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## Preparing Teacher Candidates to Support English Learners in the Grade Level Classroom: A Perspective of the Opportunity to Learn and Demonstrate EI Instructional Strategies

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PREPARING TEACHER CANDIDATES TO SUPPORT ENGLISH LEARNERS IN  
THE GRADE LEVEL CLASSROOM: A PERSPECTIVE OF THE OPPORTUNITY  
TO LEARN AND DEMONSTRATE EL INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

By

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## ABSTRACT

### PREPARING TEACHER CANDIDATES TO SUPPORT ENGLISH LEARNERS IN THE GRADE LEVEL CLASSROOM: A PERSPECTIVE OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN AND DEMONSTRATE EL INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

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Teacher education programs seeking the Commission for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) accreditation or recertification must demonstrate proficiency in Specialized Professional Associations (SPA). For this specific study, the SPA emphasized is TESOL International Association, formerly Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) which has recently updated their learning standards of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in accordance with CAEP. These TESOL standards are meant to prepare Teacher Candidates to work with English Learner (EL) students as well as to provide EL Strategies awareness. The purpose of this program descriptive study was to recognize one component of the Teacher Candidates' opportunities to learn and demonstrate EL Instructional Strategies in the grade level classroom. This program design study used instructor interviews, course materials, and instructional coaching data (coaching observation forms and student growth and reflection logs). The data from the study was analyzed using frequency counts to determine variation to denote significance. The findings of this study help demonstrate one teacher preparation program's attempt at including EL awareness and EL strategy preparedness for all teacher candidates.

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~Unknown

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

About 1 out of every 10 students in the United States is considered an English Learner (EL) and Nebraska's EL student population falls just under the national average (Sanchez, 2017). Compared to other states, Nebraska ranks just below the top half (twenty-six) for the number of EL students, yet alarmingly ranks at number 34 for the graduation rate of EL students. Nebraska's overall graduation percentage is 89.7% and yet only 60% of EL students graduate (Sanchez, 2017). While the number of teachers with English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsements has grown in Nebraska, the state still reports having a shortage of teachers to support EL students (Sanchez, 2017).

TESOL International Association, formerly Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) has made concerted efforts to provide more ESL awareness in teacher education programs. TESOL has earned national accreditation through the Commission for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). Thus, when local teacher education programs that offer ESL endorsements seek national accreditation through CAEP, they need to align curriculum to the TESOL standards.

Having more teachers with ESL endorsements seems to be ideal, but there are a variety of limitations that prevent states from accomplishing such a lofty goal. Recognizing the growing EL population and the need for more ESL awareness in teacher education, it is important to embed this knowledge within all teacher preparation courses and not just for the Teacher Candidates seeking an ESL endorsement.

## **Background of the Problem**

Because EL students spend most of their school day in the grade level classroom, it is crucial for that time to be effective and supportive for the EL student. Russell (2012) stated, “Most mainstream teachers have little professional preparation for teaching content to ELLs, let alone the linguistic knowledge to effectively meet the academic language development demands that these students require” (p. 446). Even more critical is the amount of responsibility grade level teachers believe ESL teachers have regarding EL education. It is common for mainstream teachers to believe more responsibility rests on the ESL teacher and that is a paradigm that needs to change (Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013).

Local teacher education programs seeking national accreditation or renewal of accreditation through CAEP follow specific protocols to ensure excellence in teacher education programs (CAEP, 2019). The first CAEP standard is “Content and Pedagogical Knowledge” in which the third indicator emphasizes that teacher candidates should apply this knowledge through assessments that directly connect to Specialized Professional Associations (SPA) (CAEP, 2019). One of those SPA associations is TESOL which has recently adopted new national standards that align with CAEP (TESOL, 2019). With the most up-to-date national standards, it is imperative for local teacher education programs to take a critical lens to their curriculum and reevaluate to ensure the program aligns with the most current standards.

CAEP Standard 2 is “Clinical Partnerships and Practice” which emphasizes a strong partnership to ensure a positive experience for teacher candidates.’ It also gives Teacher Candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge from Standard 1 for

all student learners during field experiences and clinical practice (CAEP, 2019). To address this second standard, an important approach is to review coaching observation forms during various field experiences to make sure Teacher Candidates demonstrate competency in pedagogical knowledge with all student learners. Taking time to review the requirements in a preservice teacher education program and finding ways to incorporate more EL preparedness is necessary for that paradigm shift in grade level Teacher Candidates.

### **Conceptual Framework**

EL Strategy Awareness is the conceptual framework of this study. An ideal way to confirm that EL preparedness is embedded within teacher preparation programs is through the TESOL standards which are considered the national standards for ESL education. TESOL (2019) reports that their standards are “designed to be used by teacher education programs that prepare candidates for their first TESOL credential, where that is initial licensure, an endorsement, or an add-on license. Programs preparing teachers to teach English as a Second or Other Language to PK–12 students in the United States are available across the country although the credential and licensing requirements vary greatly by state” (p. 2).

The newly adopted TESOL standards serve as a tool to analyze the conceptual framework. TESOL has recently updated their EL teachers’ learning standards in accordance with the Commission for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). These new TESOL/CAEP performance-based standards are for teacher education programs seeking national recognition (TESOL, 2019).

TESOL standards include:

1. Knowledge About Language
2. ELLs in the Sociocultural Context
3. Planning and Implementing Instruction
4. Assessment and Evaluation
5. Professionalism and Leadership (TESOL, 2019, p.1).

TESOL standards are the tool to analyze the conceptual framework, EL Strategy Awareness, of this study because the standards drive the content to support EL learners. This tool supports the evidence of opportunities to learn EL Strategy Awareness through instructor interviews and provided course materials. Equally important to recognize is the Teacher Candidate's ability to demonstrate preparedness to work with EL students during their field experiences. Echevarría, Vogt & Short (2017) Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SIOP) serves as an additional tool of analysis in this study. The SIOP model is implemented to interpret whether Teacher Candidates' field experiences and actions demonstrate the learned TESOL standards. Both tools are used to study EL Strategy Awareness.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Typically, Teacher Candidates express feeling of unprepared to work with language minority students, so it would be valuable to include EL preparation in their curriculum (Zhang & Stephens, 2013). Moreover, Teacher Candidates believe the responsibility for English Learners lies more with the ELL teacher and less with the grade level classroom teacher (Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013). Knowing that the majority of an EL student's time is spent in a grade level classroom, it is essential to understand why

teacher candidates feel unprepared. If Teacher Candidates have an opportunity to learn and demonstrate EL Instructional Strategies through a variety of teacher preparation program field experience courses, they may feel better prepared to educate EL students in the grade level classroom.

Therefore, TESOL-connected EL Instructional Strategy training and awareness in teacher preparation programs is vital. Recognizing that teacher preparation programs include SPA standards aligned with CAEP (2019), research through the lens of TESOL standards is appropriate to confirm EL Strategy Awareness. Instructor interviews and course material reviews are useful resources to gain this insight. Of equal importance, teacher candidates must demonstrate preparedness to support EL students. CAEP (2019) emphasizes the importance of teacher candidate demonstration via field experiences and clinical practice. In turn, instructional coaching data through observation forms and growth and reflection logs are helpful tools. Researchers Sugimoto, Carter & Stoehr (2017) studied Teacher Candidates' field experiences in grade level classrooms with support to EL students. This study finds, "these experiences left preservice teachers with lingering feelings of uncertainty, which, in turn, may complicate their development of a positive orientation toward ELs" (Sugimoto, et al., 2017, p. 186). Taking time to learn from instructors and Teacher Candidates' experiences while in the teacher education program is an invaluable opportunity for a teacher preparation program.

This study was a program evaluation including instructor interviews, a review of course materials, an analysis of the coaching observation, and student growth and reflection forms. The intent of this program evaluation is to review one of many ways a

teacher preparation program incorporates EL Strategy Awareness in alignment with TESOL/CAEP standards.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this program design study was to record Teacher Candidates' opportunities to learn and demonstrate EL Instructional Strategies in the grade level classroom. This acknowledgement of EL Strategy Awareness can also identify areas where a teacher preparation program incorporates the TESOL/CAEP standards.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions are addressed during the study:

1. During the field experience courses at one Midwestern metropolitan university, what are the opportunities for Teacher Candidates to learn EL Instructional Strategies?
2. How are Teacher Candidates demonstrating preparedness to work with EL students during their field experience courses?

### **Significance of Study**

This study is significant because it demonstrated how a CAEP-accredited teacher preparation program supported EL Strategy Awareness with their Teacher Candidates. As teacher preparation programs begin to adopt the TESOL standards as one of many SPA standards that support the CAEP accreditation process, it is important to analyze these programs' efficacy through the opportunity to learn and opportunity to demonstrate these opportunities. This study can help teacher preparation programs determine which TESOL standards are being implemented. This is determined through instructor interviews, course materials evaluations, and Teacher Candidates' demonstration of EL

preparedness with the coaching observation forms and student growth and reflection forms. In addition, this academic research helps serve as a resource for other programs currently working toward recertification toward CAEP.

### **Operational Definition**

- Awareness of EL Instructional Strategies – having an opportunity to learn and “demonstrate their ability to plan instruction for English learners” through use of SIOP strategies (TESOL, 2019, p. 14).

Beyond operational definitions, there are several ways to refer to different components of this content. Experts differ on how to refer to an ESL program and the students who are enrolled in these programs. These discrepancies may have good intent as it is argued that some terms are used to describe EL students as a deficit rather than an asset (Wright, 2019). For the purpose of this study, *ESL* was used consistently because that is the official program name in Nebraska. Students who are enrolled in an ESL program, were referenced as *EL (English Learner) students*. When discussing the differences between an ESL classroom and a grade level classroom, this research referenced a PreK – 12 mainstream classroom as a *grade level classroom*. These terms align with ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) which is the national educational law that the United States abides (2016).

### **Summary**

Teacher preparation programs must incorporate EL Instructional Strategies learning opportunities in order to achieve. CAEP accreditation. EL Instructional Strategy awareness was demonstrated during field experience by interviewing instructors, reviewing course materials, and analyzing instructional coaching data. The program



design study gained insight on Teacher Candidates' EL Strategy Awareness and helped craft a portion of data toward the teacher preparation program as it aligned the curriculum with CAEP accreditation and in support of the new TESOL standards.

PREVIEW

## Chapter 2

### Introduction

It is commonly accepted that the number of English learner (EL) students in the United States PreK – 12 classrooms is steadily increasing. As previously documented, Nebraska's EL population reflects the national trend of underachievement on assessment and achievement (Sanchez, 2017). With the combination of an increase of EL students and the concerns about underachievement, there is a need to confront the situation.

Different ways to help improve this issue are being studied, but more data is needed to further understand possible solutions. EL students' underachievement occurs in part because not enough teachers are being prepared to teach ESL students. Also, teachers believe that the weight of responsibility lies on an official ESL teacher and not the grade level classroom teacher (Russell, 2012; Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013). Through the lens of teacher preparation programs, researchers can explore the variety of ways that Teacher Candidates are being prepared to work with EL students in the grade level classroom.

There is a discrepancy in teacher education programs regarding the amount of ESL coursework and ultimately EL awareness that is required. Researchers Flores, Claeys, Gist, Clark & Villarreal (2015) reviewing one teacher college program, discovered that there is less emphasis on EL awareness in certain content endorsement and grade level areas. These researchers recognize that EL students can struggle as they advance into secondary education and more awareness is necessary (Flores, et al., 2015). In a similar viewpoint, Shaw, Lyon, Stoddart, Mosqueda, & Menon (2014) sought to improve content learning through science for EL students and researched ways to support preservice teachers with this goal in mind.

With growing data to support the need for more EL awareness at the higher education level within teacher education programs, researchers Nguyen, Benken, Hakim-Butt, & Zwiép (2013) chose to review the faculty's EL awareness. It is important to recognize, "professional development for teacher education faculty presents the unique challenge of validating what these faculty members bring to the table as experts in their field, while simultaneously providing the content and support necessary to develop new knowledge, skills, attitudes and confidence" (Nguyen, et al., 2013, p. 312).

To make progress toward this endeavor, there are three critical areas of expertise to explore and dissect to see how they influence teacher preparation programs. The first area of research is from researchers who are ESL experts. Connected to these ESL experts is the evolution of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and its use in this research design. Equally important is to examine the research-based knowledge behind CAEP and teacher institutions seeking national accreditation. Associated with CAEP is the implementation of the TESOL standards in this research design. The third area to explore is the value of demonstratable EL awareness opportunities within a teacher preparation program. Once these three areas of expertise have been explored, it is crucial to study the conclusions of these experts and explore a plan of action for teacher preparation programs.

### **Support from ESL Experts**

Researchers Alamillo, Padilla & Arenas (2011) recognize the growing need to span across a variety of school districts therefore, "institutions dedicated to the preparation of teacher candidates must shift their focus by looking at teacher preparation faculty, their knowledge of EL instruction and the extent to which they integrate effective