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Teachers' Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Instructional Practices Regarding English Language Learners

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study was used to examine the impact of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and instructional practices when teaching English Language Learners (ELLs). Quantitative and qualitative data were sequentially collected, concurrently analyzed, and triangulated. A sample of 126 experienced K-12 educators from the northeastern US completed (a) a demographic survey, (b) a teachers' self-efficacy survey, and (c) a classroom strategy scale. A stepwise multilinear regression procedure determined that teachers' use of academic performance feedback, efficacy beliefs in student engagement, and employment of both student-directed and direct instructional practices predicted teachers' self-perceptions about being able to adapt instruction for their ELL population. Qualitative data were obtained from 10 participants who self-rated as having high self-efficacy and classroom strategy use. Themes included foundational requirements, school leadership, specific instructional strategies, and knowing how to apply these strategies with ELLs. The triangulated results revealed that when school leaders provide professional learning opportunities that support a truly inclusive curriculum and collaborative time in which to plan with colleagues, there is a positive impact on teachers' self-efficacy to instruct ELLs.

Keywords: English Language Learners; Teachers' Self-Efficacy; Strategy Instruction

Abbreviations: CRT: Culturally Relevant Teaching; IEP: Individualized Educational Plan; TSES: Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale; CSS-T: Classroom Strategy Scale for Teachers; NCES: National Center for Education Statistics; CRTSE: Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy; TSELI: Teachers' Sense of Efficacy for Literacy Instruction

Introduction

Without proper training, teachers do not know how to provide ELLs with the services and supports that they need, and their lack of self-efficacy to teach ELLs is causing educators to disproportionately recommend these students to special education for having learning disabilities [1,2]. Misidentification of ELLs as needing special education services is often due to their uneven progression across the multiple communication modes of listening, speaking, reading, and writing [3,4].

For example, staff members typically observe a disparity between the development of ELLs' day-to-day conversational ability, which can take six months to two years to master, in contrast to their academic proficiency, which is often not achieved for six or seven years [5,6]. These differences are influenced by the students' first language background, which can complicate the transferability of the student's native language and culture to their new environment. Consequently, to an untrained or inexperienced classroom teacher, an ELL may mistakenly appear to have an intellectual disability. Unfortunately, students' deficits in the use of the English language can lead to over referrals for disability services [7], or mask intellectual capacity for potential gifted behaviors [8].

The best support for ELLs begins with high quality teachers and instruction. Teachers with greater self-efficacy have demonstrated higher student outcomes and have provided more supportive and encouraging classroom environments [9-12]. Additionally, if teachers lack the self-efficacy to deliver culturally

relevant instruction, linguistically diverse students may not receive the instructional support needed to foster academic achievement [13,14].

Implementing effective instruction for ELLs can minimize the number of special education referrals and academic misplacements for this growing population [15]. Little research has focused on teachers' self-efficacy when working with the ELL student population [16,17]. Teacher self-efficacy needs to be examined to ensure that teachers believe and have confidence in their ability to teach using relevant instruction for the culturally and linguistically diverse students in the classroom setting [16,18,19].

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the social cognitive theories of Bandura [20-24] and Vygotsky [25]. Social cognitive theory is grounded in the premise that the learner constructs knowledge by observing, modeling, and imitating others [23,26]. Albert Bandura's [24] social cognitive theory and Lev Vygotsky's [25] sociocultural theory are applicable to both educators and ELL students as they collaborate in the social educational setting. Learning is impacted by behavioral factors such as a task's complexity, skill level, and duration [27]. Additionally, Bandura [27] stressed that all learners have unique personality factors which contribute to their learning, such as cognition, motivation, disposition, and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy [23] refers to an individual's perception regarding their ability to achieve an objective, which impacts their ability to accomplish tasks related to that objective [23]. In the context of teachers, Bandura conjectured that self-efficacy empowers them to believe in their ability to impart new knowledge to learners. He postulated that, when individuals have higher levels of self-efficacy, they are more motivated and demonstrate increased perseverance when they are in challenging environments [21,22]. This theory suggests that, when teachers have a higher degree of confidence in their abilities to teach ELLs, their classroom practices to assist these students will improve [24].

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) describes the distance between a learner's potential developmental level and their actual independent problem-solving capability [25]. This zone is described as proximal because the learner will potentially be able to solve and practice new skills with the guidance of social collaboration and scaffolded attempts. Optimal cognitive learning begins when the learner is not able to independently perform a task; however, with the guidance of a more knowledgeable person (adult or peer), the learner can advance their abilities. Vygotsky's Gradual Release model [25] describes how the responsibility shifts from the instructor or guide to the learner, in this case, to advance ELL student learning.

Teacher Efficacy

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy [19] enhanced Bandura's self-efficacy construct [24] with specific "theoretical and empirical underpinnings of teacher efficacy" [28]. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy [19] maintained that a new self-efficacy assessment was necessary and created the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) that includes three constructs: "efficacy for instructional strategies," "efficacy for classroom management," and "efficacy for student engagement" (p. 799). They expanded upon Bandura's self-efficacy construct and claimed ". . . a valid measure of teacher efficacy must assess both personal competence and an analysis of the task in terms of the resources and constraints in particular teaching contexts" [19]. Subsequently, Tschannen-Moran and Johnson [29] conducted a study analyzing teacher self-efficacy and the use of instructional practices for both teaching in general and teaching literacy. They utilized two self-efficacy assessments: the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) and the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy for Literacy Instruction (TSELI), which they also authored. The TSELI focused on literacy specific areas such as self-efficacy for writing instruction, oral reading, and "the ability to make use of students' prior knowledge in reading tasks" (p. 755). The study employed a purposeful sample of 648 teacher-participants recruited from 20 elementary schools and 6 middle schools from Virginia, Kansas, and Arkansas. These researchers concluded that teachers' self-efficacy for literacy instruction was moderately related to their overall sense of efficacy for teaching ($r = .61$, $p < .01$; p. 757). Teacher self-efficacy in general, as well as for teaching literacy, was most influenced by the quality of a teacher's university preparation, level of education, school level, resources available, and their sense of efficacy for instructional strategies and for student engagement.

When Durgunoğlu and Hughes [30] explored the preparation received by preservice teachers, they found that they lacked appropriate training to increase their self-efficacy for working with ELLs. This result was predominately due to their untrained mentoring teachers, who were not prepared to guide the preservice candidates to instruct ELLs. Overall, Durgunoğlu and Hughes highlighted the necessity of professional learning for teachers of ELL students.

Unfortunately, when teachers lack professional learning with ELLs and have a low selfperception of their ability to instruct the growing population of ELLs in their classroom, their self-efficacy to instruct both ELLs and non-ELLs is hindered [31,32]. Conversely, when Poulou et al. [33] conducted a correlational study coupled with classroom observations they showed that teachers benefit from effective ELL instructional coaching in the classroom, which improves their self-efficacy for working with this population. In the current study, it was not possible to conduct classroom observations. Instead, follow-up interviews were conducted to obtain insights regarding classroom practices initiated with ELLs.

Instructional Strategy Use

Robert Marzano [34] conducted a metanalysis of more than 100,000 research studies and concluded that teachers could improve the quality of their instruction and augment student

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achievement by using research-based strategies. Marzano et al. [35] suggested that teachers consider the learner when choosing research-based strategies to improve their instruction. To apply Marzano's recommendations for instructing ELLs, teachers need to understand the relationship between effective ELL classroom teaching practices and the natural and predictable order of language attainment [36]. Second language acquisition is typically developed in the sequential stages of preproduction, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency, and advanced fluency [37]. Bligh [38] urges educators to be aware of the importance of the first stage of language acquisition, preproduction, in which the learner has minimal second language comprehension and often enters a silent receptive stage. When an ELL enters the silent stage, educators often worry that their student cannot read or contribute. Bligh suggests that educators should be patient and recognize that their ELLs are in a stage of "legitimate peripheral participation" (p. 22).

A focus on research-based teaching strategies and individual differences was intensely examined by Hattie in a series of metanalyses [9,39,40]. In 2016, Hatti and Donoghue analyzed an additional 228 studies in a metanalysis about learning strategies. The authors established "three phases of learning (surface, deep and transfer)," and advised that the effectiveness of strategy use depends on when the strategy is implemented [41]. Different strategies are most powerful at various stages of the learning cycle. These findings suggested that teacher judgement and adaptability are crucial components when considering student achievement, as well as key teacher competencies when working with ELLs.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Gloria Ladson-Billings [42] coined the term Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT), a pedagogy that views cultural and language differences as a strength to empower all students and advance academic achievement. Ladson-Billings hypothesized that highly effective teachers "insert culture into education, instead of education into culture" (p. 159). Her observations and interviews confirmed that exemplary teachers and administrators supported and embraced the contributions of students from various cultural backgrounds. Moreover, outstanding educators culturally modified their materials and approaches to accelerate academic achievement for their students of diverse backgrounds [43]. Geneva Gay [44] advocated that educators should use an increased sense of culturally responsive teaching by adopting a pedagogical paradigm shift to advance minority achievement. She explained that the culturally responsive teaching approach "instructionally supports students' personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments" [45]. To validate this theory, Gay conducted a meta synthesis that included 52 empirical studies related to culturally responsive teaching practices in grades K-12. Gay's findings indicated that teachers need to build their own cultural knowledge base to incorporate it into classroom instruction. In 2011, Siwatu responded to a call for educator training to deliver culturally relevant teaching. He recognized Bandura's social cognitive theory and that "teacher educators should also nurture prospective teachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy beliefs" (p. 360). After conducting mixed methods research to investigate their culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy (CRTSE), Siwatu recommended, "For most preservice teachers, opportunities to practice or observe culturally responsive teaching would ideally occur during their field experiences situated in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms" (p. 366). Implications from this research support the need for teachers' experiential learning with culturally diverse populations. By strengthening teacher education programs to include CRT strategies and vicarious CRT experiences, teacher CRTSE will strengthen, which in turn, should advance the learning of culturally diverse student populations. The concept of CRT is supported by the inclusion of culturally responsive educational practices in the plans submitted to the US Department of Education by 33 states [46].

Methodology

Research Questions

Based on a need to assess teachers' self-efficacy and instructional strategy use with ELLs, the present study was guided by two research questions:

i. To what extent and in what manner do the subscales of teachers' self-efficacy (efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional strategies, and efficacy in classroom management), and instructional strategies (student-directed instruction, direct instruction, promotion of student thinking, and academic performance feedback) predict teachers' adaptive instruction for educators who teach in K-12 classroom settings that include English Language Learners?

ii. For K-12 teachers with high self-efficacy and frequent usage of a variety of instructional strategies, how are these strategies used to support English Language Learners?

Setting and Sampling

This study occurred in one state in the northeast of the US. After receiving permission to invite all educators from five school districts and members of two university graduate programs (doctoral and master's degrees) located in multiple counties, personnel at each site sent a link via email to educators that included a demographic questionnaire, a self-efficacy survey, and a survey about self-perceptions for using specific instructional strategies in the classroom. A total of 1330 educators were invited to participate in the study. Subsequently, the quantitative sample consisted of 126 participants (10% of the population), selected using a purposeful sampling procedure. All participants indicated that they had taught ELLs in a K-12 setting for five or

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more years and that they held at least a master's degree (Table 1). Participant characteristics in the quantitative sample were reasonably balanced regarding grade level, with a representation of 66 elementary and 60 secondary school educators. Categories for racial/ethnic status (Table 2) were similar to the national average, according to the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) [47]. The qualitative sample, a subgroup of the quantitative participants, consisted of 10 educators with the highest self-efficacy and strategy scores (Table 3) from two surveys administered at the beginning of this study.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Characteristics for Quantitative Sample, n = 126.

Characteristic	Sample (*n*)	Sample (%)
Age Range		
20-29	9	7.14
30-39	31	24.6
40-49	41	32.54
50-59	28	22.22
60-69	12	9.52
70-79	3	2.38
Gender Identity		
Female	113	90
Male	13	10
Highest Level of Education		
Master's Degree	115	91.28
Doctoral Candidate	5	3.97
Additional (certificates)	6	4.76
Teacher Position		
K-5 Classroom Teacher	28	22.22
Content Area Teacher	31	24.6
Special Educator	13	10.31
Interventionist (Reading, Math, Speech)	15	11.9
English as a Second Language or World Language	25	19.84
Number of Languages Spoken		
1	98	78
2	19	15
3 or more	9	7
Lived in Another Country		
Yes	29	23.02
No	97	97.98
Years in Teaching Profession		
6-May	15	11.9
7 or More	111	88.1
Years in Current Position		
4-Jan	40	31.75
9-May	23	18.25
14-Oct	23	18.25
More than 15	40	31.75

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Table 2: Participant Racial/Ethnic Status.

Characteristic	Sample (*n*)	Sample (%)	U.S.* (%)
White	107	84.92	79
Hispanic	11	8.73	9
Black or African American	4	3.17	7
Prefer Not to Say	3	2.38	-
Asian or Pacific Islander	1	0.79	2
American Indian	0	0	1
Total	126	100.00	100.00*

Note: *Slight difference in calculation due to rounding. *U.S. National Center for Education Statistics NCES [47].

Table 3: Participant Demographics for Qualitative Sample, n = 10.

Characteristic	Sample (n)	Sample (%)
Age Range		
20-29	1	10
30-39	2	20
40-49	5	50
50-59	1	10
60-69	0	-
70-79	1	10
Gender Identity		
Female	8	80
Male	2	20
Highest Level of Education		
Master's Degree (1 or more)	9	50
Doctoral Candidate	1	10
Teacher Positions		
K-5 Classroom Teacher	1	10
Content Area Teacher (Math, Science, etc.)	1	10
Interventionist (Reading, Math, Speech)	2	20
English as a Second Language or World Language	4	40
Specialist Teacher (Music, Art, PE/ Health)	2	20
Languages Spoken		
One	7	70
Two	2	20
Three	1	10
Lived in Another Country		
Yes	2	20
No	8	80
Instructional Setting		
Classroom Setting	5	50

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Content Area	5	50
Years in Teaching Profession		
7 or more	10	100
Years in Current Position		
4-Jan	3	30
9-May	1	10
14-Oct	1	10
More than 15	5	50

Mixed Methods Design

This research investigation used an integrated mixed methods research design [48]. First, the researchers collected quantitative data and utilized the results to select a qualitative sample. Next, qualitative interview data were collected. Subsequently, both types of data were analyzed separately by the researchers. Finally, the results were triangulated (Figure 1).

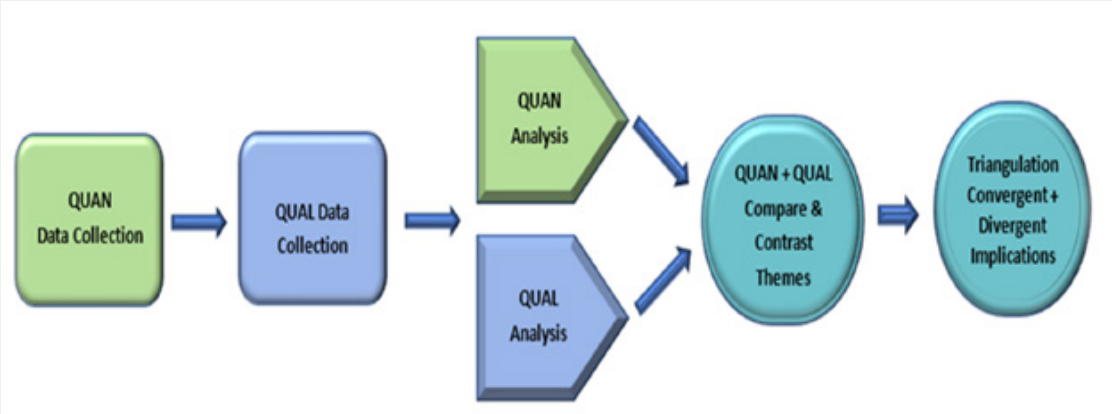

Figure 1: Integrated Mixed Methods Design. Creswell & Plano Clark [48].

Instrumentation and Data Collection Tools

Quantitative: An online platform was used to collect and compile the data from three tools: (a) a demographic survey to identify participant characteristics, (b) the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale [19] to measure teachers' self-efficacy, and (c) the Classroom Strategy Scale -Teacher Form, Instructional Scale (Reddy et al., 2016) assessing teachers' use of instructional strategies in the classroom setting.

Demographic Survey: The purpose of the demographic survey was to identify the participants' attributes. A 20-item demographic survey was completed by each adult participant at the start of the study. The demographic survey included multiple choice and short answer questions relating to each participant's current age, ethnicity, gender identity, highest level of education, teaching position, number of languages spoken, educational background, teacher experience, classroom setting, and living experience outside the United States. All teachers with a minimum of five years of experience teaching ELLs were selected to be a part of the study.

The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES): The 12-item short-form of the TSES [19] has three valid and reliable subscales [19] with four items each, which measure "efficacy for instructional strategies," "efficacy for classroom management," and "efficacy for student engagement" (2001, p. 799). Each subscale is determined by calculating the mean from the responses. Individual subscales were used in the quantitative analysis.

The Classroom Strategy Scale for Teachers (CSS-T): Instructional Scale. The CSS-T has five valid and reliable dimensions [49]: (a) "adaptive instruction;" (b)"student-directed instruction;" (c) "direct instruction;" (e) "promotes student thinking;" and (f) "academic performance feedback" [50]. These scales are originally from an observational tool and were adapted for use in

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this study as a self-perception survey with permission from the authors. Adaptive instruction refers to how teachers use strategies "to respond to their students' learning needs while teaching. These practices reflect teacher flexibility and responsiveness to students' needs, as well as methods of differentiated instruction" [51]. Student-directed instruction includes "strategies teachers use to actively engage students in the learning process" (p. 74). Direct instruction refers to "strategies teachers use to deliver academic content or convey information to students" (p. 74), and includes modeling, identifying, and summarizing. The dimension called promotes student thinking, relates to the strategies that teachers use "to critically think about the lesson material (why/how analysis), generate new ideas, and examine their own thought processes" [52]. Academic performance feedback represents "how teachers provide feedback to students on their understanding of the material. These practices assess teacher efforts to explain what is correct or incorrect with student academic performance" [52]. All subscales were included in research question 1.

Qualitative: The participants' combined mean from the TSES and the CSS-T subscales were calculated. The resulting composite means were utilized to choose 10 teachers with the highest self-efficacy and instructional strategy use. Subsequently, a semi-structured interview protocol was used to interview participants. Several of the interview questions were framed using key instructional practice components from the CSS-T assessment. In this way the researchers hoped to expand on the quantitative responses of experienced teachers who work with English Language Learners. General questions such as, "What English Language Learner professional learning have you and the staff at your school received?" were followed by more specific questions about a teacher's English Language Learner instructional practices, such as, "How do you plan for explicit instructional supports to meet the needs of struggling English Language Learners?" Responses were recorded, transcribed, and uploaded to a software tool to assist with the coding and retrieval of qualitative data.

Analyses and Results

Quantitative

A stepwise multilinear regression was used to analyze interval data from the survey instruments to identify the extent to which the set of independent variables of teachers' self-efficacy (efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional strategies, and efficacy in classroom management) and instructional strategies (student-directed instruction, direct instruction, promotion of student thinking, and academic performance feedback) predicted the teachers' self-perceptions of using adaptive instructional techniques [53]. Correlations among all variables are indicated in Table 4. The results suggested that these educators who used adaptive instruction were more likely to provide their students with feedback, have high efficacy for engaging them, and frequently use the instructional strategies of student-directed and direct instruction. This set of four predictors explained 42% of the variation in adaptive instruction. Overall, the regression model exhibited a moderately high, positive correlation, $R = .652$, $p < 0.001$, based on the ANOVA summary (Table 5) and the model summary (Table 6). Cohen's f^2 was used to calculate the effect size, $f^2 = R^2/(1-R^2)$ [54], which was a medium value of .74.

Table 4: Pearson Correlations for Instructional Strategies and Teachers' Self-Efficacy.

	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Instructional Strategies							
1	Adaptive Instruction	--						
2	Student-Directed Instruction	.408**	--					
3	Direct Instruction	.481**	.352**	--				
4	Promotes Students' Thinking	.473**	.438**	.507**	--			
5	Academic Perform. Feedback	.491**	.326**	.552**	.560**	--		
	Self-Efficacy							
6	Student Engagement	.435**	0.162	.200*	.320**	.320**	--	
7	Instructional Strategies	.388**	0.138	.256**	.301**	.279**	.575**	--
8	Classroom Management	.256**	-0.012	0.171	.213*	.253**	.601**	.639**

Note: *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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Table 5: Multiple Regression ANOVA Summary for Variables

	Model	Sum of Squares	*Df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
1	Regression	10.96	1	10.962	39.49	.000[b]
	Residual	34.42	124	0.278		
	Total	45.39	125			
2	Regression	14.86	2	7.429	29.93	.000[c]
	Residual	30.53	123	0.248		
	Total	45.39	125			
3	Regression	17.55	3	5.851	25.65	.000[d]
	Residual	27.83	122	0.228		
	Total	45.39	125			
4	Regression	19.29	4	4.822	22.36	.000[e]
	Residual	26.1	121	0.216		
	Total	45.39	125			

a. Dependent Variable: Adaptive Instruction

b. Predictors: Academic Performance Feedback

c. Predictors: Academic Performance Feedback, Efficacy in Student Engagement

d. Predictors: Academic Performance Feedback, Efficacy in Student Engagement, Student- directed Instruction

e. Predictors: Academic Performance Feedback, Efficacy in Student Engagement, Student- directed Instruction, Direct Instruction

Note: This table shows that four explanatory variables had a statistically significant association with adaptive instruction, p = 0.001.

Table 6: Model Summary of Variables Predicting Adaptive Instruction.

Model	*R*	R Square	*Adjusted R* Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	*df1*	*df2*	Sig. *F* Change
1	.491[a]	0.242	0.242	0.526	0.242	39.497	1	124	0
2	.572[b]	0.327	0.327	0.498	0.086	15.694	1	123	0
3	.622[c]	0.387	0.387	0.477	0.059	11.822	1	122	0.001
4	.652[d]	0.425	0.425	0.464	0.038	8.043	1	121	0.005

a. Predictors: Academic Performance Feedback

b. Predictors: Academic Performance Feedback, Efficacy in Student Engagement

c. Predictors: Academic Performance Feedback, Efficacy in Student Engagement, Student directed Instruction

d. Predictors: Academic Performance Feedback, Efficacy in Student Engagement, Student directed Instruction, Direct Instruction

Note: There was a moderately high correlation, R =.652, f^2 = .74.

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Qualitative

Research Question 2 utilized deductive coding, a top-down process, to establish preliminary codes using vocabulary from the literature and survey instruments [62]. Line-by-line, inductive descriptive codes as well as in vivo codes were added to capture meaningful insights. As the codes were refined, patterns emerged, and subthemes and themes were established. A total of 108 second cycle codes were streamlined into 60 categories, 14 subthemes, and four themes (Figure 2). The four resulting qualitative themes were: foundational requirements, leadership, strategy instruction, and instructional applications.

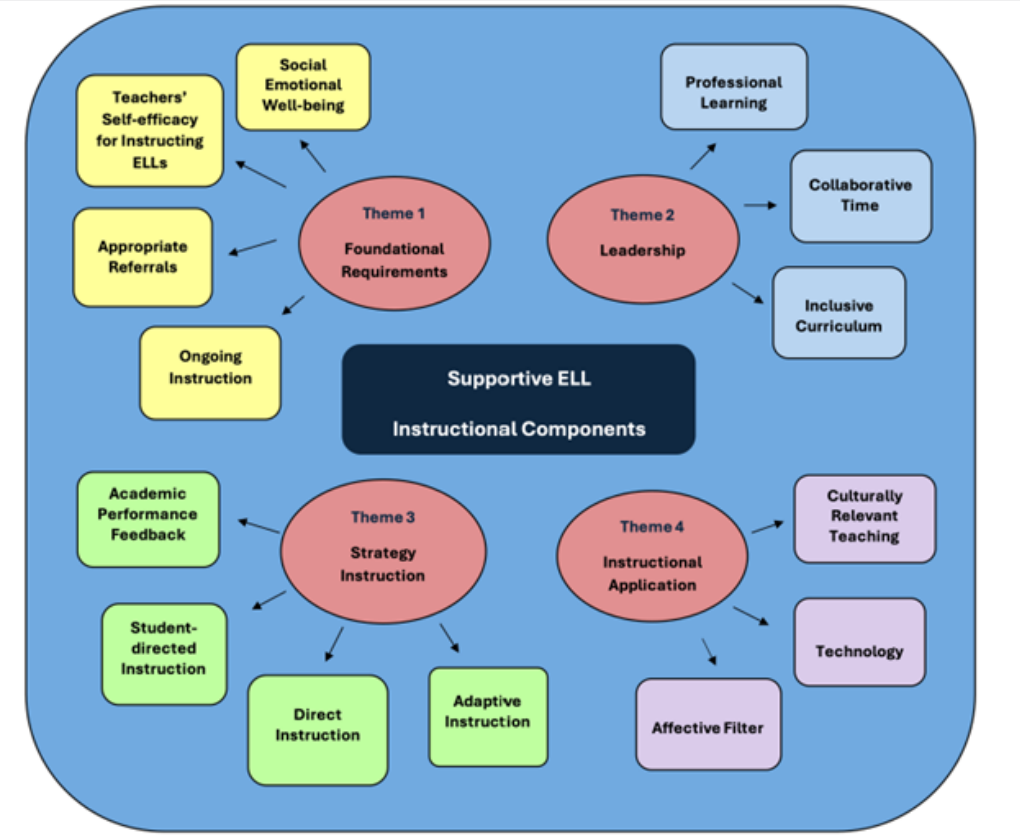

Figure 2: Graphic Representation of Themes and Subthemes for Supporting Instructional Strategies to Assist ELL Students.
Note: This figure illustrates four supportive ELL instructional themes and 14 subthemes derived from 10 participant interviews.

Theme 1: Foundational Requirements

Foundational requirements are necessary to implement effective ELL instruction. They include, but are not limited to, social-emotional well-being, teaching self-efficacy for instructing ELLs, appropriate referrals, and ongoing instruction needed for ELLs (Table 7). Teachers discussed how important it was to ensure that an ELL's social emotional comfort level be solid, before beginning their instruction. Educators reported nurturing students' social-emotional well-being by developing strong student-teacher relationships, providing the students with extra individualized help, taking an interest in their culture, fostering their interests, developing relationships with their families, and encouraging positive student-peer relationships. The participants in this study held different and somewhat contrasting views of what an appropriate education for ELLs entailed, especially regarding referrals for educational support. Although the U.S. Supreme Court in 2017 ruled that all children, regardless of their origin or language (including ELLs), are entitled to a free and appropriate public education (Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Public Law 94-142) [55], two participants remarked that their districts were not equipped to provide adequate ELL instruction. In these districts, educators stated that referrals either to special education, resulting in an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-112, Section 504) [56] were necessary and routinely conducted to provide ELLs with the extra support needed. This practice was also reported by Gargiulo and Bouck [57]. In contrast, six participants pointed out that referrals to special education were appropriate only when ELLs had an identified learning need or disability.

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Table 7: Qualitative Theme 1: Foundational Requirements.

Category	Example Quotes
Social Emotional Well-Being	Haylie recommended that educators need to "consider the anxiety that the kids might be feeling coming to a different country and learning a whole other culture." She added, ELLs "want to fit in and make friends."
Teachers' Self- efficacy for Instructing ELLs	Quinton asserted, "Teachers' self-confidence and attitude and viewpoint affect how they teach the English language learners. I see teachers come in who have no confidence and fall flat on their face."
Appropriate Referrals	Grace explained, "We need to work with the leadership to help these ELL students, so they don't end up in special education when they exit from ELL [status]."
	Nathan reported, "Basically, in our district if a student is an English language learner, they are given an IEP or 504 for speech or reading support." He speculated, "ELLs need support, and there is no reason that they should not have a Section 504 and IEP supports with measurable goals and objectives."
Ongoing Instruction Needed for ELLs	Yasmine explained, "They still need some support to bridge the gaps between when they actually are let go from that intense ELL instruction that they had gotten every day to the academic support they need [now]. This year I am more of that support person."

Note: All names are pseudonyms.

The educators in the latter category felt that it was appropriate to first provide an educational program that was geared to an ELL's linguistic and cultural needs [58,59]. The educators in this study who said that they lacked ELL professional learning described their low confidence in teaching ELLs and their need to seek support from a specialist, such as a coach who was trained to address the learning needs of ELLs. All participants described that collaboration with peers helped them feel empowered and more prepared to adapt their instruction or the ELLs in their classrooms. All interviewees were concerned about the follow-up process after the ELLs reached minimum proficiency and were exited from their daily language support program. These students were reclassified as not requiring intense services. Study participants said that they needed more human and material resources for teaching these students. The educators employed in suburban districts with fewer ELLs also explained that once students were reclassified, they were not informed about their status. This circumstance, reported by many teachers [60], is contrary to the laws supporting ELLs, which prescribe that educators provide ELLs with scaffolded instruction in the general education setting, and monitor their progress for an additional two years, after they exit from direct services (No Child Left Behind, Public Law 107-110) [61]. Therefore, this study highlighted the importance of ongoing ELL instruction for reclassified ELLs, and the need to communicate this information to all faculty and support staff members.

Theme 2: Leadership

School leadership plays a crucial role in creating a conducive atmosphere for teachers to implement appropriate classroom strategies. Educators listed the value of targeted professional learning activities, time to collaborate with their peers, and the implementation of an inclusive curriculum for all students (Table 8). Without ongoing high quality professional learning to enhance teacher knowledge and effectiveness to work with ELLs in the classroom, some participants indicated that the responsibility for these students should be assigned elsewhere, such as to ELL specialists or special educators. To ensure adequate support for their ELLs, the participants requested that their school leaders consider professional learning, collaborative time with peers, and more resources to support ELLs when the school budget is created. These educators wanted details about the support services for each ELL as well as those who were exited from daily services. These recommendations should also be extended to content area specialists in the arts, music, physical education, and health teachers, who are often excluded from professional learning opportunities for general education teachers.

Table 8: Qualitative Theme 2: Leadership.

Category	Example Quotes
Professional Learning	Grace reflected, "To help ELLs, we need leadership that will instill a philosophy about teaching that will foster confidence in the staff, that will allow an open dialogue on their own needs, and the support that they need, so they will best help the students."
Inclusive Curriculum	Nathan noted that his district revised the curriculum when they had an [accreditation] review. He noted that "When we revised the curriculum, there was no place in there to address the needs of ELLs."
Collaborative Time	Isabelle stated that when a school principal does not provide collaborative time, professional learning is not as effective. "You can go to a conference, spend thousand[s of] dollars, [and] bring it back, but ELL training needs practice and a coach."

Note: All names are pseudonyms.

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Qualitative Theme 3: Strategy Instruction

The educators in this study stressed that choosing the correct combination of strategies depended on the student, setting, and task (Table 9) Marzano et al., [35]. The most frequently used strategy was adaptive instruction, which teachers used flexibly, often in the moment, to guide students' understanding and correct any misperceptions. Examples of how the educators adapted their instruction included: connecting students' background knowledge to their learning task; using an inquiry strategy to help students discover solutions to problems; and providing language support. Adaptive instruction was often used in conjunction with other strategies.

Table 9: Qualitative Theme 3: Strategy Instruction.

Category	Example Quotes
Academic Performance Feedback[1]	Isabelle recommended, "Rubrics help students know ahead of time what the expectation is. It provides ELLs with great feedback on their performance."
Student-Directed Instruction[2]	Olivia explained that she would frequently assign student partners to her ELLs, " . . . because just having conversations with somebody his age versus me" was valuable.
Direct Instruction[3]	Nora described, "I use diagrams, and pictures of vocabulary. That way, the ELL can sufficiently point at what the problem is. Then I point at what they don't understand. I model with the I do, we do, you do technique."
Adaptive Instruction*	Helena explained, "It's what you do in the moment when you know that the student is in need of another avenue to travel down in order to get clear and concise information."

Note: Triangulation is represented by the *criterion and three of the 1, 2, 3 predictors represented in research question 1. All names are pseudonyms.

Integrated in this theme, the participants described using a gradual release of responsibility with their ELL students, where the teachers moved the students toward independence using three instructional strategies: direct instruction, student-directed instruction, and academic performance feedback. The educators initiated ELL learning with a direct instructional approach, where the teachers clearly defined and modeled the learning tasks. With this strategy, the participants described using visuals, pre-teaching vocabulary, and initiating a color-coding technique to identify similarities and differences in their students' words. Subsequently, the educators described how they involved the ELLs in student-directed learning by applying a constructivist, hands-on approach, peer partnerships, and cooperative learning. The teachers explained that they provided increased ELL autonomy through academic performance feedback by encouraging student efforts and achievements, and remedying misunderstandings. Performance feedback strategies included a mastery learning approach, student conferences, goal setting, and student recognition of accomplishments.

Qualitative Theme 4: Instructional Applications

Instructional applications include culturally relevant teaching (CRT) Gloria Ladson- Billings [42], specialized technology, and an affective filter to advance teachers' instruction when teaching ELLs (Table 10). The participants noticed that these applications nurtured their ELLs emotionally, which increased their willingness to take risks, embrace new learning, and happily participate in classroom activities, rather than socially withdraw. CRT and technology helped improve the teachers' ability to communicate with their ELLs and their families. Participants described how technology helped them as well as their students overcome instructional challenges, such as an inability to communicate due to language differences, a gap in their ELL's background knowledge, and a need to provide differentiated reading levels. Interviewees reported that they utilized translation software to bridge communication gaps; reinforced vocabulary with online images; used a search engine to provide instantaneous knowledge on topics; and requested definitions for complex phrases or sentences to simplify the text. While applying these scaffolded activities, educators used an affective filter to gauge a student's frustration level in order to apply an appropriate level of challenge to learning tasks. The qualitative data provided specific adaptive instructional strategies used by educators to advance ELL success. These strategies were corroborated by the results of the multiple regression analyses.

Validity and Trustworthiness

The researchers took steps to minimize issues related to survey error [64], as well as establish qualitative trustworthiness [63]. Dillman et al. [64] explain four types of errors when collecting survey data, "coverage, sampling, nonresponse, and measurement" (p. 16). Coverage refers to including the entire intended population in a data collection process. In this case, the intended geographic location included the five largest districts in a region of a northeastern state. The researchers requested that the link be sent to all educators employed in each district and to all students in graduate education programs at two universities, accounting for comprehensive sampling at each site. The response

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rate was recorded after three follow-up emails were sent to all targeted educators. Measurement was addressed through the selection of highly valid and reliable surveys and the pilot testing of all data collection tools.

Table 10: Qualitative Theme 4: Instructional Applications.

Category	Example Quotes
Culturally Relevant Teaching	Nora said, "I formally and purposefully integrate songs of my ELL cultures into my curriculum I definitely make those decisions because I want the students to be able to have a little piece of home, and to know that we honor all cultures in my classroom."
Technology	Nathan stated, "By seeing the subtitles in their own language, it helped them make a connection to have follow up conversations. I could see that the movie and topic made a lot more sense to them. Something as simple as just turning on subtitles drastically changed the classroom."
Affective Filter	Olga explained, "It is so important because [ELLs] just shut down and they don't want to participate, so we always give them positive feedback. It's okay to make mistakes."

Note: All names are pseudonyms.

Qualitative trustworthiness as described by Lincoln and Guba [63] and elaborated upon by Krefting [65] includes four concepts: "credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability" (p. 217). The "credibility" [65] of the researchers was established by their expertise in literacy, special education, and educational psychology. "Transferability" [65] is initiated by the reader who can decide how the content of this research applies to their environment. This is made possible by the thorough descriptions of the procedures. "Dependability" [65] refers to the reliability of the information reported and is supported by comparing quantitative and qualitative results through the process of data triangulation. "Confirmability" [65] of the data interpretation was established through the following procedures: adhering to a semi-structured interview protocol, audio-recording and transcribing each interview to maintain accuracy of responses, checking and rechecking the coding process, and having two researchers independently conduct an audit of the data.

Discussion

Research Question 1

The statistical results suggested that these educators adapted their instruction when working with ELLs by using different types of feedback, multiple engagement strategies, and a balance between the employment of student-directed and direct instruction. According to Reddy et al. [49] "Teaching is an active and interactive process requiring the modification and adaptation of teaching strategies as student learning is monitored" (pp. 527-528). With respect to adaptive instruction, educators adjust their instruction when they "respond to their students' learning needs while teaching" [51]. Wang [66] further emphasized that adaptive instruction is appropriate for all learners because it is "matched to students on the basis of knowledge about each individual's background, talents, interests, and past performance" (p. 122). Research studies show that adaptive instruction improves student learning because it is based on student abilities, it utilizes alternative materials, it provides achievable goals, and it allows students to work at their own pace [67].

Regarding the outcome of the regression procedure, two subscales of the TSES, classroom management and instructional strategies, and one subscale of the CSS-T, promotes student thinking, did not enter the regression equation. Classroom management had the lowest correlation with the criterion, adaptive instruction ($r = .256$), and a relatively high correlation with the predictor, student engagement ($r = .601$). This made it an unlikely variable to explain additional variance in the criterion. The specific strategies represented by the subscales of the CSS-T may have been more on target for predicting adaptive strategies used by these educators than the more general construct from the TSES. We would like to suggest that the CSS-T scale titled promotes students' thinking be further investigated. Perhaps the educators, who were asked to respond to the surveys with their ELL students in mind were, unfortunately, not focused on higher order thinking skills for them.

Research Question 2

Foundational Requirements

Teachers reported how important it was to ensure that each ELL is socially and emotionally comfortable in the classroom before beginning their instruction. Bandura's social cognitive theory [68] and Pajares' self-efficacy belief system [69] emphasized the impact that one's psychological status and beliefs have on a learner's ability to grow. The participants explained that ELLs struggle emotionally when they are becoming accustomed to a new culture and school system. These students want to make friends, and not look different or appear as though they do not know the answers. They are therefore afraid to make mistakes and can become quiet or appear unresponsive [38].

Bandura [20] underscored that a learner's anxiety and apprehension can create avoidance and low self-efficacy whereas,

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a comfortable mindset is more likely to generate a positive and persistent attitude. When ELLs feel apprehension, their teachers can lessen this emotion with verbal persuasion and positive learning experiences [69].

The participants in this study held different and somewhat contrasting views of what an appropriate education for ELLs entailed, especially when making appropriate referrals for support services. Although the U.S. Supreme Court in 2017 ruled that all children, regardless of their origin or language (including ELLs), are entitled to a free and appropriate public education (Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Public Law 94-142) [55], some participants remarked that their districts were not equipped to provide adequate ELL instruction. In these districts, some educators stated that referrals either to special education or to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-112, Section 504) [56] were necessary and routinely conducted to provide ELLs with the extra support needed [57]. In contrast, other participants noted that referrals to special education services were appropriate only when ELLs had an identified learning need or specific disability. The educators in the latter category stressed the appropriateness of providing education that was geared to the ELLs' linguistic and cultural needs first because they were entitled to the same educational access as their peers. Instructionally, ELLs require linguistic support since they learn both academic content and vocabulary while simultaneously learning a new language [70,71]. This struggle to achieve fluency often masks capabilities and highlights deficits, which has resulted in an underrepresentation of ELLs in gifted programs and an over-selection of ELLs for special education for the past three generations [7]. Therefore, it is vital that educators learn about student characteristics and needs in order to make appropriate referrals to maintain the academic development of ELLs, who can then be matched to services provided by educators trained to support them [72].

Leadership

Previous studies demonstrated that leadership has a vital impact on the success of ELLs. Elfers et al., [73] emphasized the critical importance that leadership provides in building an ELL support system that should include professional learning for its teachers, inclusive curriculum practices, and collaborative time with peers. Kraft et al. [74] reported that decisions made by school leaders impact the effectiveness of professional learning, noting that when it is accompanied by teacher coaching, there is higher student achievement. Also, when school leaders provide the time for teachers to collaborate with colleagues, they feel increased empowerment to teach ELLs [71,75]. Consequently, appropriate instructional delivery has been found to be "consistently associated with positive and mostly statistically significant improvements in teachers' practices" [76]. The educators in this study also recommend that a strategic school plan embed inclusive classroom practices to support ELLs.

The educators in this study who lacked ELL professional learning described having low confidence and expressed a need for specialist support. Corroborating this sentiment, Walker et al. [77] reported that numerous teachers of ELLs felt unqualified to teach this population and would rather not have them in their classes. Also, teachers who were less self-efficacious were more likely to refer their students to a special education program, possibly leading to their misidentification as students needing disability services instead of recommending them for specific linguistic support [15]. Two contributors to making an incorrect referral are poor communication and lack of information about ELL students. Unfortunately, many study participants were often unaware of who had previously been identified as an ELL, making it difficult for an ELL to receive targeted support in the classroom.

The participants recounted how ELLs who had exited from specific services often required a transitional amount of support. The literature indicates that ELLs who have been reclassified, and no longer considered English Language Learners, often feel "separation from longstanding friendships, a feeling of otherness, self-esteem and confidence issues, a need to catch up in content areas, and a potential lack of scaffolded instruction" [60]. With poor follow-up, staff members are unaware of which students require continued ELL monitoring [60]. Therefore, this study highlighted the importance of ongoing ELL instruction for reclassified ELLs and the necessity to communicate this information to staff.

Strategy Instruction

Although many ELLs are capable learners, there is a well-documented and persistent student achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs [78-80]. As the projected ELL population continues to grow in the US, teachers have voiced that they need to know how to teach ELLs [81,82].

Differentiated instructional strategies, as used by the participants in this study, were theoretically supported by Vygotsky's Gradual Release model [25], which shifted the responsibility from the instructor to the student to advance their learning. Hattie and Donoghue [41] established that scaffolded instruction that focuses on an individual's learning stage and unique needs is an effective strategy.

Instructional Application

Educators who embedded culturally relevant teaching into their instruction noticed that these practices promoted peer acceptance and were central to closing the ELL/non-ELL achievement gap [43,83,84]. Banks [83] recommended that educators integrate multicultural goals and activities into every aspect of their instruction to diminish prejudice, promote impartiality, and inspire diversity. However, many teachers report that they lacked culturally relevant teaching self-efficacy and would benefit from professional learning about CRT [82].

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Another instructional application was the use of technology to assist ELLs. The participants reported that they used technology to instantly adjust the delivery of their instruction to provide timely interventions to support their ELLs. Bandura [24] purported that technology has the capacity to provide adaptive instruction, while delivering a positive and global, inclusive context for learners. These findings suggest that if educators use technology to support their own learning, and support the instruction of their ELLs, they can improve ELL achievement and lessen the achievement gap.

An affective filter was also a crucial teaching element that accompanied instruction for advancing ELL student learning. When teachers were sensitive to an ELL's learning capacity and ensured that instruction was supported with the proper amount of challenge [85], they reported that students were emotionally ready for learning and were more likely to take risks.

Implications and Conclusion

The statistical results from this study indicate that there is an integral relationship between adaptive instruction and the predictors of academic performance feedback, self-efficacy in student engagement, student-directed instruction, and direct instruction. If educators utilize a blend of these strategies, then ELLs will be successful. Also, if educators and school leaders utilize targeted themes from this study they will be able to improve learning outcomes for this growing, diverse population. These emergent themes were: foundational requirements that include social and emotional well-being, teachers' self-efficacy, appropriate referrals, and ongoing instruction; leadership that focuses on professional learning, use of collaborative time, and an inclusive curriculum for ELLs; ELL strategy instruction with adaptive instruction, feedback, and student-directed and direct instruction; and instructional applications in the K-12 setting that use CRT, adaptive technology, and teacher use of affective filters. We strongly believe that these educator-informed recommendations have the potential to close the achievement gap.

This research can be used to advance the teachers' awareness of their self-efficacy when instructing ELLs. Since there is a link between classroom practices and student learning [9], providing teachers with ELL instructional strategies should assist student learning, minimize multicultural intolerances, and lessen the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs [86,87].

Appendix A

Descriptive Statistics for Research Question 1

Variables	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
	Self-Efficacy					
Student Engagement	5.00	9.00	6.94	0.92	0.312	-0.271
Instructional Strategies	5.75	9.00	7.46	0.82	0.072	-0.604
Classroom Management	5.00	9.00	7.41	0.95	-0.112	-0.605
Adaptive Instruction	4.75	7.00	6.29	0.60	-0.532	-0.656
	Instructional Strategies					
Student-Directed Instruction	3.40	7.00	5.43	0.73	-0.021	-0.188
Direct Instruction	4.63	7.00	6.24	0.54	-0.642	0.193
Promotes Students' Thinking	3.50	7.00	5.66	0.69	-0.456	0.387
Academic Performance Feedback	3.29	7.00	5.81	0.72	-0.456	0.166

Note. The self-efficacy was measured using a 9-point scale and instructional strategies were assessed using a 7-point scale.

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