a pull-out program...so I had to know all my numbers in Spanish...college helped me prepare.”</p> <p>“I have attended workshops and trainings to work with all these [special] populations...my biggest challenge is working with SPED students in the classroom.”</p> <p>“If I had started teaching in Rural Acres, I don’t know if I would have gotten the support I needed as a first-year teacher...the district I started in....they had loads of support through...curriculum coordinators.”</p>	<p>“I had a college degree in biology and double minors in psychology and sociology.”</p> <p>“I’ve gone to some workshops...I’ve tried to utilize them...it’s been incredibly difficult.”</p>	<p>“I didn’t go through it with an education focus...I got my alternative cert....the courses, you could knock ‘em out in a week.”</p> <p>“In terms of the training we have received...they do those little things during staff training; but it’s pretty generic stuff.”</p> <p>“We went to this little training...that was based on English language learners, and I didn’t feel like it was anything significant. We weren’t taught anything new and helpful.”</p>

Participants reported specific motivations for selecting teaching as a career.

Katarina selected teaching as an opportunity to escape Rural Acres and overcome the negative impact of generational poverty and perceived her role as a teacher as the means of helping students achieve similar successes. Kristin described personal necessity coupled with a love of her subject area as motivating factors in pursuing a teaching career. Fredrik selected a career as a teacher/coach as an opportunity to pursue dual

interests in history and athletics, as well as a means of interacting with and developing positive relationships with young people.

As data illustrated in Table 4 suggest, participant motivations for choosing to teach appeared to influence participant perceptions of adequacy to provide instruction for ELs in content-area classrooms. Motivated by the impacts of personal effort and educator support in overcoming hardships in her own life, Katarina appeared to value the success of all student populations and used personal time to seek additional training for the improvement of instruction for SPED populations. Katarina's interest in mathematics did not appear to reduce the focus of her efforts in providing quality language support for ELs.

Kristin described personal time outside of the classroom spent searching for innovative methods and technologies supporting biology instruction. Kristin did not describe a similar search for methods supporting language instruction, despite a perceived lack of adequacy to support ELs. Kristin's interest in biology appeared to narrow her instructional focus to strategies geared to enhance content acquisition for general learner populations.

Fredrik selected teaching as a career that provided opportunities to pursue his interest in history and relationship-building with students. Fredrik believed verbal interaction supported student learning; therefore, Fredrik focused on developing quality student relationships that generated authentic conversations. Fredrik understood history as a connection between past and present events and enjoyed helping students make those connections. Fredrik applied relationship-building and verbal interaction as instructional strategies intended to support ELs.

Table 4

Participant Motivations for Selecting Teaching as a Career

Participant One, Katarina	Participant Two, Kristin	Participant Three, Fredrik
<p>“I’ve always been helping people pass...major tests in their life...my mom wanted to get a job and needed her GED... I began working with her in the evenings...she learned it and passed.”</p> <p>“Like most students in Rural Acres, I wanted to get out...my principal pulled me aside my junior year; and he said, ‘You’re going to college.’ He got the forms...I filled them out on his desk...and he mailed them in.”</p> <p>“I want to help these kids realize they’re not stuck...we may be that person in their life, if their parents aren’t going to give that example at home...we’ve got to plant the seeds in them.”</p>	<p>“I’ve always been a teacher of some sort growing up--a tutor.”</p> <p>“Out of necessity and a world that’s been turned upside down, I decided to do something with my life. Thus, I became a teacher.”</p> <p>“My degree was in my subject matter, and that is something that I love. Even in my spare time...I’m out hunting...and coming up with new ideas and new innovations to utilize in the classroom.”</p> <p>“I had students come in this summer that were not my summer school students; I taught them wet mount slides.”</p>	<p>“I just always enjoyed my history classes, and I was an athlete...when I got to school, I couldn’t think of anything else I wanted to study, so I studied history.”</p> <p>“I started thinking, ‘What am I going to do with this?’ and the only thing I could think of to do with a history degree was teach. Of course, I wanted to coach.”</p> <p>“When I was in high school, I started working the summer camps; and I just really enjoyed working with kids--interacting with them.”</p> <p>I’m a pretty strong lecturer. I’m able to show how the stuff I’m talking about...still translates as important today...it gets me talking...it gets them talking. Conversation is where they learn the most.”</p> <p>“I feel kids relate better and I feel they work harder for me just because of the relationship outside of the generic classroom.”</p>

Participant Instructional Strengths

Katarina perceived her strengths as experience, patience, and flexibility applied to classroom instruction. Katarina provided instruction in multiple modes, such as visual aids to enhance vocabulary development, verbal and written instructions to promote student comprehension, and small group learning configurations to provide scaffolded learning.

Word frequency and KWIC analyses provided additional insight into Katarina's instructional strengths. Katarina valued education as a means of improving student college and career opportunities and took responsibility for differentiated instruction in mathematics and academic vocabulary; for reading and language development; and for connecting with students and parents in the rural community in which she lived and taught. Table 5 illustrates word frequency data collected from an interview with Katarina (i.e., Participant One).

Table 5

Participant One/Word Frequency Analysis Data

Word (variant)	Frequency of use	Frequency of use	Word (variant)
<i>student(s)</i>	41	<i>college</i>	12
<i>school(s)</i>	26	<i>level(s)</i>	11
		<i>Spanish</i>	11
<i>math</i>	20	<i>parents</i>	10
		<i>problem</i>	10
<i>year(s)</i>	19	<i>class(es)</i>	9
		<i>life</i>	9
		<i>read(ing)</i>	9
		<i>vocabulary</i>	9
		<i>words</i>	9
<i>working(ed)</i>	18	<i>Communication(ed)</i>	8
		<i>feel</i>	8
		<i>learners</i>	8
		<i>support</i>	8
		<i>trust</i>	8
<i>English language</i>	16	<i>hard</i>	7
<i>learn(ed)</i>	16	<i>hear</i>	7
<i>teaching(taught)</i>	16	<i>time</i>	7
<i>rural</i>	15	<i>district</i>	6
		<i>educate</i>	6
		<i>ELLs</i>	6
		<i>grade</i>	6
		<i>people</i>	6
		<i>skills</i>	6
		<i>successful</i>	6
<i>community</i>	14	<i>classroom(s)</i>	5
		<i>high</i>	5
		<i>home</i>	5
		<i>instruction</i>	5
		<i>pass</i>	5
		<i>teacher</i>	5
		<i>translate</i>	5
		<i>ways</i>	5

Kristin cited “hands on” strategies as her most successful instructional approach and expressed enthusiasm for students demonstrating an interest in biology. As illustrated in Table 6, analysis of data collected from an interview with Kristin (i.e., Participant Two) produced only two words used five or more times. Repeated words included the word “language” with eight repetitions, and the word “time” with five repetitions.

Table 6

Participant Two/Word Frequency Analysis Data

Word (Variant)	Frequency of Use
language	8
time	5

Given the sparsity of Kristin’s word repetitions, data analysis shifted to contextually meaningful words emerging from interview data. Meaningful words used by Kristin in the context of instructional strategies in teaching biology included “hands on” and “innovations.” Kristin mentioned a love for biology that drove her to look for innovative instructional approaches in her spare time.

Fredrik reported using a mixture of instructional strategies, including lecture, discussion, documents, and documentaries. Fredrik identified his instructional strengths as lecture and generating discussions with students. Additional analysis of data, as illustrated in Table 7, revealed an interesting pattern, as Fredrik used the word “relationships” and variants or alternate expressions connected to relationships 18 times and used the word “talking” and variants or alternate expressions connected to talking 21

times. The 39 total uses of words, word variants, and alternate expressions for words related to talking and relationships represented 40 percent of the total number of words Fredrik repeated five or more times.

Table 7

Participant Three/Word Frequency Analysis Data

Word(Variant) and Alternate Expression	Frequency of Use
<i>talk(ing)</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>relationship(s)</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>connect</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>lecture(s)</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>comfortable</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>father figure</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>flock to me</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>latch on to me</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>my kids</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>ask</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>call</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>conversation</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>interact</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>say</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>vocal</i>	<i>1</i>

Specific instructional strengths as cited by participants were supported by word count and KWIC analyses. Table 8 illustrates data related to participant perceptions of instructional strengths and strategies as revealed by word count and KWIC analysis.

Table 8

Participant Instructional Strengths and Strategies

Participant One, Katarina	Participant Two, Kristin	Participant Three, Fredrik
<p>“Just learning from them every year, new methods and new ways of working things--that they’ve learned and that they want to share--just keeping an open mind.”</p> <p>“Repeating things helps; and, also, not just saying it but giving a visual.”</p> <p>“If we can type up instructions and keep it simple--just little bullets of instructions, a little checklist.”</p> <p>“Many of them are visual and tactile learners these days. So, just repeating it...they don’t process it until the second or third time...so repetition and giving visual, as well as auditory instructions.”</p>	<p>“Hands on strategies...any time I do hands on, they seem to get it...and with science that’s easy to do.”</p>	<p>“I’m relatively knowledgeable on the subject just through study, both in school and just because of my own personal interest in the subject.”</p> <p>“I’m organized with the way I present the information...I’m able to lay it out chronologically...I put a lot of work into it.”</p> <p>“I try to mix things up as much as possible...every day they do multiple things.”</p> <p>“I do lecture a lot. It’s history, so you’ve got to talk about it...but I try to read something else; we always have documents that we’re reading.”</p> <p>“Everything has a documentary made about it, and a lot of it is good stuff.”</p> <p>“I get several hours building relationships that other teachers don’t get to build with our kids. A lot of them really relate better.”</p> <p>“I have a special relationship with my</p>

Participant One, Katarina	Participant Two, Kristin	Participant Three, Fredrik
		powerlifting kids...I get a lot of girls...and for a lot of our girls, I am the most positive father figure they have...so a lot of the girls really kind of flock to me and kind of latch on to me...I have a close relationship with my female athletes... I am careful with that relationship.”

EL Instruction in Content-Area Classrooms

Katarina employed sound instructional strategies in support of ELs, such as cloze-style writing models, bilingual visual aids, and English-Spanish bilingual instruction employing numbers and operational terms. Katarina displayed a positive disposition toward ELs in her classroom.

Analysis of contextualized data regarding Kristin’s instruction of ELs produced the following keywords: (a) copying; (b) difficult; (c) Greek; (d) puzzle pieces; (e) segregated; (f) technology; and, (g) vocabulary. Kristin described ELs in her classroom copying academic vocabulary words perfectly but felt they lacked the necessary language skills to make conceptual applications of the words. Kristin asserted ELs would find it impossible to pass a standardized biology test without foundational language skills and expressed frustration with a lack of adequate instructional strategies for ELs. Kristin’s frustration appeared to shift to frustration with ELs in her classroom.

Fredrik expressed a positive disposition toward ELs in his history classes. Fredrik mentioned his admiration for John, a student from China. Fredrik felt he could learn as

much from John as John learned from him. Fredrik, however, offered few specific strategies for language instruction in history. Fredrik cited explaining and interacting as instructional strategies for ELs, failing to acknowledge the limitations of verbal explanations in English offered to non-English speakers. Table 9 illustrates participant data with regard to instructional approaches and dispositions toward ELs in content-area classrooms.

Table 9

EL Instruction in Content-Area Classrooms

Participant One, Katarina	Participant Two, Kristin	Participant Three, Fredrik
<p>“It helps that I know a little Spanish, especially enough in math with my numbers and operational words...so I translate as many of the instructions that I can.”</p> <p>“If we’re working with a problem...I’ll shift and ask the question in Spanish. I can see they’ll perk up because they know I really expect a Spanish student to answer this.”</p> <p>“I have some vocabulary cards with graphs and pictures that will show the word in English, and it also has the word in Spanish.”</p> <p>“My word walls...are done in English and Spanish.”</p> <p>“We were doing writing prompts...they would copy</p>	<p>“I’m going to be honest. I’m at a loss...like my warm ups, they copied them down perfectly every day; they were not answered, but they were copied. They don’t have a basis of the English vocabulary.”</p> <p>“You actually learn more new words in biology than you do if you were learning an entire language; and, with them having no basis, it’s twice as hard.”</p> <p>“It’s like little bitty pieces of the puzzle to make the big picture and, when there’s no foundation, it’s just a bunch of puzzle pieces...it’s not fitting.”</p>	<p>“They like to talk about things because sometimes when they read it they don’t understand it; so I try with them, specifically, to do a lot of talking.”</p> <p>“I ask them a lot of questions to make sure they understand it and get them talking about the material; and that way if they say something that’s incorrect, I can stop that and... get rid of the misconceptions they have...I feel like, with them, just being more vocal.”</p> <p>“This past year, for some reason all of my ELLs were in one class, so they were willing to talk...so that really helped.”</p>

Participant One, Katarina	Participant Two, Kristin	Participant Three, Fredrik
the words because I set up the paragraph and just leave blanks for the words I was looking for.”	“They copied; they segregated; they sit and speak their native language. If you go back there to check on them, they’re supposed to be using a translator on their cell phone and they’re on social media.”	<p>“Just getting them to let down that shell...try something they’re not very comfortable doing.”</p> <p>“Just getting them to understand...you need to read the information; but I’m here for you, and I’m going to help explain it and that goes back to the trust and getting the relationships.”</p> <p>“We had John this year. He came all the way from China and was one of the top guys. He just happened to come when we were talking a lot about Communism and China...I looked at him just to make sure I was getting it right. He’s a smart kid; and I feel when you have kids like that, you can learn just as much from them as they learn from you.”</p>

RTI and District Support

Participants discussed the composition of classes in terms of student levels of need for intervention. Katarina described a broad range of mathematical levels in all learner populations and cited specific classrooms in which the percentage of students in need of intervention exceeded the percentage of students prepared for on-level instruction. Kristin expressed concern that, without an aide, students in many of her

classes were “not getting the attention they need.” Fredrik mentioned a lack of support staff provided by the district to meet student intervention needs. Fredrik reported that required ESL certification of teachers, while perhaps useful to the district in meeting state standards, did not meet the needs of ELs in the classroom.

Katarina felt the implementation of an RTI model in the classroom would be a perfect model to meet the needs of all learners. Fredrik stated the implementation of an RTI model would require research on the part of administrators and counselors rather than the current practice of seemingly random classroom assignments.

Participants agreed the district lacked the resources to support special populations adequately in classrooms. Participants felt the district would be more likely to hire a single language instructor than to hire several individuals to serve as support staff. Katarina suggested a double-block of language instruction with an emphasis on academic vocabulary from all content-area subjects.

Katarina and Kristin discussed the ineffectiveness of district implementation of an Internet-based language acquisition program in support of EL test preparation. Katarina and Kristin cited the last-minute nature of program implementation that allowed ELs approximately one week to practice content-area skills and one week to use the language program before facing a second administration of state exams. Katarina and Kristin viewed the Internet-based program as a possible strategy for overcoming support staff limitations, provided the program was implemented for a reasonable duration during the instructional year. All participants favored a pull-out program for ELs. Table 10 illustrates participant perceptions of classroom composition and district support.

Table 10

RTI and District Support

Participant One, Katarina	Participant Two, Kristin	Participant Three, Fredrik
<p>“More like 60 percent at the bottom with more at the top...there were some classes...where this might have been 20 percent at the bottom.”</p> <p>“What they called our SPED class...when 10 to 12 students are SPED in one class...you don’t have students that are high in math to partner them up or group them up to help them and, if you don’t have an inclusion aide that’s there...they’re just not getting the attention they need to be successful.”</p> <p>“And that’s why I’m looking for more strategies this summer...it’s a problem when 15 of my students are SPED and 15 of them do not meet the minimum requirements to pass STAAR; there’s a critical need right there.”</p> <p>“This [RTI model] would be an ideal setup for every classroom.”</p>	<p>I’ve actually had one inclusion teacher in 10 years that I would consider an inclusion teacher...she got a copy of my lesson plan; she knew what she was doing...students were successful.”</p> <p>“I feel that if these kids had been put on <i>Rosetta Stone</i> during certain periods during the year--maybe electives--then the possibility of them doing much better in summer school making more sense.”</p> <p>“I think, while immersion is good, we’ve got to use some strategies that will help these kids.”</p>	<p>This [RTI model] would require researching, and that’s not ours--our administrators, counselors--it would require them to do more than just, ‘okay, you’re here, you’re here’...”</p> <p>“The problem...is the number of kids that we have, we would need someone with them. We don’t have the staffing...we’ve got 45 minutes...there’s only so much differentiation you can do in that time period.”</p> <p>“They say the best way to learn a language is immersion...but do they need a pull-out program? Absolutely.”</p> <p>“If they had an actual, real pull-out program...that would be highly effective...but, sadly, we don’t.”</p> <p>“At the elementary school, their answer...was to make the teachers be ESL certified which, I guess legally, works; but it’s not really going to do anything. You still have those kids sitting there in that</p>

Participant One, Katarina	Participant Two, Kristin	Participant Three, Fredrik
		<p>classroom in a roomful of people they don't understand."</p> <p>"It falls to the teacher...my wife had to deal with it...she would have to give instruction to the other kids, then she would have to go off to the side...and figure out a way to explain."</p> <p>"Really some type of pull-out program...having an aide in your room all day or following them around seems like a waste of a body."</p>

Testing and Accountability

Participants discussed stresses resulting from state-mandated testing, perceiving a negative impact on teachers and students alike. Kristin stated high-stakes testing reduced teachers and students to "a number" and created negative self-perceptions within students based on performance on a test. Fredrik pointed out that testing drives instruction and testing also limits instruction by replacing time available to delve deeply into topics of interest with time required to offer shallow coverage of tested topics followed by weeks of test review. Katarina indicated the stress of preparing for state-mandated testing robbed her of the joy of teaching and reduced the performance of students by promoting low passing standards.

Katarina and Kristin cited difficulties faced by ELs in learning academic vocabulary as a key challenge in successfully passing end-of-course exams. Fredrik mentioned the challenges facing many ELs, as recent residents of another country, in understanding historical documents and comprehending U.S. history. Fredrik felt the test also was a problem for ELs because they might not be “comfortable with the language.” Fredrik noted state tests for ELs that are not on level are detrimental to student development.

Regarding the impact of state-mandated testing on ELs, Katarina expressed a measure of hopefulness; however, she pointed out ELs recognized they would have to work much harder than many other students to pass the test, as the mathematics exam tested mathematics and reading skills. Word problems included distractors, preventing struggling readers from deciphering the problems correctly. Kristin asserted that state-mandated tests created the risk that ELs would drop out and be restricted to manual labor. Fredrik believed the language barrier presented by state tests was, for most ELs, discouraging.

Participants discussed options for measuring accountability. Kristin asserted that accountability should focus on learner growth and progress rather than on passing or failing a test. Katarina mentioned the possibility of using student portfolios to measure progress; although, Katarina admitted collecting portfolios for all students in public schools would probably not be feasible. Fredrik pointed out the unreliability of state-controlled measures of accountability and asserted that accountability should be maintained at a local level, placing responsibility on local administrators to manage

teacher effectiveness. Table 11 illustrates participant feedback on the impact of state-mandated testing on teachers and students.

Table 11

Testing and Accountability

Participant One Katarina	Participant Two Kristin	Participant Three Fredrik
<p>“The test is in English, so they have a major disadvantage because of the vocabulary blockage.”</p> <p>“It is more of a reading test, even the...algebra test; there is some math that they have to pull out; but, if they can’t understand and read the problem, then they’re not going to be successful.”</p> <p>“So many distractors are in the problems--extra information that could throw them off. And, if they’re not even processing what the word problem’s talking about, they may not have all the hints and clues they need to solve that problem.”</p> <p>“It’s affecting them in different ways...many of them are working hard because they know they need to pass it to graduate. The students I’m working with are very determined...they want to be successful.”</p>	<p>“It’s like someone who is trying to read Greek--they have no idea; and you can’t really help them other than what you do throughout the year.”</p> <p>“I think it’s a total waste of time to expect these kids to pass a standardized test as English language learners when they have very little vocabulary groundwork done--impossible.”</p> <p>“I think the long-term impact would be that they do not master, and they end up being a statistic as a dropout, and actually going to work as a manual laborer.”</p> <p>“Our accountability depends on those numbers...I hate the fact that we’ve defined our profession as a number on a test...I think, by testing, we actually set our students up for failure...you internalize, ‘Well, I’m just an idiot; I’m lazy; I don’t have to;</p>	<p>“Translating the material. I know, at one point, they were able to take it in their native language.”</p> <p>“If they are not comfortable with the language--if it is not their primary language--they’re not going to do as well...if we want someone to be successful, we put them in the most comfortable situation...obviously, if they are English language learners, it’s taking it in the language they are comfortable with.”</p> <p>“It’s kind of a double-sided deal...we want them to become proficient; but we also want them to be successful on the test.”</p> <p>“There are certain words they need to get things across and, if you don’t know them, you can’t explain yourself fully.”</p> <p>“Some of them are at level and they do fine. But, for the ones struggling, I just</p>

Participant One Katarina	Participant Two Kristin	Participant Three Fredrik
<p>” They don’t feel they’re in a hopeless state, but they do realize they’re going to have to work much harder to overcome the barrier--the language barrier--and learn the math as well. They’re not totally disheartened.”</p> <p>“There’s a lot of pressure...on the teachers for these STAAR tests...it does take the fun out of teaching...it’s just a very stressful time; you’ve got to move along...I do miss just teach all year long and let them take a test at the end of the year and not have to stress and stop and review for six weeks.”</p> <p>“One thing I told myself in college, ‘I will never teach to a test’ and it was a couple of years ago it hit me--I feel like I am teaching to a test.”</p> <p>“I feel it is lowering our standards...they know the passing rate is 40%...that, to me, is not a passing rate.”</p> <p>“I remember my first 10 years of teaching never mentioning a test, never stressing over it; but it’s just a pressure these last</p>	<p>it’s no big deal,’ or, ‘I tried real hard and I failed’...”</p> <p>“We could measure progress and growth...not that you passed or failed. Did you move beyond?”</p> <p>“We don’t standardize...our teaching; so why are we standardizing a student...not every one of my students is going to love biology...I say gear to the ones you can and do what you can to the best of your ability for the rest.”</p> <p>“You look at these students and realize the foundation you are giving them in a subject that 70% are not going to use at all. I think that is where we are failing students as educators--not gearing them more.”</p> <p>“We need to rethink. I’ve often thought about setting up a flipped classroom on Facebook or something.”</p>	<p>feel it’s another blow they have to take...it’s detrimental to their development, because they think that they are trying hard--they are trying hard--and it just may not be clicking.”</p> <p>“If they fail, they are obviously going to be very disappointed, and it makes them feel like ‘all this work I’ve been doing, and what’s to show for it?’”</p> <p>“You literally have kids show up on test day and just go to sleep. They don’t care, and a lot of it is because they know, ‘I don’t have to pass this the first time; I’ll have another chance.’ So, it’s not an indicator of what they’re learning; of how we’re teaching.”</p> <p>“Having to teach to this curriculum—and I have to move through it in a timely manner so I can finish and have six weeks to review--it really limits what we can and can’t do.”</p> <p>“And it’s a standard that the state doesn’t even decide until they get the tests...which is stupid, I think.”</p>

Participant One Katarina	Participant Two Kristin	Participant Three Fredrik
<p>eight years, it really has shifted.”</p> <p>“I remember having this discussion in college, and we were thinking about...portfolios for the students to show...you couldn’t turn in a portfolio for every student across the state of Texas--but maybe we could.”</p>		<p>“And going back to accountability...I always thought it would be better to place more stress on the administrators...it’s their job to watch us and to make sure we are doing our jobs....so, having a more administrative presence.”</p>

Rural Education

Participant perceptions of the benefits of teaching in a rural district included knowing several students well and having attended school with parents or relatives of several students. Participants perceived close connections in a rural community as resulting in open lines of communications between the classroom and the home. Table 12 illustrates participant perceptions of the benefits of teaching in a rural district.

Table 12

Benefits of Rural Education

Participant One Katarina	Participant Two Kristin	Participant Three Fredrik
<p>“I never thought I would come back until retirement, but I wanted to come back to the community that helped me and gave so much to me.”</p> <p>“I like the rural community because everybody knows everybody...so, I’m teaching a lot of students that I went to school with their parents; and I think those connections are much deeper in a rural community.”</p> <p>“Some parents say, ‘Put your number in my cell phone...if you need me for anything, I’ll be there’...”</p> <p>“I like more of the parent involvement and the community pride and fighting to make it better--not just one person, but it’s a group--a larger group of the community.”</p>	<p>“These are your neighbors, your friends; these are their children, their grandchildren...positive benefits would be being able to get support from home...understanding we are all on the same team, and we all really want success for the student.”</p> <p>“The comradery, the hometown feeling, what’s important to the students--we get to share that.”</p>	<p>“I’ve never thought about not teaching in one because I went to school in a rural district, and I have always taught in this district--I’ve never known anything else.”</p> <p>“It’s smaller. You know your kids a little bit more...I think it’s just going back to the relationships you are able to build.”</p> <p>“Obviously, I am from Rural Acres, and I know a lot of these kids; I know their parents, so I have that relationship that I can fall back on if I need help...if I am having a problem with a kid--some of the kids...I went to school with their parents--I can call them up and say, ‘Hey, it’s Fredrik;’ and they can help me out.”</p> <p>“I feel in a city you might be more likely to catch parents that are unwilling to connect because they don’t know you.”</p>

Benefits perceived by participants from living and teaching in a rural community did not extend to ELs and their families. Fredrik mentioned many EL families, having more recently moved to Rural Acres, did not experience close relationships with the teachers at Rural Acres High School. As illustrated in Table 13, teacher participants unanimously attributed a perceived lack of close relationships between Rural Acres teachers and EL families to language and cultural barriers.

Table 13

ELs and Rural Education

Participant One Katarina	Participant Two Kristin	Participant Three Fredrik
“They are very respectful and very hard working; and I, too, see the language barrier in communicating with their parents...last year I called. Just a positive phone call. So, they assumed something was wrong...they didn’t really understand me; the daughter said she had to explain...what the call was about.”	“I think we need to understand culturally...we need...professional development; we need not only better strategies and more strategies and ways to reach these kids, but also more understanding of the cultural unit.”	<p>“A lot of our ELL kids are moving here, so they aren’t established in the community...it’s just hard to establish that same relationship you have with the parents of a kid that I’ve known for 15 years.”</p> <p>“And those parents aren’t immersed...so, it’s difficult to get them to understand the urgency of what we do...and, you don’t even know what they’re telling that kid.”</p>

Participants cited a number of downsides to rural education, including: (a) insufficient opportunities for teacher job growth; (b) sparsity of job opportunities for students; (c) a small pool of substitute teachers available to the district; (d) limitations in extracurricular activities available to students; (e) small numbers of school staff members

available to support an expansion of extracurricular activities for students; (f) limitations in district funding available to meet individual student needs adequately; (g) student inability to perceive opportunities available in the larger world outside of a rural area; (h) the rapidity at which negative information spreads within a small community; (i) a lack of organized communication of positive information within a rural community, such as school activities and the achievements of students; and, (j) the inconvenience of travel to obtain wanted and needed items at lower prices. As illustrated in Table 14, participants agreed that a central downside to teaching in a rural community centered on limited student perspectives with regard to life and career choices available outside of a rural community--a lack of perspective that negatively impacted student motivation to engage in and to achieve in school.

Table 14

Downsides to Rural Education

Participant One Katarina	Participant Two Kristin	Participant Three Fredrik
<p>“Like most other students that grow up in Rural Acres, I wanted to get out--there’s nothing to do here...a lot of them feel like they’re stuck in Rural Acres, and they’ll never get out.”</p> <p>“In a small town, news travels fast...we need the positive things in our school, that information, to travel fast.”</p>	<p>“The lack of opportunity, lack of job growth...the inconvenience of having to travel to get what you need, what you want without having to pay an arm and a leg for it in a rural area...”</p> <p>“Like life in any small town... you know everybody, and everybody knows your business.”</p>	<p>“When you are in a rural district like this, that’s all they know; and they have a hard time...seeing big world issues. Rural Acres is their little world, and it’s hard to see outside of these borders--what’s happening here. Sometimes it’s difficult to get them to understand.”</p>

Participant One Katarina	Participant Two Kristin	Participant Three Fredrik
<p>“In our rural community, many of them are just not motivated.”</p> <p>“That aide was to help translate...but she was very often called to be a substitute. I would say she was in our classroom about 10 percent of the year.”</p>		

Regional Representative

Analysis of interview data collected from an interview with a regional education service center representative with expertise in ESL and bilingual education supported themes emerging from teacher participant interview data. Analysis of regional representative data provided support for analysis of teacher participant data in three key areas, including: a) teacher perceptions of adequacy to provide instruction for ELs in content areas; b) teacher perceptions of a need for increased district support of EL instruction in rural districts; and, c) teacher perceptions of the impact of high-stakes testing on the academic outcomes of ELs.

Content-Area Instruction

Regarding EL instruction in content-area classrooms, Crystal’s insights supported Katarina’s confident and consistent use of research-based instructional practices. Katarina’s emphasis on providing visuals in vocabulary instruction, sentence stems in writing activities, and connections between the English language and the EL’s native language, matched best practices as described by Crystal.

Despite Kristin's perceptions of inadequacy in offering instruction to ELs in biology, Crystal also supported the use of hands on instructional strategies as highlighted in Kristin's described instructional strengths. Kristin's use of concrete, hands-on instruction in biology provided suitable instruction for ELs, indicating Kristin's perceptions of inadequacy might be mitigated upon recognizing her instructional strengths suited the needs of ELs.

Fredrik also expressed a sense of inadequacy in providing instruction for ELs in history, mentioning the need for the district to provide better services for ELs. Crystal's assertion of the primacy of relationships over programs highlighted unrecognized strengths in Fredrik's instruction of ELs in the history classroom stemming from establishing relationships and encouraging conversation.

Perceptions of inadequacy as expressed by Kristin and Fredrik were supported by Crystal's comment that many teachers arrive for training feeling overwhelmed and fearful and needing to understand the use of solid instructional strategies in content areas are sufficient for the support of ELs. In addition to providing instructional confidence, however, Crystal emphasized the need for teachers to understand the process of language acquisition in order to apply instructional strategies at the appropriate time in the process of language acquisition. Crystal pointed out that strategies and language acquisition processes can be modeled by trained peers for application in content-area classrooms.

RTI and District Support

Despite the use of instructional strategies providing support for ELs in content-area classrooms, teacher participants expressed perceptions of a lack of district support in offering instruction for ELs. Inadequate support personnel in mainstream classrooms with

inverted, top-heavy tiers of intervention needs created an instructional scenario described by Katarina as a “critical need.” Crystal addressed lack of support in rural districts connected to small numbers of staff members available for classroom support and the tendency in rural districts to bypass student needs when such needs are represented by small numbers of students. Crystal posed a solution in establishing a cohort of trainees--teachers respected by administrators and teachers alike--as participants in training to support instruction of ELs in content-area classrooms.

Regarding a cohort candidate from a rural district, an ability to cross content-areas would be an additional requirement, as small districts often reflect a staffing composition including a single staff member as the instructor for an entire level of instruction. Training would also need to bypass the typical practice of front-loading professional development to address instructional needs in the context of instruction as it takes place over the course of the school year. A year-long schedule of training would facilitate a real-time response to student assessment data, as well as a contextualized response to the expressed needs of teachers for instructional support.

Testing and Accountability

Analysis of regional representative interview data provided support for teacher participant perceptions of increased difficulties for ELs attempting to successfully pass high-stakes end-of-course tests given in English. In addition to obvious challenges arising from insufficient language acquisition, biology exams represented a high level of academic vocabulary acquisition made more challenging for learners in the process of acquiring English conversational vocabulary; algebra exams represented a high level of English reading skill required in addition to mathematical concept acquisition in

deciphering an exam focused on the solving of word problems; and history exams represented understanding of US historical and political events by learners with little exposure to US history and politics. Crystal acknowledged the increased difficulty for ELs without English language acquisition in place prior to the seventh grade. Crystal supported teacher participant suggestions for a pull-out program focused on academic vocabulary acquisition across content areas, stating:

I understand the need to have assessments like this; but it kind of feels like a game...you can't play school the same way...if you have ELL students in the beginning and intermediate stages of English and you're getting them in the seventh and eighth grade; then you need some kind of accelerated way of helping them to close the gaps.

Crystal also remarked on the impact of EL instruction in an educational climate representing academic gaps in the general population. Crystal stated, "And it's not only for ELLs. There are plenty of kids that are not proficient in the English language and teachers not knowing how to address somebody that doesn't know how to read or write proficiently at fifth grade." Crystal decried the emphasis on testing that takes a teacher's focus from creative strategies that undergird student learning to a focus on passing an exam. Table 15 illustrates analysis of data from an interview of a regional representative. Analysis provided support for themes emerging from analysis of data collected from teacher participant interviews.

Table 15

Emergent Themes and Regional Representative Interview Data

Theme	Context
Content-area Instruction	<p>“Many teachers I have trained have lots of strategies, and they begin to see...that these strategies will benefit ELLs as well...they see the impact they will have if used consistently...concrete instruction...visuals, manipulatives, hands-on, and gestures, and vocabulary.”</p> <p>“I think the key, the crux, is to understand second language acquisition...they also need to learn the timing to use the strategy.”</p>
RTI and District Support	<p>“What I would like to do is build capacity within the districts...it needs to be somebody that is respected by the group...a go-to person peers will listen to...that has the ear of the administrators and principals.”</p> <p>“It’s difficult for a district to let a teacher go to multiple trainings...it’s hard to find a substitute. It’s hard when you’re the only...teacher for that grade level.”</p> <p>“They would rather front-load staff development before school starts...I am more focused on getting ready and prepared to welcome the...hundred people that are going to pass through my doors...I’m just beginning school and just getting to know those kids...we can compromise. We can have a set up where we have training days throughout the year that are meeting the needs that are generated from the needs assessment and the data we’ve collected...we also need to allow the teachers to have their choice.”</p>
Testing and Accountability	<p>“So, it just breaks my heart what I see; people putting pressure from the outside. People thinking about an exam instead of thinking about addressing a TEK and what is the fun literature and activities that can bring that to life.”</p>

Summary

Chapter V included an introduction with an overview of themes emerging from data analyses, as well as patterns and outcomes of data analyses. Patterns and outcomes stemmed from analysis of participant background data, analysis of participant content-area instruction data; analysis of RTI and district support data; analysis of accountability data; analysis of rural education data; and analysis of interview data obtained from a regional education service center representative.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Participants in the study included three rural high school teachers providing instruction for grades 9 through 12 in mainstream content-area classes of algebra, biology, and history, and a regional education service center representative. Themes emerging from data collected from individual participants were supported by data collected from a group interview including teacher participants and by data reflecting a regional perspective collected in an interview with a regional education service center representative. The tiered study design reflected the conceptual model of the study highlighting an inverted intervention model reflected in many rural high school mainstream content-area classrooms.

The results of the study addressed research questions with regard to rural high school teacher perceptions of: (a) the ability to successfully manage EL instruction in mainstream classrooms; (b) the ability to implement effective strategies for integrating language instruction into content-area instruction; (c) the effectiveness of professional training and development provided in support of EL instruction in content-area classrooms; (d) district support for the instruction of ELs in content-area classrooms; (e) stress accompanying the instruction of ELs in content-area classrooms; and, (f) the impact of end-of-course testing on the academic outcomes of ELs.

Interpretation of Findings

Teacher Perceptions of Adequacy

The mathematics teacher participant reported confidence regarding providing instruction for ELs in a rural high school algebra classroom; however, the biology and history teacher participants expressed a lack of confidence in the ability to provide adequate instruction for ELs in content-area classrooms. The confidence of the mathematics teacher in providing instruction to ELs appeared to emerge from pre-service training, including university-level courses in ESL instruction and a pre-service internship experience providing pull-out instruction for ELs. In-service training and professional development workshops did not appear to positively impact teacher perceptions of adequacy regarding providing instruction for ELs in content-area classrooms.

Pre-service training appeared to provide the mathematics teacher with confidence in recognizing specific strategies supporting both language and content-area knowledge acquisition. The mathematics teacher cited classroom use of visuals to support vocabulary development, use of sentence stems in writing prompts, and making connections between English and Spanish during instruction as effective tools for supporting ELs in the mathematics classroom. The instructional strategies cited by the mathematics teacher coincided with effective strategies for ELs in content-area classrooms described by the regional service center representative as including visual aids to support vocabulary development, the use of sentence stems, the use of gestures, and making linguistic connections during instruction.

The service center representative emphasized the tendency of content-area teachers to feel overwhelmed and fearful regarding instruction for ELs in content-area classrooms. The biology teacher demonstrated evidence of feeling overwhelmed, citing the impossibility of providing effective instruction for non-English speaking learners considering the high level of vocabulary acquisition demands in the content-area of biology. The service center representative indicated teachers often found relief from stress resulting from expectation for providing adequate instruction for ELs in content-area classrooms upon the realization that consistent practice of research-based instructional strategies adequately provide support for EL instruction in content-area classrooms. The stated preference of the biology teacher for hands-on instruction in biology offered an area in which the biology teacher might have developed a sense of adequacy in providing content-area instruction for ELs in biology, as hands-on instruction is an especially suitable instructional support for EL instruction as per the regional service center representative. The biology instructor also might have developed confidence in using instructional strategies such as writing prompts upon making a minor adjustment of the prompts in providing sentence stems for ELs.

The history teacher cited relationship-building and conversation with learners as a preferred instructional strategy in the history classroom. The regional representative supported the development of relationships with ELs and an emphasis on conversation as important strategies for supporting EL learning in content-area classrooms. The regional representative described a need for teachers to set aside a view of ELs as a foreign entity within a classroom or as a learner void of understanding. The service center representative emphasized a need for teachers to adopt a view of ELs as typical of other

classroom learners--children possessing valuable background experiences available to teachers through conversation and relationship development. The history teacher expressed an innate understanding of the need to develop relationships with all learners in the classroom and might have developed increased confidence in providing instruction for ELs upon making minor adjustments to instructional strategies, such as an increased use of sentence stems in writing activities or an increased use of hands-on activities as instructional strategies.

Professional Training

In tandem with increased confidence in providing instruction for ELs in content-area classrooms, the key training need for content-area teachers appeared to be increased understanding of language acquisition processes. The regional representative described teacher frustrations stemming from offering content-area instruction suitable to EL learners only to observe little to no evidence of increased language acquisition or increased content-area learning. The regional representative suggested teachers needed to understand optimal timing to provide strategic instructional strategies--timing coinciding with EL language development stages. The regional representative also emphasized a need for teachers to recognize an ongoing need for instructional supports to avoid a preemptive cessation of supportive instructional strategies such as visual aids, hands-on activities, use of gestures, providing sentence stems, and making connections between a learner's native language and English. The regional representative also emphasized the benefits of content-area teachers understanding the need for an EL to continue use of a native language and to continue to experience linguistic and cultural connections between a native language and English.

The regional service center representative emphasized a need for more contextualized teacher training rather than a frequent use of “one-size-fits-all” training workshops. Contextualized training would allow teachers to develop a deeper understanding of EL language acquisition processes and individualized EL learning needs while providing opportunities for a trained cohort of teachers to recruit and empower other teachers across multiple districts within a region. A cohort training system provides a possible means for a single regional representative to offer more rapid and broader dissemination of training across multiple districts in a region.

District Support

The regional education service representative indicated rural districts often struggled to provide adequate support for EL instruction in content-area classrooms due to a lack of substitutes available for teacher training opportunities--a factor that promotes the current practice of front-loading professional development training. The regional service center representative expressed a need for teachers to experience training in the context of the instructional year after becoming familiar with student needs and after having opportunities to identify specific areas for additional training.

The regional education service center representative supported the development of a cohort of teachers for extended professional training. A cohort training system would allow a select teacher to obtain adequate professional development in EL instruction and to deliver such training to fellow staff members on individual campuses. The cohort system would provide extended development over the course of an instructional year, providing contextualized input addressing the needs of individual districts, individual teachers, and individual students. The cohort training system suggested by the service

center representative mitigates the issue of providing adequate numbers of substitute teachers to support teacher training, as a single teacher would be selected for extended training and would be able to deliver support to other teachers in the district. The select teacher, however, would need to possess the ability to deliver training in all content areas, as many rural districts have a single teacher for each level of instruction precluding the selection of cohorts members for training from each department.

The regional representative emphasized the need for care in selecting a cohort member for extended training, as the cohort member needed to have earned the respect of teachers and administrators in respective districts. The cohort member would need to have earned the respect of other teachers to effectively impact the classroom practices of fellow teachers in the district. The cohort member would need to have earned the respect of district administrators to exert influence on policy decisions.

The mathematics teacher participant reported district provision of an EL instructional aide; however, a dearth of substitute teachers available to the district resulted in the instructional aide serving as a substitute teacher for 90% of the instructional year. All teacher participants discussed district provision of an inclusion aide who was seldom present in classrooms. The history teacher pointed out budgetary limitations for a rural district in providing adequate personnel to serve as push-in instructional aides. In addition, the history teacher perceived requiring teachers to acquire ESL certification, while addressing legal and policy requirements, did not adequately meet student needs without providing adequate support staff to assist teachers. All teacher participants concluded the best solution for their rural district was to provide EL pull-out instruction emphasizing the acquisition of academic vocabulary from all content

areas. Teacher perceptions of the limitations in rural district support for EL instruction were substantiated by the comments of the regional service center representative regarding rural districts lacking available substitutes to provide training opportunities for content-area teachers and lacking the will to provide instruction for small numbers of ELs.

High-Stakes Testing

Teacher participants expressed perceived stresses regarding instruction for ELs in content-area classrooms, using descriptors such as “impossible,” “lacking,” and “critical need.” Teacher participants expressed perceived negative impacts on teachers and learners alike regarding state-mandated tests. The effect of mandated testing on ELs was described by participants as “becoming a statistic as a dropout;” “harmful to development;” “a barrier that prevents them from being as successful as they could be;” and, “lowering the standard for all students.” Participants expressed the negative impact of state-mandated tests on teachers as “teachers are being defined as a number;” “takes the fun out of teaching;” “teaching to the test;” and, “limiting what I want to teach.”

The regional education service center representative supported teacher perceptions of the negative impact of high-stakes testing on EL instruction and on the quality of instruction for all learners. Regarding ELs, the service center representative indicated testing was like “a game that required different rules” for ELs possessing beginning and intermediate English language skills in junior high and beyond. For ELs with lower levels of language acquisition, passing end-of-course exams requires an accelerated learning environment--a conclusion that seconded the teacher participant suggestion that ELs with language barriers be placed in a pull-out program focusing on

the acquisition of academic vocabulary from all content-areas. Clearly the expectation that ELs pass high-stakes tests before reaching a high level of English language acquisition presents a significant barrier to positive EL academic outcomes.

Rural Education

Teacher participants expressed the perceived benefits of rurality as established relationships in the community fostering communication with parents and guardians, and as a sense of working as a team with the community to achieve the success of students. The benefits of rurality were not perceived by participants as extending to ELs and their families. Participants cited a more recent influx of EL families, language barriers, and cultural differences as perceived inhibitors of teacher-parent communication and teamwork that provided a perceived advantage for the students of long-time, English-speaking residents in the rural community.

Connections to Theoretical Framework

Constructivist theory supports a study of inclusive classrooms intended to provide learners with cognitive supports to assist knowledge construction and with social supports to provide the modeling and scaffolding necessary to exceed the developmental limitations of the learner (Bruner, 1963; Peterson, 2012; Piaget, 1985; Scholnik et al., 2006; Vygotsky, 1986). Constructivist theory also supports language learning within inclusive social contexts in which day-to-day exposure to comprehensible output, safe opportunities to practice, and developmentally-sound demands for growth in conversational and content-area language are intended to support language acquisition (Bruner, 1963; Krashen, 1987, 1988; Piaget, 1985; Vygotsky, 1986).

Connections to Conceptual Framework

Data collection and analysis supported the conceptual framework of the study regarding the inverted RTI intervention model present in many rural high school content-area classrooms (IDEA, 2005; Jaeger & Pearson, 2017; Lovett et al., 2008; Meltzer, 2001). Data were collected and analyzed for emerging themes beginning with collection and analysis of individual participant questionnaire and interview data; moving to collection and analysis of group interview data; and ending with collection and analysis of regional interview data gathered from a regional education service center representative.

Teacher participants expressed stresses resulting from expectations that content-area instruction should include scaffolded and differentiated instruction for learners needing small group and individual intervention in numbers that matched or exceeded the number of learners with on-level skills. The regional service center representative expressed the need for high school teachers to be able to meet the literacy needs of ELs along with other learners lacking the ability to read and write proficiently in classrooms, indicating the achievement gaps in native speakers coexist with the language acquisition needs of ELs in content-area classrooms. High school content-area teachers must develop skills extending beyond content knowledge to provide instruction for learners with academic gaps, as well as to provide instruction for learners with language acquisition gaps.

Further, the current state of education requires an adjustment in curriculum and in the expected delivery of instruction. Teacher participants discussed the need for changes in how instruction is delivered in order to better engage students and to meet individual

student needs. As stated by the regional education service center representative, “We can’t do things the same way we’ve been doing...we need to be proficient in that language piece...we are killing the learning. You have to think differently and think how you could get them...engaged.”

Implications for Policy and for Practice

Data emerging from this study emphasized that successful application of constructivist theory requires more than organizing mainstream classrooms with diverse populations of learners. Content-area teachers must be trained effectively to model and differentiate instruction for populations with a broad range of instructional needs. Pre-service training should include university coursework and opportunities for internships providing experience in scaffolding and differentiating instruction for special populations. Professional development training must include specific, research-based strategies, as well as proficient means of assessing the impact of strategies on learner progress--diagnostic and formative assessments useful for supporting and adjusting instruction rather than summative, high-stakes assessments that drive and limit instruction. Districts must provide adequate support to achieve instructional successes for diverse learners, implementing training that provides contextualized and individualized input throughout the instructional year. Bridges must be constructed between schools and homes to connect personal and cultural backgrounds of learners with school culture.

State and federal policies mandate the inclusion of special populations in mainstream, content-area classrooms except for learners unable to function in mainstream classrooms (IDEA, 2004). Funding to support such policies must be adequate and must be accounted for in terms of local use for services provided to specific learner

populations (Verstegen & Knoeppel, 2012; Wixom, 2015). Accountability for funding should be tied to local assessment of individual student growth as opposed to state-mandated assessments based on a nebulous standard of achievement. Teacher accountability should be linked to individual student growth rather than to passing percentages gleaned from a shifting standard.

Recommendations for Future Research

The suggestion presented by the regional education service center representative for a cohort system of teacher development and training provided an important area for future research. The service center representative conducted an initial foray into cohort training and pronounced the experiment as a successful endeavor that would benefit rural schools in the region. Future research should focus on the elements of a cohort training system developed with the goal of establishing a successful teacher training model. The cohort training model might prove especially successful in meeting training needs in districts with limitations on the ability to allow for teacher absences from the classroom for training purposes. Also, the cohort training model would provide extended training in contextualized settings to more closely meet the needs of individual districts, individual schools, individual teachers, and individual students.

Closing Statement

Becoming a teacher requires a significant investment of time and money in the pursuit of education, training, and preparation required to meet state requirements for certification. Yet, teachers are often left out of decisions regarding professional training, curricular choices, and modes of learner assessments. This study demonstrated teacher awareness of and care for the needs of special populations in content-area classrooms.

This study also revealed stresses teachers experience when called upon to provide adequate instruction in mainstream classrooms--stresses due to a lack of adequate preparation and a lack of support for providing instruction for diverse populations in classrooms often reflecting an inverted intervention model. Additionally, this study highlighted the inordinate level of stress exerted on teachers and students resulting from a demand for accountability in the form of high-stakes standardized tests that fail to accurately measure individual student growth and that frequently serve to inhibit teacher creativity and teacher responses to individual needs in the classroom.

Teachers should play a larger role in school, district, and state policy decisions regarding training, classroom support, and accountability measurements. Teacher efforts must be supported by consistent systems of training with proven results and by provisions of adequate support for the task at hand, as learner successes often depend on teacher successes. Rural high school content area teachers deserve consideration in training and support geared toward rural student populations and learner needs specific to rural communities. Policies and practices must be developed to support changes in the way instruction is delivered to diverse learners with changing needs.

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APPENDIX

Educational History, Experiences, and Specialized Training of Secondary Teachers

The purpose of this questionnaire is to learn more about your experiences as a content area teacher, including your title, teaching experience, and specialized training at the secondary level. Please take a moment to respond to this questionnaire as thoroughly as possible. Your responses will only be used in educational research solely for the purpose of better understanding your experiences and professional training with regard to the instruction of diverse populations in academic subject area classrooms. Your responses will be kept confidential. By completing this questionnaire, you agree to participate in this study. Your participation in this brief questionnaire is greatly appreciated.

Demographic information:

Check the age group that is applicable to you:

24-29 _____ 30-35 _____ 36-39 _____ 40-45 _____ 46-49 _____ 50-55 _____

Gender:

Male _____ Female _____

1. What degree(s) have you attained?

2. What certification(s) do you currently hold?

3. What is your current professional position?

4. How many years of experience do you have in your current position?

5. What academic subject area(s) do you teach?

6. How many years of experience do you have as a teacher in your academic subject area(s)?

7. What is your current teaching schedule with number of students taught and classroom makeup?

8. Please describe your experiences in offering classroom instruction to diverse populations in your academic subject area(s).
9. What special populations are included in your content area classrooms, such as SPED, 504, ELLs, and/or RtI populations?
10. What special training do you have in these areas?
11. Please describe school or district resources available to support the classroom instruction of ELLs in your academic subject area(s).
12. What do you perceive as the biggest challenge to you as a content area teacher?

VITA

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EDUCATION

<p>Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX</p> <p>ED. D in Literacy</p> <p>“Rural high school teachers’ perceptions of an inverted model to support English language learners: A multiple case study”</p>	<p>2018</p>
<p>Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX</p> <p>ME. D in Reading</p>	<p>2014</p>
<p>San Diego Christian College, El Cajon, CA</p> <p>B. S. in Secondary Education</p> <p>Minor: Literature</p>	<p>1977</p>

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

<p>Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX</p> <p>Adjunct Instructor: “Content Area Reading and Word Study in Middle Grades”</p>	<p>2018</p>
<p>Adapted syllabus and administered all grades</p>	
<p>Instructor: Huntsville High School, Huntsville, TX</p> <p>Developed syllabus and administered all grades; provided intervention instruction</p>	<p>2017-2018</p>
<p>Instructor: Trinity High School, Trinity, TX</p> <p>English Department Chair; developed curriculum and syllabus; administered all grades</p>	<p>2014-2017</p>
<p>Instructor: Union High School, Broken Arrow, OK</p> <p>Piloted program for “at risk” learners; developed curriculum and syllabus; administered all grades</p>	<p>2006-2008</p>

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Tulsa Public Schools, Tulsa, OK

Instructor

2004 – 2006

Created journalism department; obtained grant funding for journalism program; instructor

Native American Training Center, Tulsa, OK

Instructor

2005 – 2006

Provided GED instruction for adults and high school students

Fellowship Bible Church, Tulsa, OK

Women's Studies Board Member and Instructor

1985-1990

Developed curriculum; provided oversight and instruction for women's studies

Northeast Christian Academy, El Paso, TX

Department Chair and Instructor

1977-1978

Developed curriculum for start-up private school; provided instruction and program supervision

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

"Strategies for Intervention in the Secondary Classroom"

Speaker at Write for Texas Summer Institute

Summer, 2016

Review of Heart-Shaped Cookies by David Rice

Book review included in Read: An Online Journal for Literacy Educators, Vol.1, No. 2

Summer, 2016

"Genre Studies and Units of Learning"

Small-group presenter at Jean Prouty Conference

Fall, 2016

MEMBERSHIPS

International Literacy Association