THE ROAD TO FLUENCY: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE READING STRATEGIES FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

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Abstract

English learners (ELs) are among the fastest growing populations in U.S. schools. They bring with them various levels of proficiency in their native languages, as well as various levels of proficiency in English. ELs are expected to learn core content while simultaneously learning their new language. English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers only have ELs for a portion of the day; the remainder of the day is spent in core instruction. General education teachers must teach ELs subject content and differentiate for their proficiency levels. This study sought to examine research-based reading strategies that have been shown to be effective when teaching reading to ELs. It further examined teacher perceptions of effective reading strategies and the methods used to evaluate the effectiveness of those strategies. The participants were comprised of a convenience sampling of teachers of grades kindergarten through grade eight, and who had at least two years’ experience teaching ELs. The theoretical framework for this phenomenological, qualitative study was based on Stephen Krashen’s Five Hypotheses of Language Acquisition, specifically his Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, and Jim Cummins’ theory of BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic language Proficiency). Three sources of data were collected: a five-point Likert survey of 10 reading strategies, individual interviews of six teachers, and a focus group discussion. The study found that teacher perceptions of best practice EL reading strategies included specific language acquisition and language learning strategies that were shown to be effective with ELs. It further discovered that teachers are using specific data-based and formative assessments to determine effective reading strategies for ELs.
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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband and best friend, Michael. You blazed the way with your doctoral degree. I admire the work ethic and determination you demonstrated throughout your own dissertation process, which inspired me to move forward. Your integrity and drive have inspired me over the last 36 years and I am so proud of all you have accomplished. Thank you for your support and dissertation advise, and for stopping whatever you were doing to listen all the many times I needed to talk something through. And thank you for bringing me snacks while I was toiling away! I’m looking forward to enjoying some down time and I wonder, what’s next?
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“We acquire language when we understand messages, when we understand what people tell us and when we understand what we read.” – (Krashen, 2004a, p.1)

Introduction and Background

Learning to read can be a daunting task. Native English speakers can struggle with not only the decoding of words, but the comprehension of the text. That struggle is magnified in English Learners (ELs). Newcomer ELs must not only learn to speak and understand a new language, they are also expected to learn to read and write in their new language rather quickly. All ELs, newcomers and long-term ELs alike, are also typically below grade level in reading, which translates to all the content areas. ELs “can acquire basic communication skills within about two years of initial exposure. However…it can take anywhere from five to seven years for their cognitive academic abilities to catch up to those of their native English speaking peers” (Hargrove, 2010, p 9). Some EL students may linger in language acquisition classes for longer than seven years. The goal for ELs is that they become fluent and successful readers, both academically and personally.

Research Problem

Teaching reading to second language learners requires an understanding of language acquisition. “Some of the problems associated with ELs struggling to read can unfortunately be attributed to particular methods of reading instruction that either test rather than teach reading or that do not take into consideration the differences between learning to read in a first and a second/subsequent language” (Farrell, 2009, p. 1). Additionally, the educational background of students must be considered. Students who are literate in their native language will generally
progress faster than students with first language low literacy skills (Crawford & Krashen, 2007). With only about one hour each day to teach ELs, every strategy must be effective and appropriate. Additionally, instruction must target all ELs, from those who are newcomers to those who are advanced, and especially to those intermediate level students who just cannot make substantial gains. The goal for ELs is that they become grade-level proficient. How to go about that task is the question at hand.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges ELs face in their acquisition of language as well as to explore the many strategies teachers can use to teach the various elements of reading, such as comprehension, academic language, vocabulary instruction, fluency, and automaticity. This research explores a variety of research-based instructional strategies as a way to equip students with the tools they need to access texts in all areas of reading, including their content texts, recreational reading, and real-world reading.

**Theoretical Framework**

Stephen Krashen is one of the leading voices in the field of second language acquisition. He proposed five hypotheses that can be applied to second language learners and the way they acquire and learn a second language.

The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis is thought to be Krashen’s most important hypothesis of all of his theories. It asserts that there are two ways in which language develops: by acquiring it or picking it up, and by learning it through direct instruction. Language acquisition is a subconscious process, which is very similar to how children acquire their first language. Acquisition is achieved through authentic and meaningful conversations and interactions with other native speakers. Conversely, language learning is deliberate (Krashen, 2003). When
discussing the learning of language, Krashen focuses on the explicit teaching of the rules of English, specifically grammar rules. He argues that the deliberate teaching of rules is ineffectual. In fact, Krashen rejects the educational practice of explicit grammar instruction.

The Monitor Hypothesis refers to the ability of a second language learner to self-correct their acquired language with their learned language. This happens when an EL scans, inspects, and uses the learned language to correct errors. This can happen before or after the sentence is produced (Krashen, 2003). The ability to monitor functions is the planning and correcting of language when “three specific conditions are met: that is, the second language learner has sufficient time at his/her disposal, he/she focuses on form or thinks about correctness, and he/she knows the rule” (Schütz, 2017).

The Natural Order Hypothesis poses that there is a natural, pre-determined, predictable order in which language is acquired. It holds that certain grammatical structures will be acquired before others. The order of grammar acquisition is not based on age, first language educational background, or how the learner was exposure to the second language (Schütz, 2017). Likewise, the order of acquisition is not necessarily from simple to complex. In fact, “a rule may seem to be simple to a linguist, but may be late-acquired” by an EL (Krashen, 2003, p. 2).

The Comprehensible Input Hypothesis is the foundational theory of language acquisition. It holds that “comprehending messages is the only way language is acquired” (Krashen, 2003, p. 4). Krashen proposes two points about language acquisition: first, that language acquisition is effortless, learners only need to comprehend the messages and second, that it is involuntary if learners have a low affective filter (see below) (Krashen, 2003). The crux of this theory is that ELs will only make progress if they receive input that is one step above their current language proficiency level. For example, if the learner’s ability level is at \( i \), then learning will take place if
the input is $i + 1$, or one level above the learner’s proficiency. This would be language that the “learner would not be able to produce but can still understand” (Schütz, 2017).

The Affective Filter Hypothesis poses that there are both internal and external factors which affect a person’s ability to both acquire and learn language, such as: motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, and distractions. These obstructions are things that essentially block or prevent an EL from absorbing knowledge and thus acquiring language. This could, in some cases, account for students who receive the same instruction, but progress at different rates. One student may be open to the input, but another may be hindered by one of the blocks, or affective filters (Krashen, 2003). Low affective filters are desired so that students can learn and acquire language. Teachers must be mindful of these blocks and provide an environment that lowers the affective filter for ELs.

Although all of Krashen’s hypotheses were considered in this study, the theoretical framework focused specifically on the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis. As stated above, there are two ways that a learner obtains a second language. The acquiring of language is a natural and involuntary process that happens when a learner is involved in the exchange of language with native speakers of the language. ELs acquire a great deal of language without it being explicitly taught to them. However, ELs cannot learn everything they need to know to access core instruction with acquisition alone. They need explicit and deliberate rigorous instruction to enable them to meet the demands of content in the classroom.

Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis can be further explained for practical use in the classroom with Cummins’ theory of BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). Many teachers believe that if a student speaks fluently, then he/she should be proficient in English language skills. That is not always
the case. Students typically acquire social language before they learn academic language. The language used to speak to classmates and friends socially is different than the language necessary in the classroom. ELs can communicate efficiently in a social setting using only a limited amount of vocabulary. However, the amount and type of vocabulary necessary for the classroom is a different matter. “Problems arise when teachers and administrators think that a child is proficient in a language when they demonstrate good social English” (Haynes, n.d.). While BICS is usually acquired naturally, academic language, both expressive (speaking and writing) and receptive (reading and listening), must be explicitly taught. “Students need to be taught expressive language…so that they can answer questions, participate in discussions, and be successful in showing what they know on assessments” (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2010). Teachers can model the appropriate sentence structure, vocabulary, and discourse that students need in a particular lesson, thereby scaffolding and supporting the EL in developing and using academic language. Therefore, “when students understand the language of the teacher (listening), express their thinking and conceptual knowledge (speaking and writing), and better comprehend the text (reading), they will experience academic success” (Siegel, 2009, p.12).

The goal is for ELs to become not only fluent in social language (BICS), but also in academic language (CALP). Dana Siegel (2009) states, “Academic language is used in school to learn new concepts and content, complex thinking processes, and abstract concepts… Academic language is the language of text, tests, and learning.” She further states that for ELs, “the key to academic success is learning, recognizing, and using academic language” (p.6). For example, when teaching the concept of compare and contrast, it is important to explicitly teach and model the academic language associated with that function, such as same, similar, both, alike, and differences, as well as comparatives and superlatives. By explicitly teaching and modeling higher
order thinking, students learn to how to think about thinking; they learn how to think in a metacognitive way. This is accomplished through the joint efforts of language acquisition and language learning.

**Research Questions**

The research questions at the center of this study focus on teacher perceptions of best practices for reading instruction and the effectiveness of those perceived reading strategies on EL reading comprehension. Since there is no one strategy that works for every student, teachers must choose which strategies to use when teaching ELs, both as a whole class as well as individual student differentiation. Teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of those strategies is not just a very important factor in the teaching of ELs, it is the very pivot point of effective instruction. The decisions teachers make when choosing which best practices to use will be the determining factor of student progress. With this in mind, the following research questions were proposed:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding best practice reading strategies for EL students?
2. Which reading strategies are being used by teachers for EL students and what method are teachers using to determine effectiveness?

**Rationale for the Study**

Prior to 1965, the federal government did little to regulate education. It was very cautious of infringing on the states’ individual rights to legislate or prescribe curriculum, instructional practices, or general educational policy. The extent of federal involvement was to provide funds or land for schools as well as fund some special programs. In 1965, President Johnson signed the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education) Act into law. This new law provided extra funding to lower socioeconomic schools in the hopes of strengthening the resources available to these schools. In doing this, “there seemed to be the promise that the federal role in education would
lessen the achievement gap between students of different backgrounds without intruding on those schools that were doing well without federal mandates” (Savage, 2006, para 1). In order to determine if the new funding was effective at closing the achievement gap, the need for accountability arose. Schools taking federal dollars were now required to show and document improvement. An assessment was developed to assess student learning. This test, developed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), reported scores “by region with the intent only of gauging how schools were doing in general, not of making comparisons between specific states or schools” (Savage, 2006, para 2). Over the next decade, despite the new law and new funding, the achievement gap was not corrected.

In the 1980s, a report called *A Nation at Risk* was published which described the failure of American schools. It was determined that the extra funding was not the answer and federal funds decreased “21% between 1980 and 1985” (Savage, 2006, Old Problems, New Answers, para 1). It was determined that the previous accountability, which only gauged how each school was doing individually, was inadequate. Furthermore, it was decided that schools needed to be compared to one another in each state as well as across the states. An education summit in 1989 “led to a commitment to develop content standards at the national level for each core subject area” (Savage, 2006, Old Problems, New Answers, para 3). ESEA was reauthorized in 1994 by President Clinton as the *Improving American Schools Act* and built on the commitment to develop national core standards by mandated that they do so.

In 2001, President Bush reauthorized the ESEA act naming it *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). This act mandated that state assessments must be administered each year in which students are required to demonstrate proficiency. Additionally, teachers must be held accountable with rigorous standards and evaluations. Added to these stipulations is the
accountability of each school and teacher. “States must report to the general public the status
their schools are making toward meeting federal mandates for adequate yearly progress and
employing highly qualified teachers. Severe consequences result for schools who are not meeting
standards” (Savage, 2006, ESEA Reborn, para 1). Now, not only must scores be reported and
analyzed, but there would be penalties for schools that failed to meet the standards. This ushered
in the new era of high-stakes testing. The federal educational act No Child Left Behind (NCLB)
made significant gains in ensuring the proficiency of every student, however, its “prescriptive
requirements became increasingly unworkable for schools and educators” (Every Student, n.d.,
A New Education Law). Furthermore, it “shined a light on where students were making progress
and where they needed additional support, regardless of race, income, zip code, disability, home
language, or background” (Every Student, n.d., A New Education Law). In order to address these
issues and increase the level of rigorous instruction, the Elementary and Secondary Education
Act (ESEA) was reauthorized with the signing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in
2015.

Although the federal government enacts education laws, it is up to each state to adapt that
law to their own needs and submit it for approval (Summary, 2015). Tennessee’s final plan
focused on accountability for both students and teachers as well as student preparation for
success. Schools and districts are evaluated on a grading scale of A-F. Each school’s grade is
based on an accountability rubric with the following indicators: achievement, growth, ready
graduate, chronically out of school, and ELPA (English Language Proficiency Assessment)
(English Language Learners, n.d).

There were significant changes to the English learner portion of ESSA. Prior to this
reauthorization, English learners (ELs) were held accountable under Title III. Now, the
accountability for ELs falls under Title I, “to show that proficiency for ELL students is as important as proficiency for other students” (Summary, 2015, p. 8). Title I encompasses students who are disadvantaged and moving ELs into this category for accountability ensures that these students are afforded the same rigorous instruction and expectations. The ELPA (English Language Proficiency Assessment) is used to determine proficiency level in the areas of achievement as well as growth, both at the school and the district level. In Tennessee, that assessment is WIDA ACCESS 2.0.

One change with the greatest impact was that the accountability of ELs are further sorted to include the length of time a student has been in an ESL program. The overall achievement of a Recently Arrived English Learner (RAEL) holds a different weight than ELs who have been in the program for a longer period of time. Additionally, there is a new metric in the state report card that follows the progress of Long-term English Learners (LTELs), students who are beginning their seventh year of ESL having not qualified to exit the program. As the state reviews the data from this group, it will provide added resources to assist schools and districts “in how best to support LTELs and increase the likelihood of exit” (English Language Learners, n.d).

In order to meet the new ESSA standards and accountability, rigor in instruction and assessment need to be increased. In 2017, WIDA retooled the WIDA ACCESS 2.0 scoring matrix “to meet language demands of college and career readiness standards” (2017 ACCESS, n.d.). Students are now required to demonstrate higher language skills in order to show growth, proficiency and achievement. It is now more important than ever to find the most effective and rigorous instructional strategies for teaching ELs.

**Researcher Positionality Statement**
The researcher had nine years of experience teaching English learners in kindergarten through eighth grade and holds a B.S. in Language Arts with an endorsement in ESL, an M.Ed. in education with a Reading Specialist endorsement, and an Ed.S. in Curriculum and Instruction. The researcher provided professional development for general education teachers and mentored new ESL teachers as well as student teachers. Due to the fact that there is no prescribed curriculum for ELs, the researcher continually researched, analyzed, or sought rigorous and valid strategies that are effective with second language learners who are learning and acquiring both reading skills and language skills at the same time. The researcher’s role in this study included evaluating and comparing reading strategies that align with second language acquisition theory.

Research and data collection were conducted in a way to be free from any bias. Guided by the research question, data was collected and organized to determine the most effective and rigorous reading strategies for English learners.

**Definition of Terms**

*English Learner:* any student whose first language is not English and has limited English proficiency. These students are in the process of learning academic language and content while at the same time acquiring a second language (Crawford & Krashen, 2007, p. 12).

*BICS* (Basic Interpersonal Language Proficiency): refers to the social aspect of language that ELs pick up through interaction in social settings. This “peer-appropriate conversational fluency” can be acquired in as little as two years (Cummins, 1999, p. 2). Although ELs who exhibit fluent language in conversation may appear to be fluent enough to be on grade-level in content classes, this may not be the case. Academic language is an entirely different level of language fluency, requiring significantly more complex vocabulary and discourse for comprehension.

*CALP* (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency): the academic language of the classroom, textbooks, texts, tests, and learning. CALP “refers to students’ ability to understand and
express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school” (Cummins, n.d., Introduction section, para. 1).

_Academic Language:_ the language of the classroom, texts, tests, and learning. This is defined as “the extent to which an individual has access to and command of the oral and written academic registers of schooling” (Cummins, n.d., Early Developments section, para. 3).

_Discourse:_ The process of communicating in the form of spoken and written interchanges. Common discourse refers to social and informal language, while academic discourse refers to the language of the classroom and academia (Diamond, n.d.).

_Morphology:_ the study of word parts as combinations of smaller units of meaning within words: morphemes; root words, prefixes, and suffixes (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2010, p. 49).

_Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis:_ There are two ways in which language develops: by acquiring it (picking it up) and by learning it (through direct instruction). Language acquisition is a subconscious process, while language learning is deliberate (Krashen, 2003, p. 1).

_Natural Order Hypothesis:_ The theory that there is a natural, pre-determined, predictable order in which language is acquired. Certain grammatical structures will be acquired before others. This order is not necessarily from simple to complex. In fact, “a rule may seem to be simple to a linguist, but may be late-acquired” by an EL (Krashen, 2003, p. 2).

_Monitor Hypothesis:_ the ability of EL to self-correct their acquired language with their learned language. This happens when an EL scans, inspects, and uses the learned language to correct errors. This can happen before or after the sentence is produced (Krashen, 2003).

_Comprehensible Input Hypothesis:_ This is the foundational theory of language acquisition. It holds that “comprehending messages is the only way language is acquired” (Krashen, 2003, p. 4). Krashen proposes two points about language acquisition: that language acquisition is effortless, learners only need to comprehend the messages and that it is involuntary
if learners have a low affective filter (see below). ELs will only make progress if they receive input that is one step above their current language proficiency level. For example, if the learner’s ability level is at $i$, then learning will take place if the input is $i + 1$, or one level above the learner’s proficiency (Krashen, 2003).

**Affective Filter Hypothesis:** variables which affect language acquisition such as: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. The affective filter is essentially a block that hinders or prevents an EL from absorbing knowledge and thus acquiring language. This could, in some cases, account for students who receive the same instruction, but progress at different rates. One student may be open to the input, but another may be hindered by one of the blocks, or affective filters (Krashen, 2003, p. 6). Low affective filters are desired so that students can learn and acquire language.

**Phonological Awareness:** a broad term that encompasses the awareness of the sound structure of words such as syllables, onsets (the part of the word before the vowel), and rime (vowel and consonant blends at the end of words). Further, this refers to the ability to recognize that words are made up of a variety of parts, and the “understanding that sounds and print letters are connected” (Phonemic Awareness, n.d.).

**Phonemic Awareness:** a more specific term that involves the ability to hear and distinguish phonemes, the individual sounds that form words (Phonemic Awareness, n.d.).

**Schema Theory:** focuses on the necessity of applying generic knowledge to specific situations or texts. The implementation of instructional strategies that guide students to activate their background knowledge concerning the text or concept enables students to make connections to the subject which will help the student comprehend as well as remember the text/concept (Pappas, 2014).
Summary

Now more than ever, it is vital that effective, researched-based reading strategies are used in EL instruction on a daily basis. Not only is this important in order to meet the new state and district requirements of ESSA, but moreover, it is imperative to the educational health and well-being of English learner students during their school years and beyond. Drawing on the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis and the theory of BICS and CALP, rigorous instructional strategies can be implemented by not only ESL teachers, but classroom teachers as well.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

The mandatory education of English learners is relatively new in the United States; the first legislation was enacted specifically for English learners a mere forty-four years ago. Prior to that, ELs were placed in the same classes with the same materials and resources of native English-speaking students, regardless of their level of English proficiency. Individual help may or may not have been provided, but it was not required. The following legal rulings are paramount in English as a Second Language (ESL) education.

History of English as a Second Language Education in the United States

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) is widely hailed as one of the most important Supreme Court decisions regarding the rights of students. It not only paved the way for the Civil Rights Movement, but it also paved the way for children of all racial backgrounds to receive an equal education. Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote, “In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right that must be made available on equal terms” (Brown, 1954). While this case focused on the desegregation of black students and white students, it eventually opened the door for the rights of all students, regardless of racial, ethnic, or language background. Twenty years later, the Supreme Court would again make a landmark decision for the rights of students.

In San Francisco, California in the early 1970s, a class action suit, Lau v. Nichols, was brought by the parents of Chinese students against the San Francisco school district. The suit was based on the fact that of 2,800 Chinese-speaking students in the district, only 1,000 of them were receiving special English language instruction, leaving almost two-thirds of the students with no
special English instruction, which they argued violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Court of Appeals sided with the school district saying every student “brings to the starting line of his educational career different advantages and disadvantages…created and completely apart from any contribution by the school system” (Educating, n.d.). The case went to the Supreme Court and in 1974, it made its ruling in favor of the plaintiffs stating,

[basic English skills] are the very core of what these public schools teach. Imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the educational program, he must already have acquired those basic skills is to make a mockery of public education. We know that those who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful (School, n.d.).

The Court reasoned that if students could not graduate from high school without a basic knowledge of English, and if students are required to attend school, and if schools receive federal money, then schools have a responsibility to provide non-English speaking students with language acquisition instruction (Educating, n.d.).

The Lau v. Nichols case was the pivotal decision for the education and instruction of English learners. Before this, ELs were given the same instruction as English-speaking students and that was the problem. Non-English-speaking students could not access that instruction because they lacked English proficiency. The Lau ruling stated, "There is no equality of treatment by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers and curriculum, for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education" (Lau, n.d.). In other words, providing ELs with the same instruction and resources as native English speakers was not equal. Equality in education means providing the necessary tools to each individual student to ensure that everyone has the same opportunities to succeed. The
Lau v. Nichols ruling meant that ELs would not only receive the same core instruction as their English-speaking peers, but that they would also receive specialized instruction in language acquisition. No longer were students left to sink or swim, but schools were ordered to take “affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency…” (Educating, n.d.). Congress agreed and in the same year enacted the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974 (Rethinking, n.d.).

Beginning in 1974, the government required all schools to provide specialized instruction for ELs but did not specify how to do that. Consequently, there were problems implementing a fair and appropriate model for EL instruction. As a result, Mexican-American parents in Texas filed a lawsuit claiming their children were being grouped “based on racially and ethnically discriminatory criteria” (Castañeda, n.d.). In 1981, the Texas court was to make the second pivotal ruling concerning the education of ELs.

The courts had enacted guidelines and parameters for the delivery of effective instruction to ELs, however, specific methodology was not specified then, and it is not specified now. Therefore, the methods and strategies used in the instruction of ELs is at the discretion of the ESL teacher or the school district, provided those strategies are research-based and effective.
Students come to school with a myriad of backgrounds and educational abilities. Strategies that are effective for one student may not work for another. Some students come from a print-rich environment where the parents read to the children and provide access to books and language. However, many students do not have the same access to books and language. Those students begin school already behind their counterparts. By the time children from low socio-economic backgrounds are four years old, they have thirteen million fewer words in their vocabulary and experiences than working class families and both groups are behind children from professional families (Hart/Risely, 2003). These disparities impact the learning development of children. Students who have had books and have been read to are already familiar with the concept of print as well as alphabetical concepts. They already know that the printed letter stands for a sound and letters strung together makes words. They may even be familiar with the sounds of the letters. Students who have not had this advantage must start from the beginning. Some can catch on quickly, while others struggle with even the most basic skills.

These disparities can be further magnified in ELs. Many students arrive in the United States with an education in their own language. This is extremely important because this means they are literate and understand the concepts of the written word. They can then begin to learn those same concepts in English (provided their language uses the Roman alphabet). However, there are also many students who enter school with no or very low literacy skills. They may have been in a refugee camp or they may come from extreme poverty where they had no access to school, the printed word, or rich language. This presents an even bigger task as those students are also starting from the beginning, although they may be much older. Additionally, there are students who, despite having advantages, still do not progress as expected. Sometimes students do not respond to the method of instruction and therefore fall behind.
The key to reaching children with different backgrounds and different levels of learning is differentiation. Instruction cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. Teachers must use a variety of approaches and strategies in order to meet the needs of every student. For example, a student who is a visual learner will need to have visual aids. An auditory learner will need to hear the lesson, perhaps over and over. Students who are kinesthetic need to use their hands and bodies to absorb the concept. By implementing different strategies, students will have a better chance of learning.

Additionally, teachers of ELs must be mindful of the specific strategies they choose. Since there is no prescribed curriculum and no one strategy that works for every student, those strategies must be research-based. Teachers must also test and evaluate each strategy for effectiveness within their own instruction. Strategies that work for one teacher and student might not work for the next. The following review of literature discusses various instructional strategies that have been researched and identified to be best practices for teaching reading to ELs. While there are separate sections for the following strategies, many of them overlap and intertwine; they are neither isolated nor independent approaches.

**Reading Instruction**

**Definition**

Reading, in its basic form, is looking at words on a page and internalizing them in order to comprehend the message. In its most complicated form, reading is a labyrinth of letters and sounds strung together on a page, which may or may not make any sense at all. The mystery that texts hold can be open and available or they can be closed and perplexing. Unlocking that mystery is the goal of reading instruction.

**The Role of Reading Instruction**
Learning to read in a second language makes unlocking the mystery more difficult. When ELs struggle to learn to read, part of the problem may be “attributed to particular methods of reading instruction that either test rather than teach reading or that do not take into consideration the differences between learning to read in a first language and a second/subsequent language” (Farrell, 2009, p.1). For example, when a teacher assigns a reading passage followed by comprehension questions or a written summary/sentences, that is considered testing, not reading instruction. There is a place for assessment, however, it should not be confused with instruction. For ELs, traditional assessments are not always effective at assessing reading. Formative assessments will allow ELs to demonstrate knowledge more purposefully.

While first language learners have more background knowledge and grammar skills in English than second language learners, ELs “begin reading in the second/subsequent language with a different knowledge base (e.g., more world knowledge, more developed cognitive abilities) than they had when they started to read in their first language” (Farrell, 2009, p. 3). This information should drive the approach ESL teachers take in teaching ELs to read and write. While some ELs are literate in their native language, many ELs, who are fluent in oral language, are not literate in their native language. These factors can also affect the strategies used in reading instruction.

**Reading Strategies /Best Practices**

Reading strategies are tools that help readers make sense of texts. They are “a set of abilities that readers have conscious control over but are also relatively automatic, such as skipping a word we may not know when reading” (Farrell, 2009, p. 9). Teaching ELs different reading strategies and how to use them, not only in guided practice, but independently as well, will give them the tools they need to become “strategic readers” (p. 9). The following reading
strategies have been chosen as a representation of the many research-based reading strategies available.

ELs respond well to Read Alouds, which allow the teacher to present texts at a higher reading level than the students could read independently or in a shared read. This means that texts can be read that are age appropriate, which is important for ELs that are older but reading at a low grade-level. The teacher can stop along the way to model thinking. ELs benefit from hearing the teacher read fluently, with inflection and intonation, and think out loud through the text. It also gives ELs the opportunity to read out loud in a controlled and safe environment. The Read Aloud is also a good way to introduce vocabulary and background knowledge, as well as garner interest in the upcoming topic (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2018).

In shared reading, the teacher uses a text that is just above the independent level of the students which corresponds with Krashen’s (2003) theory of comprehensible input (i + 1) in which learning occurs when the student is given material that is one step above their current proficiency level. This allows the students to push themselves thereby learning new skills and concepts. In shared reading, the students follow along as the teacher reads aloud. This approach allows the teacher to present a comprehension strategy or teach the text feature/structure beforehand. Shared reading is a great opportunity for the teacher to model the activity, then invite the students to participate, and finally turn the responsibility over to them (I do it, we do it, you do it). This “gradual release of responsibility” allows students to not only take ownership of their learning (Gallagher, 2009, p. 61), but to experience success.

Nothing is more daunting to a struggling reader than a textbook. Not only is the text difficult to comprehend, but the organization of the pages can be overwhelming. Teaching how a textbook and other nonfiction texts are organized will unlock the mystery and give students
access to that text. “While most pieces of fiction follow the same or similar general organizational patterns, different expository texts can have very different text structures. Therefore, it is important to teach students to recognize common text structures found in expository texts” (Using Text Structure, n.d.). It is important to understand the difference between text structure and text features. Both are a regular occurrence in textbooks.

Text features are the elements that make it easier to find information within the text. For example, headings, bold lettering, captions, italics, maps and diagrams, and text boxes are all text features. Teaching how to use the features will help students use the text to their advantage. Text Structure is how the ideas in the text are organized, such as compare and contrast, cause and effect, sequence of events, and problem and solution. This structure provides clues to the reader about what is important in the text as well as aids in summarizing and recalling important information (Spence, n.d.). Both text features and text structure provide support for readers, but these components must be explicitly taught. For example, when teaching the concept of compare and contrast, it is important to explicitly teach and model the academic language associated with that function, such as same, similar, both, alike, and difference, as well as comparatives and superlatives. By explicitly teaching and modeling higher order thinking, students not only learn how to think about thinking, they learn how to think in a metacognitive way.

A great way to incorporate all of these strategies is through a thematic unit. EL students respond best to a consistent presentation of thematically related material that includes “oral reports, a wide range of literature, resources using various media, and learning activities that are authentic.” Furthermore, students “learn content vocabulary in a natural context” (Vacca et al., 2009). Thematic units provide structure and continuity whereby the four domains of language acquisition (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) can be taught, encompassing all core
subjects across the curriculum. Within the thematic unit, a variety of strategies and activities can be used and “integrated and interconnected through an interesting and motivating theme” (Crandall, 2003). ELs respond best to a consistent presentation of thematically related material that includes “oral reports, a wide range of literature, resources using various media, and learning activities that are authentic.” Furthermore, students “learn content vocabulary in a natural context” (Vacca et al., 2009). To make the content even more motivating for students, allow them to vote on the theme they will study.

Schema Theory

Definition

Schema theory is not a new idea. Immanuel Kant posed the concept in 1781. He argued that no text, written or spoken, holds any meaning unless it can be related to the experiences and knowledge of the receiver. (Carrell, 1984). Modern day schema theory, or schemata, was used as a cognitive psychology theory that was applied in the quest to create an artificial intelligence that could display human-like behaviors, such as reading a text in a natural human voice. It was unsuccessful due to the fact that the computer did not have the necessary background knowledge to read the text with inflection or emotion. It was determined that “meaning is formed by the information and cultural and emotional context the reader brings through his schemata more than by the text itself” (Schema, n.d.). Schema is the mental framework used to organize and process information coming into and being stored in the human brain. When new information is presented, it is compared and related to the existing information stored in the brain. Consequently, when new information is introduced for which there is no existing knowledge (schema) as a reference, a new connection must be formed (Dixon, 2017). There are three main types of schema, content schemata, which is background knowledge about the topic of the text,
formal schemata, background knowledge of rhetorical and text structure, and language schema, prior knowledge of vocabulary in the text (Schema, n.d.).

The Role of Schemata in Reading Instruction

ELs have very diverse backgrounds. Some come from backgrounds where education is promoted and valued. Those students tend to be at or above grade level in their native language. Additionally, they usually have prior knowledge to apply to the content if the teacher can help them activate it. However, many students do not come from education-rich backgrounds and may have gaps in their education. These students need to be explicitly taught prior knowledge so they can apply it and therefore understand the content. “For example, immigrant students may not have studied the U.S. Civil War in their native countries, but they may have studied another war or experienced military conflict firsthand. By tapping into what students know about such conflict, the teacher can set the context for a lesson on the U.S. Civil War” (Short & Echevarria, 2005).

While native English speakers may possess the appropriate cultural background knowledge as it relates to a topic, if an EL lacks that knowledge (and in most cases they do), comprehension will suffer. For example, ELs have a lot of trouble understanding American humor. Stott (2001) gives the example of a teacher who gave her students a story entitled, “It’s a Mugger’s Game.” It was tongue in cheek humor and the teacher thought it was funny. Instead the students, who were Japanese, thought the story was “scary and shocking” (p. 2). What is considered humorous in one culture may not be humorous in another. This discrepancy may cause comprehension to be diminished or be lost entirely. That is not to say that this type of text should be avoided, but rather prior knowledge and humor can be pre-taught explicitly in order to ensure comprehension, as well as build up the repertoire of background knowledge for students.
Cultural background differs drastically in some cases. Teachers of ELs need to be aware of those differences because it is those differences that can and will impede comprehension. Although there cannot be awareness of every specific difference, teachers should be well aware that there are differences, and that those differences can and most likely will impact reading comprehension. Another example of the differences in cultural background knowledge is the concept of “full moon.” Stott (2001) explains that in Europe (and perhaps in the U.S. as well), the full moon evokes memories of horror stories and scary movies, while in Japan, that same full moon is a symbol of beauty and inspires moon-viewing parties. Cultural background knowledge will be accessed by an EL reader and will influence that reader’s comprehension. Therefore, when a teacher activates prior knowledge as a pre-reading activity, the appropriate prior knowledge may not be activated. This lack of cultural knowledge, combined with readers reading at their linguistic limits, results in the student either overcompensating for “absent schemata by reading in a slow, text-bound manner” or overcompensating by “wild guessing” (p.2). Both scenarios produce a lack of comprehension. Nevertheless, pre-reading activities for ELs are invaluable and must accomplish two things: construction of new background knowledge and activation of the student’s existing background knowledge.

Schemata Strategies/Best Practices

EL students will miss out on comprehension when basic (and academic) vocabulary is limited. “The importance of a lexico-grammatical focus, particularly in the early stages of learning, needs to be recognized” (Stott, 2001, p.5). Vocabulary cannot always be decoded in context. It needs to be explicitly taught. Even basic vocabulary should not be overlooked. It is often the case that EL readers completely miss the concept of a text due to not knowing the meaning of one word. For example, when reading a story about tornado safety, students who do
not know the word *cellar* will miss out on very important concept that could alter the entire meaning of the text. Stott suggests a “parallel approach” in which pre-teaching vocabulary and background knowledge is done concurrently, thereby developing both vocabulary and schemata. This balance is essential to the EL reader.

English learner reading texts need to be more controlled due to limited vocabulary and limited background knowledge. Narrow reading is a strategy in which ELs’ reading is focused on one author or a single topic of interest. This narrowing of input allows students to encounter vocabulary and concepts many times within the texts, thereby increasing exposure and leading to comprehension (Krashen, 2004). ELs should be provided with longer, “conceptually complete texts, rather than short, conceptually incomplete texts” (Carrell, 1984) as a way to build background knowledge.

Anticipatory activities help to build the necessary background knowledge for a particular text. Without background knowledge, students cannot understand the text. Often, teachers assume that students have the appropriate background knowledge needed for a text. Many times, that is not true. “Gaps in a student’s experience or prior knowledge may derail his or her ability to comprehend the passage” (Fisher & Frey, 2004, p. 5). Anticipatory activities help build prior knowledge in a way that is fun and interesting. It will also help students connect to the text on a more personal level. These activities are not fun for the sake of entertainment, but for the scaffolding of instruction (p. 20). These activities are a way to build upon the new background knowledge and apply it to the text at hand as well as future texts. There is a wide variety of anticipatory activities, allowing the teacher to choose a different one each time.

Pre-reading skills and activities are extremely important for ELs not only for activating what background knowledge the student does have, but also creating new background
knowledge. Students cannot be expected to activate knowledge they do not have. Providing opportunities to increase this knowledge is vital.

**Extensive Free Reading**

**Definition**

Extensive free reading programs have many names. A few of them are Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), Free Voluntary Reading (FVR), and Drop Everything and Read (DEAR). This concept, developed by Stephen Krashen, has been in use since 1960 and has shown very promising results. It rests on the premise that students are given a certain amount of time each day, usually ten to fifteen minutes, to read to themselves. A quiet, calm atmosphere must be maintained during reading time and the books they read must be self-selected. This insures that the student is interested in the book he or she has chosen, which develops and enriches motivation. This high-interest reading can be at any level the student chooses. “No student, able or remedial, should be chided for reading an easy book” (Chow, 200, p.4). Furthermore, students must not be required to write a book report or answer comprehension questions about what they have read. This is reading for pleasure. To that end, the teacher must be a role model for the students. During SSR, the teacher should be reading for pleasure as well. It is imperative that the teacher demonstrate his/her own love of reading. But it does not end there. Teachers should talk about the books they read to the students. This will not only model literary conversations but encourage the students to discuss their own readings.

While most of the strategies in this review of the literature involve learned language, skills and strategies directly taught to ELs, extensive free reading involves acquired language, absorbing language in a subconscious and authentic way.

**The Role of Extensive Free Reading**
An old adage proclaims, *practice makes perfect*, and never has that been more important than in reading. Richard Allington (1977) asks the question, “If they don’t read much, how they ever gonna get good?” (p. 1), and indeed he has a point. Many remedial reading groups focus on skills practice and very little actual reading is done. In order for students to “get good” at reading, they need practice, not only in class, but they also need to read independently for the pleasure of reading. That is a tall order for struggling readers who tend to avoid reading at all costs. In order for students to be interested in reading, they need to be exposed to and have access to texts that are of high interest to them.

The benefits of SSR are compelling. Studies have shown that SSR promotes a healthy attitude toward reading. Most students reported enjoyment in reading, where there had been limited or no enjoyment before. Many students, after participating in an SSR program throughout the school year, went on to read independently during the summer. Not only did reading scores improve, but vocabulary was shown to improve as well. Additionally, students that participated in SSR had better reading strategies when they encountered difficulties. While the benefits are promising, it is not a short-term program. Students must participate in SSR for a minimum of four months in order for the benefits to occur (Chow, 2000).

Reading and vocabulary go hand in hand. If a reader has limited vocabulary, then reading will be frustrating, and a frustrated reader will most likely not want to read. During SSR reading, students will be exposed to a variety of vocabulary, and that reading is one of the best ways to generate a large-scale growth in vocabulary. Furthermore, “incidental learning from context during free reading is the major mode of vocabulary acquisition during the school years” (Chow, 2000, p.2). While explicit vocabulary instruction is necessary and effective, the learning of new words through incidental means provides an added layer of learning. Students will be
more receptive to learning when they have chosen the vehicle of instruction. Since many ELs lack basic vocabulary, even choosing an easy book will expose the reader to essential vocabulary. It is vital to expose ELs to as much vocabulary as possible in a generalized, high volume, and incidental way. Teaching ELs to read can be a “Catch 22” in that students have difficulty reading because they struggle with vocabulary and language and they struggle with vocabulary and language because they have difficulty reading. SSR is a way to improve both reading and vocabulary, with the added bonus that students’ attitude toward reading will, in most cases, improve.

Research studies have shown that students who participated in a variation of SSR which consisted of shared reading, language experience, and free reading, “outperformed traditionally taught students on test of reading comprehension, vocabulary, oral language, grammar, listening comprehension, and writing” (Krashen, 2004, pp. 4-5). In fact, Krashen goes on to say, “Teaching vocabulary lists is not efficient. The time is better spent reading (p. 19).

**Extensive Free Reading Strategies and Best Practices**

It is important that students not be required to read textbooks or basal readers for SSR. Many of these texts are written specifically to use certain vocabulary words and are contrived rather than natural and authentic. Trade books, story books, and young adult literature, on the other hand, provide students with rich language, giving them the “opportunity to unravel the intricacies of written language…” (Chow, 2000, p.4). While becoming engrossed in a book, students will unwittingly learn new vocabulary and language. Moreover, students will come to view reading as a valuable activity and will “develop an appreciation of the magic of books” (p.2).
While providing free reading has many benefits, some students may act like they are reading when they are not. Although quizzes and reports are discouraged, there are ways to keep students focused and ensure some accountability for the time spent during the free reading period. Students can be encouraged to talk with the teacher or other students about the book they are reading. The teacher can model a literary book talk and encourage students to do the same. Reader’s response activities, such as creating a book jacket or designing a t-shirt allow students to connect with the book as well as hold them accountable for their reading time.

Many ELs are trying desperately to keep up in the classroom in every content area. Reading, and vocabulary as a key to reading, is an essential part of classroom instruction. Students who struggle in reading often have no desire to read. With reading frustration levels so high, most ELs do not read for pleasure. In fact, for many students, reading has become abhorrent. SSR gives students the opportunity to see reading from another perspective: enjoyment. Lowering the affective filter by allowing students self-choice may spark a lifelong joy of reading. That in itself is worthy of fifteen minutes. But add to that not only the exposure to new vocabulary, but vocabulary used in a real and natural way, and the benefits can be far-reaching.

Vocabulary Instruction

Definition

Vocabulary words can be sorted into three categories or tiers. Tier One words are basic everyday words that can be used in social situations, such as cereal and window. Tier Three words are academic, content-specific words, such as the word photosynthesis in a science lesson, or the word embargo in a social studies lesson. Tier Two words bridge the span of social language and highly academic words. They are frequently encountered in textbooks, texts, and in
classroom instruction but there is a very low incidence of exposure in everyday language. “They are words that are precise, interesting, and sophisticated; words that mature language users include in their conversation; words that authors include in their stories and articles” (Kucan, 2012). In the classroom, teachers instruct students with the Tier Two and Tier Three words that are needed for the lesson. ELs need these words as well, however, they also need Tier One vocabulary in order to access the concept being taught.

The Role of Vocabulary Instruction

If there are four domains of language: reading, writing, speaking, and listening, then vocabulary is the glue that holds it all together. The role of effective vocabulary instruction cannot be overemphasized. Between 95 and 98 percent of words in a text must be understood in order for comprehension to take place (Schmitt, Jiang, & Grabe, 2011). Without an understanding of the words, comprehension is impossible.

There are three views of vocabulary instruction: explicit, implicit, and a combination of both. There are those who believe direct instruction is the best way to teach ELs vocabulary. “Direct instruction in vocabulary influences comprehension more than any other factor” (Bromley, 2007). Conversely, some believe in a whole language approach with incidental learning of vocabulary in a natural and authentic way. Krashen (2004) believes that “language is too complex to be learned one rule at a time” (p. 19). However, Cisco and Padron (2012) believe in an integrated and balanced approach. “Both incidental and purposeful vocabulary development may be especially important for ELs who encounter more total unknown words and are less able to use contextual and linguistic clues to decipher unfamiliar vocabulary than monolingual English speakers” (p. 3). Therefore, a single approach may be inadequate.
While an extensive free reading program will allow ELs to acquire, or incidentally and implicitly take in vocabulary, this is not enough for the majority of ELs. The kind of vocabulary that is needed in content classrooms may not be encountered in free reading. Explicit instruction allows teachers to connect relevant vocabulary to specific texts and lessons in an authentic way. Well-planned vocabulary instruction leads students in rich and meaningful interactions with the words, “developing the kind of high-quality lexical representations that will endure and be available for reading and writing” (Kucan, 2012, p. 366). Furthermore, ELs may have no understanding of the common colloquial language of English, such as idioms and figurative language. What may be considered a common expression may impede comprehension for an EL. Polysemous, or multiple meaning, words are a roadblock as well. Consider the word table. In its common form, it is a piece of furniture. But in academic language, it is a graph-like box on the page of a textbook. Additionally, tables look differently in a science textbook than they do in a math or social studies textbook. Added to the confusion is the word table used as a verb. It is crucial that teachers explicitly teach words that are content-specific as well as words that may cause confusion.

**Vocabulary Strategies /Best Practices**

Vocabulary instruction should draw on the students’ native languages for cognates and other similarities, when possible. Many students know the word in their language and completely understand the concept behind the word, but they lack the connection with the English word. By incorporating cognates and other similarities, students can link the English word with the word in their language (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005). Allowing students to write the word in their language alongside the English word may help them internalize that word.
Graphic organizers are not only helpful for reading comprehension or writing organization, they can also be used for vocabulary instruction. There are many types of graphic organizers available. All provide students with a visual and kinesthetic way to break down words. Flow charts can be used to work with multiple meaning words (Bolos, 2012). Cause and effect maps and Venn diagrams not only help students organize ideas, but also teach the academic vocabulary necessary to interact with these text features. “When teachers use graphic organizers for vocabulary instruction, ELLs benefit from the clear breakdown of the vocabulary words and their meanings” (Bolos, 2012, p.17).

Frontloading, or pre-teaching, vocabulary is an effective method of vocabulary instruction that will help students become familiar with the target words before they read the selection (Bolos, 2012). When students go into a text having already learned some of the difficult vocabulary, their affective filter is lowered, allowing them to feel more confident, which can help them engage more meaningfully with the text.

**Morphology Instruction**

**Definition**

Morphology is the study of word parts. It “relates to the segmenting of words into affixes (prefixes and suffixes) and roots or base words, and the origins of words” (Stowe, n.d.). “Morphology, in its most general sense, is the study of shape. In linguistics, morphology is the study of the structure of words as combinations of smaller units of meaning within words: morphemes” (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2010, p. 49). The root word, *morph*, means to change or transform. Changing a prefix and/or suffix on a word will change the word’s meaning. Misunderstanding the prefix or suffix of a word will have a negative impact on comprehension of a text; conversely, understanding affixes will enable students to access a text’s meaning.
Teaching vocabulary through direct instruction helps students learn target words. However, teaching students to analyze word parts as a way to decode any word will help them to a larger extent. Bromley (2007) advocates teaching the most common prefixes, suffixes, and root words. Learning the most common roots, for example, “makes it much easier to figure out several other words that contain these roots” (p. 533). This allows students to become more independent in their learning, enabling the teacher to take away some scaffolding so students can take more ownership in their learning.

**The Role of Morphological Awareness**

A crucial component in language acquisition is phonological awareness, the ability to hear the separate sounds in spoken language. A subset of that, and equally important, is morphological awareness, the knowledge that words can be made up of smaller units which affect their meaning. While morphological awareness and phonological awareness often go hand in hand, the two can be separated and used as indicators of word reading skills. Keiffer and Lesaux (2008) found that ELs who have limited morphological awareness will also have limited reading comprehension and conversely, those with a higher level will be able to comprehend more, “even among ELs who have somewhat limited breadth of vocabulary” (p. 788). Additionally, Keiffer and Lesaux (2010) studied 13 teachers in seven urban middle schools with a large number of ELs over an 18-week period. It was found that the students (both English only and ELS) that were explicitly taught morphology strategies out-gained the students that were taught with a regular English language arts curriculum. In fact, “the intervention students gained about six months of extra growth in morphology and nine months of extra growth in reading comprehension” (p. 49-50).
Many ELs at the intermediate level are still limited in their overall amount of vocabulary. “ESL students, for whom lack of vocabulary remains one of the major obstacles, should be equipped to utilize every word analysis strategy, including the ability to look at the morphological clues within the word, in search for its meaning or part of speech” (El-Saghir, 2009, p.8). The ability to decode the meaning of a word by isolating morphemes, including prefixes, suffixes, and roots, will greatly improve the ability to comprehend that word. In fact, “students can enhance their understanding of 60% of unfamiliar words by applying their knowledge of common root words and the strategy of morphological analysis” (Chung, 2012, p.113). Teaching students to break down words into morphemes, including prefixes, suffixes, and roots, will give students the “cognitive strategies” they need to access the words in texts (Oz, 2014, p. 102). Explicit and meaningful morphology instruction can give students the tools they need to decode even the most difficult words. In an analysis of 17 different studies, it was found that struggling readers, ELs included, benefit from the addition of morphological instruction. It has “potential to support literacy achievement for low achieving students who need additional support learning to read and spell” (Goodwin & Ahn, 2010, p. 204). Thus, knowledge of morphology will impact a student’s reading comprehension, either positively if they have a good grasp of morphemes, or negatively if they do not.

**Morphology Strategies /Best Practices**

It is important to understand that “morphology is related to, but also distinct from, overall vocabulary” (p. 139). A deliberate approach is needed to ensure that students learn morphological strategies and then are given the chance to put those strategies into practice. Teaching is a two-sided coin. Knowledge that specific morphological instruction can greatly benefit ELs is one side of the coin. Putting that knowledge into practice is the other side. Keiffer
and Lesaux (2007) propose that effective morphological teaching has four principles of which teachers should be mindful.

The first principle is *Teach Morphology in the Context of Rich, Explicit Vocabulary Instruction*. Isolated skill-and-drills are not an effective way of teaching. Students may memorize rules but then not have the ability to transfer those rules to actual or authentic text. This principle advocates teaching morphological strategies while using content-rich texts. New words should be taught in meaningful contexts and should be encountered in a variety of contexts. Word knowledge involves depth of meaning as well as spelling, pronunciation, morphology, and syntax, and ELs should have access to the text’s meaning in their native language (p. 139-140).

Principle Two is *Teach Students to Use Morphology as a Cognitive Strategy with Explicit Steps*. Cognitive strategies such as this one need to be learned and integrated into the student’s mindset, not simply memorized as a set of rules. The first step is to teach students to recognize that he or she does not know the word or does not have a deep understanding of the meaning of the word. The student can then analyze the word for morphemes she or he recognizes (both roots and suffixes). This process may be more difficult if the word is not transparent, particularly if it requires a change in both sound and spelling. When students have identified an unknown word, they can hypothesize a meaning for the word based on the word parts. Finally, they should check the hypothesis against the context. These four steps should be taught explicitly, modeled many times, and put into practice. This process gives the teacher the ability to scaffold instruction and then gradually release the responsibility to the students (p. 140).

The third principle is *Teach the Underlying Morphological Knowledge Needed in Two Ways—Both Explicitly and in Context*. Teaching a skill explicitly does not mean it is taught in
isolation unless that skill is never put into practice in the context of authentic text. Beginning with explicit instruction ensures that students grasp the concepts of what prefixes and suffixes mean and how to connect them to root words. This skill is only effective if students know the meaning of the root word, so root words need to be taught as well. Once this foundation is in place, students will be equipped with “a powerful strategy for acquiring new vocabulary” (p. 141).

Principle Four is *For Students with Developed Knowledge of Spanish, Teach Morphology in Relation to Cognate Instruction*. English shares many cognates with other languages, especially Spanish. When Spanish-speaking students recognize the shared cognates, they are able to use their first language in a powerful and effective way. Research has shown that transferring language through the use of cognates is an important process in language acquisition. “Transfer is defined as ‘the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired’” (August, Dressler & Snow, 2005, p. 52). However, this may have its difficulties. Not all Spanish ELs are literate in Spanish and those that are may not make the connection easily. When this strategy is employed, it needs to be targeted and on-going (Keiffer and Lesaux, 2007, p. 142). The up-side is that if students can grasp the cognate connection, they will have another tool to use in their vocabulary acquisition.

The explicit instruction in morphology is akin to the old proverb, “Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime” (Author unknown). Students often ask the teacher the meaning of words and if the teacher tells them the meaning or even directs them to a word wall or other reference place, students eat for one day. But if students are taught how words work, how a root word can be changed by a prefix or suffix, if they can
independently break down unknown words in their science or math textbooks, they will eat for a lifetime. It is the goal of every teacher to impart enough knowledge to their students so they can progress and be successful. All readers, especially ELs and other struggling readers, need a strong arsenal of strategies to help them navigate complex texts. By explicitly and deliberately teaching morphological strategies, these readers can succeed.

**Fluency and Automaticity Instruction**

**Definition**

Reading automaticity is the ability to read without stumbling over unknown words or pausing to decode a word. It is something that is done automatically. Fluency is the ability to read accurately with a certain amount of speed, intonation, and inflection. Put together, fluency and automaticity allow the reader to read aloud or silently in a natural way (Automaticity, 2016). Fluency and automaticity are very important for students. Without it, they will read in a choppy and awkward way, if they want to read at all (Fluency, n.d.). Lacking these skills will not only cause distress for the student but will impede comprehension.

**The Role of Fluency and Automaticity Instruction**

The path to reading comprehension starts with fluency and automaticity skills. “The link between fluency in reading and academic success is undeniable. Reading with comprehension is required in all academic areas…” (Hargrove, 2010, p.9). Hargrove also states that according to the National Reading Panel, there is a “strong correlation between fluency and comprehension.” Furthermore, “students who struggle with fluency will have a difficult time understanding what they read no matter how strong their vocabularies or how high the level of their phonemic awareness may be” (p.11). When students are not fluent readers, they tend to focus on a text word-by-word, rather than in fluent blocks of text. Comprehension suffers; therefore, academic
success suffers. There is only one way to develop fluency and that is with reading practice (Pikulski, 2005). Fluency needs to be fully and deeply developed through oral reading accuracy, oral reading rate, quality of oral reading and reading comprehension. “Fluency is absolutely necessary…because it depends upon and typically reflects comprehension. If a reader has not developed fluency, the process of decoding words drains attention, and insufficient attention is available for constructing the meaning of text” (Pikulski, 2005, p.517). The goal is for students to become fluent and successful readers. In order to do that, students should read for pleasure. When students read something that they have personally chosen, the chances that they will complete that text are high. Moreover, the chance that they will choose something else to read is also high. This is imperative because “until students read in quantity, they will not become fluent readers” (Stott, 2001, p.5). Additionally, as students become more fluent in their reading, less time is spent on decoding and more time can be devoted to comprehension (Farrell, 2009).

**Fluency and Automaticity Strategies /Best Practices**

Repeated Reading can be a very useful activity for ELs as it has shown positive results in fluency. In one study, “many students had doubled their reading fluency pretest scores and had also increased comprehension scores” (Hargrove, 2010, p. 11). In Repeated Reading, the student reads the passage over and over again until he or she can read it smoothly and quickly. This builds confidence and speed. Teachers can incorporate a short time of Repeated Reading on a regular basis. It can be used with the whole class with a big book, or in small groups or pairs, with poetry or a book. Repeated Reading can improve fluency, word accuracy, and comprehension. It is also beneficial for ELs because it gives students the chance to practice the pronunciation of the words. This will bolster their confidence and their performance.
The explicit teaching of sight words has also shown to increase fluency. Sight words comprise approximately 75 percent of words in beginning reader texts (Williamson, 2010). In fact, “the relationship between sight word fluency and reading fluency shows that the greater sight word fluency, the higher the reading fluency will be” (Williamson, 2010, p.40). The mastery of sight words aids in automaticity, which is crucial to fluency. For beginning ELs, it is important to teach words that the student will encounter on a daily basis in books and other texts, as well as in conversation. “By choosing words that are important to understanding early reading materials, teachers help students reach a level of basic oral proficiency that provides a foundation for expanded word learning” (Helman & Burns, 2008).

Another strategy for fluency instruction is Timed Reading, which can help students increase reading speed, and therefore improve fluency. But speed alone is not effective; comprehension must accompany increased speed. Practice with Timed Reading will improve “automaticity” which “refers to the internal understanding of what is being read and the complete comprehension of appropriate vocabulary” (Browning, 2003, p.4). There are four benefits of Timed Reading: time saved, increase in concentration, a raise in academic grades, and an increase in reading for enjoyment. This is important because “the literate adult [today] is reading more in one week than their great-grandfather did in a whole year” (Browning, 2003, p.1). With this in mind, it is extremely important that EL students be able to read much faster than they do just to keep up with their academics. In fact, they must “be able to read at a level challengeable to a native speaker...” (Browning, 2003, p.1). This is a tall order for students who struggle to read even at the low end of their abilities. It is important to understand that Timed Reading is not just a read-as-fast-as-you-can activity, but rather a systematic approach to reading speed which incorporates several strategies such as “reading in broad phrases, skipping inessential words,
guessing from context, and continuing to read the text” (Browning, 2003, p.2) even when encountering an unknown term. Simply timing the students will not insure that they comprehend what they are reading and reading for speed is not the point. The aim is to read quickly and effectively. Teaching these strategies not only sets up the reading for that day, but students will learn how to use those same strategies in other content areas. This is a skill that ELs can apply in every class. Armed with effective reading strategies, ELs can increase reading speed as well as comprehension.

While it is important to know how to decode words, it is not always imperative that every word be decoded. Many ELs, especially the lower readers, tend to read “word-by-word,” often focusing on words that are actually insignificant in the text. In Timed Reading, students are taught to read words as groups, to skip over words that are non-essential, and to read on past words they cannot decode. This goes against some teaching concepts, and yet, there is logic in it. By concentrating on the “gist,” students can glean more knowledge than by concentrating on every syllable and word (Browning, 2003). The goal is to construct meaning for those skipped words through context. In theory, this is an interesting and effective concept; however, the reality of it may differ. This approach may work well with some texts, but not all. Some academic texts are by their very nature informative and complex. The strategy of skipping over some words and reading past unknown words may be detrimental in comprehending those texts. Perhaps if the strategies are properly taught and enough time is given for practice, these concerns will be negated.

Teaching spelling patterns will help students with word recognition as well as automaticity. “As we read, we look very quickly at almost all letters of each word. For most words, this visual information is recognized as a familiar pattern with which a spoken word is
identified and pronounced (aloud or through internal speech). Words we have read before are instantly recognized as we see them. Words we have not read before are almost instantly pronounced based on spelling patterns encountered in other words” (Allington & Cunningham, 2007, p. 59). In order for students to be fluent readers, they must be able to read with automaticity.

One final fluency strategy is Readers Theater. This strategy encompasses a myriad of skills, such as fluency, comprehension, writing skills, and vocabulary. Students can employ the Repeated Reading strategy when practicing the script. When students write their own script, they will inevitably be engaged with the script over a period of time. This allows them to “become familiar with the words, allowing them to comprehend what they are reading” (Portell, 2009, p.7). This prolonged exposure also exposes them to a wide variety of vocabulary. Technology fits very well with Reader’s Theater. Students can participate in video recording and most will enjoy being recorded. Teachers need to be attentive to the needs of lower English proficiency students. These students may be reluctant, at first, to speak in front of the class. But “with practice and support, over time they will begin to shine” (p.5). Reader’s Theater is a good way to put lower proficiency and higher proficiency students together. The lower proficiency students can read the smaller parts, and the higher proficiency students can model fluency and pronunciation.

**Grammar Instruction**

**Definition**

Few instructional issues are more debated than the issue of explicitly or implicitly teaching grammar to ELs. The very mention of the word can strike fear into the hearts of students and teachers alike. Grammar is the set of rules and patterns that governs and ties
together language. “If vocabulary items such as words and idioms are the building blocks of a language, then grammar is the systematic glue that holds everything within a together” (Folse, 2009, p. v). Although grammar is the foundation of all language, it can be a frightening endeavor. While it may be clear that the mastery of grammar is important in the learning of language, the method of instruction is not clear or widely agreed upon.

**The Role of Grammar Instruction**

Proponents of explicit grammar instruction argue that curriculum and methodologies that omit grammar instruction and rely only on meaning-focused language are not only incomplete, but ineffective as well. Furthermore, language acquisition programs that do not provide an explicit focus on grammar produce learners who possess neither a mastery of grammar nor of the English language (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004). Many explicit grammar lessons are comprised of a lesson focusing on one grammar point and skill-and-drill worksheets to reinforce and master that point of grammar. Proponents believe that if grammar is not explicitly taught, then it is being completely skipped over or ignored. Opponents of explicit grammar instruction believe that teachers who follow that path “hold a traditional view of language teaching. They equate language to grammar mastery and accurate usage and create bored, disaffected students who can produce correct forms on exercises and tests, but consistently make errors when they try to use the language in context” (Rhalmi, 2009). Students taught in this way may do well in the context of the particular lesson’s focus, but in an authentic language situation, they cannot produce the same results. Furthermore, “strictly explicit grammar study however, and even grammar-focused lessons are often not communicatively based. They can therefore be boring, cumbersome and difficult for students to assimilate” (Lynch, n.d.). Of course, not all teachers teach grammar in this way, however explicit grammar instruction can be overwhelming and frustrating for
beginning and intermediate ELs, not only raising their affective filter and having the opposite intended result: “poor language proficiency and fluency” (Rhalmi, 2009), but it does not “improve reading, speaking, writing, or even editing, for the majority of students” (Weaver, 1998, p. 19).

**Grammar Strategies /Best Practices:**

Direct, or explicit, teaching of grammar involves teaching the rules of each grammar point. In some cases, this is followed by a worksheet in which students demonstrate their understanding of the rule. Implicit teaching can take on many forms, from not teaching at all to teaching grammar within the context of writing or the text.

Implicit grammar instruction involves “activities that help students recognize and acquire grammar patterns within the sphere of ‘authentic’ use and with a focus on messages over abstract form” (Sargent, 2009). In authentic, context-based grammar instruction, most students are more likely to retain and be motivated by focusing on message and content over form and they are more likely to retain acquired patterns than explicitly explained abstract rules. Furthermore, there is increased motivation in that students immediately see applicability (Sargent, 2009).

Another way to implicitly teach grammar and lower affective filters is in the context of writing. When students write and then have a one-on-one conference with the teacher, the teacher can use that situation to teach mini-grammar lessons based on the errors that the student makes. When students make corrections in their own writing, that particular grammar lesson is more likely to be retained and reproduced at a later time. “Teaching grammar in the context of writing works better that teaching grammar as a formal system, if our aim is for students to use grammar more effectively and conventionally in their writing” (Weaver, 1998, p. 33).
Implicit-only grammar instruction may not be enough. Students may not encounter important grammar rules in the context of their writing, but need to know those rules in order to read fluently and comprehend text. But rather than teaching difficult rules such as the difference between present perfect and simple future verb tenses, which students will likely not remember, traditional grammar can be taught. Parts of speech, sentence structure, and subject-verb agreement will be more meaningful in improving reading and writing skills (McDowell, n.d.).

Grammar instruction is important for ELs. The way to go about implementing it varies from teacher to teacher. If explicit grammar instruction involves skill-and-drill worksheets and isolated or abstract grammar rules, then it is not best practices. Teaching traditional grammar explicitly may be more meaningful and improve students’ reading and writing. Implicit grammar instruction that includes lessons within authentic texts, activities to reinforce the grammar point, and conferencing with students in their writing, will be more likely to retain and reproduce proper grammar.

Summary

The purpose for research-based reading instruction is to produce good readers. “All good readers and writers have a store of high-frequency words that they read and spell instantly and automatically. Good readers and writers can also decode and spell most regular words” (Allington & Cunningham, 2007, p. 59). However, good readers must be cultivated. Reading strategies must be explicitly taught in order for good reading skills to develop. The reason that there are so many reading strategies available is that no one strategy or combination of strategies will work for every student (Farrell, 2009).

Academic and personal success is a teacher’s aspiration for ELs. That goal can be accomplished through both explicit and content-based instruction in background knowledge,
vocabulary, academic language, extensive free reading, morphology, grammar, and fluency and automaticity. This is an overwhelming task when dealing with students who have the added hurdle of a non-English language background. With ELs being pulled out of the classrooms for ESL instruction, and that instruction only lasting thirty minutes to an hour a day, the instruction given to those students needs to be effective and targeted.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Description of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is used when exploring the reasons, opinions, and perceptions of others (DeFranzo, 2011). For the purpose of this study, qualitative research was used to examine responses to the following research questions:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding best practice reading strategies for EL students?
2. Which reading strategies are being used by teachers for EL students and what method are teachers using to determine effectiveness?

Qualitative methods served this study well, as this approach allowed reflection of the data being collected and when necessary, allowed the modification of questions, the formulation of new questions, and the changing of “the line of questioning in order to obtain more useful data” (Orcher, 2014, p. 83). Additionally, memo writing was implemented as a way of recording the thoughts and reactions of the researcher to be used for later reflection.

Description of the Research Approach

This study incorporated the phenomenological research approach, which seeks to determine the perceptions of people in a specific situation, usually incorporating interviews and surveys (Mertler, 2014). The survey, interviews, and focus group used in this study did not seek to determine whether or not the teachers were using effective strategies and best practices when teaching ELs, but rather what their perceptions were about those strategies. This approach allowed the reflection and adjustment of the interviews in order to discover the reasons behind the pedagogical choices the teachers made in their instruction.
The theoretical framework for this study was based on Stephen Krashen’s Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis and on Jim Cummins’ theory of BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). These theories hold that second language learners obtain language in two ways: by acquiring it and by learning it. Furthermore, social language is picked up naturally and involuntarily, while academic language must be explicitly taught in order for ELs to access the content in core classroom instruction. The Likert questionnaire was compiled of reading strategies for ELs which adhere to these theories. Additionally, care was taken to ensure that strategies which employ the explicit teaching of academic language as well as strategies which encourage the positive and productive acquisition of language were covered. Furthermore, in the data analysis phase, data were analyzed and coded to reflect the theoretical framework of this study. Teachers were asked to identify which strategies they believed were most effective: language acquisition strategies or language learning strategies.

Description of the Study Participants and Setting

This study was conducted in East Tennessee in a small district that contained five schools: two primary schools with grades k-2, two intermediate schools with grades 3-5, and one middle school with grades 6-8. This district did not have a high school; students attended the county high school. In this district, there were 1711 students; 72% are white/Caucasian, 15.5% were black/African American, 9.5% were Hispanic, and 3% were Asian. Of the total student population, 3.2% were ELs, 39.2% of students were economically disadvantaged while students with disabilities comprised 14.8% of the total population. There were 114 teachers and eight administrators in the district (State, 2017). For the purpose of this study, the three schools with the highest population of ELs were chosen for the sample, for a total of 83 teachers. Recipients
of the email link to the survey will be asked to participate if they have had at least two years’ experience teaching ELs in the classroom, either prior to or during the study. In a purposive sampling, six teachers who had at least 3 years’ experience teaching ELs were chosen for a semi-structured interview.

**Data Collection Procedures**

An email link to a Likert questionnaire was sent to teachers who have had at least two years’ experience teaching ELs, along with an introduction of the researcher and an explanation of the study’s purpose. Additionally, participants were informed that the questionnaire, possible interview, and participation is a focus group were completely voluntary. The survey participants were given a list of reading strategies that were examined in the Review of the Literature, found in Chapter Two. Participants were asked to rate their perceptions of the effectiveness of each strategy utilized when instructing ELs in the general education classroom. A composite score from the questionnaire was calculated for each strategy. Two teachers from each of the three schools then participated in semi-structured interviews to ascertain the specific methods and pedagogy implemented, as well as the assessment method used to determine effectiveness. Each interviewee was asked the same base questions to expound on the reasons behind answers on the questionnaire with examples of the strategy in use as well as the method and decision-making process as to its effectiveness. Additionally, teachers were asked to share which strategies they perceived as being effective and which they perceived as not effective enough to continue implementing. The researcher followed up on the responses with alternative questions in order to customize the interview to each participant. Finally, a focus group was conducted in which teachers further expounded on their perceptions of effectiveness in a group setting. This allowed teachers to interact with one another and expand on one another’s comments. Each participant
was given the opportunity to speak and care was taken to guide the focus group so that no one person dominated the conversation (Mertler, 2014). The interviews were recorded for transcription and coding purposes.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were upheld during this study. Data were collected for this study with the permission of the Institutional Review Board. The appropriate permissions were obtained from the district supervisor as well as each building-level administrator. Informed consent was obtained from each of the participants. The interviews were recorded with the express consent of each participant. There were no identifiers on the survey and the identities of the interviewees were coded with numbers. Furthermore, although specific students were discussed in the interviews, those students were not identified by name in this study.

In order to remain objective, self-disclosure was employed to be aware of any opinions that would affect or influence the outcome and bracketed those opinions by setting them aside (Orcher, 2014).

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data in this study were collected from a Likert questionnaire and individual interviews. The Likert questionnaire contained a list of reading strategies and best practices for EL instruction with a scale of one to five, one being *least effective* and five being *most effective*. There was also a place to indicate *not applicable*. This is to allow for the possibility that some teachers may not have used a particular strategy before. The totals of each category were then calculated to determine the strategies that were considered to be the most and the least effective.

Six teachers were chosen to do a follow-up interview in which they were asked to expound on the answers given on the survey, specifically, how specific strategies were chosen,
why strategies were rated as ineffective or as effective, how the individual strategy was implemented, and the methods by which its effectiveness was assessed. Additionally, a focus group was convened in which participants interacted with one another to further explore beliefs and reasons behind pedagogical decisions. Data were further analyzed and coded to reflect the theoretical framework of this study. Teachers were asked to identify which strategies they believed were most effective, language acquisition strategies or language learning strategies.

In order to create an audit trail, raw data in the form of responses to the survey, individual interviews, and focus group questions were kept. Further, during data collection, reflexivity was applied in the form of memo writing to record the thoughts and reactions to the data being collected. As a form of informal analysis, the notes were then reflected upon in order to construct the questions for the individual interviews and focus group base questions. Memo writing was also used during the interviews to formulate new questions according to participant responses (Orcher, 2014).

The recorded interviews and memos were used in an open coding scheme to organize data by identifying and isolating distinct segments. Inductive analysis was used to reduce, but not oversimplify, the amount of data into patterns and themes (Mertler, 2014). These segments were coded into categories and subcategories of each strategy and teacher perception of that strategy. Transcripts and memos were then reexamined to ascertain any relationships existing between the categories and themes. Finally, selective coding was used to organize the data into a core category from which a story line, or overarching theme, emerged (Orcher, 2014).

Member checks were conducted during and after the interviews to ensure credibility. Feedback from the participants aided the researcher in verifying the accuracy of the
interpretations of the researcher (Orcher, 2014). Since the interview sampling is small, all six participants were involved in member checks.

Additionally, a qualified researcher not involved in the study was consulted in peer debriefing to confirm that the results and theories developed from the data collection were reasonable and accurate (Orcher, 2014).

Summary

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to collect and analyze the perceptions classroom teachers have about the effectiveness of specific reading strategies for English learners. A five-point Likert questionnaire was administered to teachers who have or have had previous experience with ELs in their classrooms. Follow-up interviews of six teachers further explored these perceptions with in-depth questions. The Likert data was analyzed to determine which strategies were viewed as least effective and most effective, which included the theories of Acquisition-Learning and BICS and CALP. The teacher interview data was then coded in categories of patterns and themes. Ethical considerations were observed to ensure anonymity and reliability. Finally, member checks and peer review ensured credibility and accuracy.
CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine various research-based reading strategies that were shown to be effective when teaching English learners. This study further examined the strategies that teachers perceived as effective as well as ineffective, how those strategies were implemented, the method of evaluation each teacher used to determine effectiveness, and the decision-making process teachers use when determining whether they will continue to use a particular strategy.

A qualitative, phenomenological research approach was used in this study as the purpose was not to ascertain whether teachers were using effective strategies when teaching ELs, but rather what their perceptions and experiences were of certain strategies. With that in mind, the following research questions were posed.

Research Questions

1. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding best practice reading strategies for EL students?
2. Which reading strategies are being used by teachers for EL students and what methods are teachers using to determine effectiveness?

The research questions focused on teacher perceptions of best practices for reading instruction and the effectiveness of those perceived reading strategies on EL reading comprehension. There is no one strategy that works for every student; teachers must choose which strategies to use when teaching ELs, both as a whole class as well as individual student differentiation. Teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies is what drives instruction.

Description of Participants
This study used a convenience sampling of a K-8 district in East Tennessee of five schools: two primary schools: grades kindergarten through grade two; two intermediate schools: grades three through five; one middle school: grades six through eight. In order to get a sampling of each grade level span, the schools with the highest populations of English learners in the primary and intermediate school category were chosen to participate in the survey, as well as the middle school, for a total of three schools and 83 teachers.

Thirty teachers responded to the survey for a return rate of 36%. The percentages were fairly evenly dispersed: 30% were kindergarten through grade two teachers, 30% were third through fifth grade teachers, and 40% were sixth through eighth grade teachers.

In a purposive sampling, two teachers with at least three years’ experience teaching ELs from each school were invited to participate in a semi-structured individual interview, for a total of six teachers. Table 4.1 illustrates the demographic information of the survey participants.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level Cluster</th>
<th>Number Assigned</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>English Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-2</td>
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<td>K</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>English/Language Arts (ELA)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Math/Science</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Math</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ELA/Social Studies</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The focus group participants consisted of two teachers who interviewed individually, one ESL teacher, and one student teacher in a master’s degree program for TESOL (Teachers of
English to Speakers of Other Languages). All of the focus group participants had experience teaching ELs, including the student teacher who had experience teaching English learners abroad. The ESL teachers were included in this discussion to add an additional perspective.

Table 4.2 illustrates the demographic information of the focus group participants.

**Table 4.2**

*Demographics of Focus Group Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number Assigned</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>English Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>K-8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>K-8</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Student teacher)*

**Data Collection Process**

An email link was sent to 83 teachers in the chosen schools inviting teachers with at least two years’ experience teaching ELs to participate in the survey. Thirty teachers responded for a return rate of 36 percent. Participants were asked to rate their perceptions of the effectiveness of each of ten strategies when instructing ELs in the general education classroom. The participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers, that the researcher was studying teacher perceptions of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of each strategy. A composite score from all participants was calculated for each strategy. Additionally, the strategies which were identified by all participants as the most effective were then broken down into percentages of responses from each grade level cluster, K-2, 3-5, and 6-8.

The survey contained the name of each strategy and a description to guide participants in making a choice. The following directions accompanied the survey:
Please rate the following reading strategies as to how you perceive their effectiveness in teaching English Learners. If you have never used a particular strategy, select N/A and then type YES in the comment box if you think it would be effective, type NO if you think it would be ineffective, or type “?” if you are not sure. (The five rankings are the same for each question).

The ten strategies are not listed in any order of importance or effectiveness.

1. Schema Theory: Teaching background knowledge before the lesson is taught
2. Read Aloud: Reading a text that is at a higher reading level than the students can read independently or in a shared read
3. Teaching Text Features such as headings, bold lettering, captions, italics, maps and diagrams, and text boxes
4. Thematic Unit: Using a thematic unit as a reading strategy
5. Extensive Free Reading: DEAR (Drop Everything and Read), FVR (Free Voluntary Reading), SSR (Silent Sustained Reading), etc.
6. Explicit pre-teaching of key vocabulary
7. Morphology Instruction: Teaching students to segment words into parts such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes
8. Fluency Instruction and Practice: Explicit teaching of fluency focusing on speed, intonation, and inflection
9. Explicit Grammar Instruction: Teaching grammar rules followed by practice
10. Implicit Grammar Instruction: Teaching grammar within the structure of a text or within the context of writing
The interviews took place over a three-day period and ranged from 13 minutes to 30 minutes, with the average interview time being 21 minutes and 29 seconds. Interview participants were asked the same base questions which allowed them to expound on the strategies identified as effective or ineffective, as well as the decision-making process they employ in order to evaluate each strategy used to differentiate for ELs. Follow-up questions were asked which were tailored to each individual conversation. The interview questions were chosen based on the theoretical framework and research questions of this study. They were open-ended which allowed in-depth discussion. The focus group discussion began using the same four questions from the interviews and lasted 47 and a half minutes. The focus group discussion allowed teachers to dialog with each other about their personal experiences in teaching ELs, the strategies that were utilized with success or failure, and the thought process behind those decisions. Participants in both settings eagerly discussed their work with ELs and the strategies they have tried and implemented. To ensure that participant responses were accurately documented and interpreted, a journal was kept and memo writing was employed to record thoughts and follow-up questions. Additionally, each individual interview, as well as the focus group discussion, was recorded with the express consent of each participant using a voice recording app which was later transcribed to discover themes and trends. The narratives were taken from these notes and transcriptions.

The responses from the interviews and focus group were then transcribed and documented in an open coding scheme to organize data by identifying and isolating distinct segments. Subsequently, the data were reduced into patterns and themes using inductive analysis which were then coded into categories and subcategories of each strategy and teacher perception of that strategy. Transcripts and memos were then reexamined to ascertain any relationships
existing between the categories and themes. Finally, selective coding was used to organize the data into a core category, which answered each research question.

To ensure credibility and fidelity throughout this process, member checks were implemented. Feedback from the participants aided the researcher in verifying the accuracy of the interpretations of the researcher. Additionally, a qualified researcher not involved in the study was consulted in peer debriefing to confirm that the results and theories developed from the data collection were reasonable and accurate.

The questions asked of each interview and focus group participant were:

1. Of the strategies you consider to be effective, how do you implement them?
2. How are specific strategies chosen? (thought process behind decision-making)
3. What was your method of evaluating the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of each strategy?
4. Are there any strategies that you use that are missing from this list?

Analysis of Research Question 1

*What are teachers’ perceptions regarding best practice reading strategies for EL students?*

Thirty teachers participated in the survey. It took an average of six minutes for participants to rate the ten strategies. Participants rated each strategy on a five-point Likert scale, from least effective to most effective. Each descriptor had an explanation to aid in making a choice: 1. *This strategy is not effective. I will not use it again;* 2. *This strategy is not very effective. I don't use it very often;* 3. *This strategy is effective in some lessons, but not in other lessons. I use it case-by-case;* 4. *This strategy is very effective. I have used it before and will use it again;* 5. *This strategy is very effective. It is in my regular rotation of reading strategies.*

Additionally, there was the choice of *Not Applicable,* with a comment option of *YES, I would try*
This strategy, or NO, I would not try this strategy. This option was included because some of the strategies are more applicable to lower grade levels, such as Fluency Instruction and Practice and the Thematic Unit strategy and some are more applicable to upper grade levels, such as Teaching Text Features and Morphology Instruction. This is not to say that these strategies are inappropriate for certain grades or that they should not be used for all grade levels, but rather certain strategies tend to work into the lesson plan pacing of some grades better than others. Additionally, it allowed for the possibility that some teachers may not have had the opportunity to use some of the strategies, but they may be interested in implementing them in the future. The results of the survey are illustrated in Table 4.3.
Table 4.3

Survey Results: Teacher Perceptions of Effectiveness of 10 Reading Strategies for ELs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Schema Theory (Background Knowledge)</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>23.33%</td>
<td>56.67%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teacher Read Aloud</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>36.67%</td>
<td>53.33%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teaching Text Features</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>43.33%</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thematic Unit</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Extensive Free Reading</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>25.93%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Explicit Pre-teaching of Vocabulary</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>56.67%</td>
<td>3.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Morphology Instruction</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>23.33%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Fluency Instruction &amp; Practice</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
<td>34.62%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Explicit Grammar Instruction</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>10.71%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>17.86%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Implicit Grammar Instruction</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>17.86%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>32.14%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 4.3, none of the ten strategies were rated as least effective (This strategy is not effective. I will not use it again). Furthermore, only four strategies, Thematic Unit,
Extensive Free Reading, Explicit Grammar Instruction, and Implicit Grammar Instruction, were rated second to least effective, with 10.71 percent or fewer respondents selecting that choice. Nine of the ten strategies received a selection of *Not Applicable*. The exception was Teacher Read Aloud, which received a rating of 100 percent over the top three indicators. This suggests that all of the participants have implemented this strategy at one time or another, with the majority of participants indicating this strategy is in their regular rotation. The majority of participants gave a rating of three (*This strategy is effective in some lessons, but not in other lessons. I use it case-by-case*) to two strategies, Extensive Free Reading and Explicit Grammar Instruction, indicating that these strategies are not least effective; however, they are not effective enough to be used regularly, but rather on a case-by-case basis. One participant commented on this strategy, writing, “Studies have shown that independent reading conferences and coupled with independent reading are effective but not just DEAR,” which suggests that while teachers may use extensive free reading, they believe there should be some accountability with it in order for it to be productive.

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, eight out of ten strategies were given a rating of four or five, indicating that participants used them often or regularly. This figure also illustrates that of the strategies rated the highest, none of them received more than 60 percent of the majority vote. This suggests that while the majority of teachers may have rated some of the strategies high, there is no one strategy that excels above the rest as the cure-all or the fail-proof strategy, which further supports the theory that no one strategy works for every student. As shown in the survey data, most teachers have at least tried all ten of the strategies and have had success, on some level, with many of them. Additionally, strategies that were rated a three (*This strategy is effective in some lessons, but not in other lessons. I use it case-by-case*) suggest that although the
strategy has not been very effective in the past or in certain lessons or activities, the teacher will still try it again in another activity or another lesson. Furthermore, the fact that none of the teachers gave a strategy the lowest score of one (This strategy is not effective. I will not use it again) suggests that every strategy on this list has its merit and a possibility of working with certain students in certain lessons. The interviews and focus group discussion further explored the decision-making process that is made when teachers are planning instructional differentiations.
Of the ten strategies included in the survey, six of them were given the highest rating of most effective (*This strategy is very effective. It is in my regular rotation of reading strategies*) by the majority of participants, as illustrated in Figure 4.2. They were Schema Theory, Teacher Read Aloud, Thematic Unit, Pre-teaching Vocabulary, Fluency Instruction and Practice, and Implicit Grammar Instruction. The results of these six strategies have been further disaggregated into the grade level spans K-2, 3-5, and 6-8 to show how many participants from each grade
level rated the strategy a five. This is to illustrate that while the composite survey data revealed which strategies all grade-level teachers perceive as most effective, when divided into grade-level clusters, the percentages vary. Some strategies, while rated high overall, are shown to be rated lower by specific grade-level teachers. This disaggregation reveals which grade levels teachers are most using them. For example, 45 percent of teachers in grades K-2 indicated that Teacher Read Aloud was highly effective, while only 20.5 percent of grades 6-8 rated it a five. Overall, Teacher Read Aloud was rated a five by 53.33 percent of respondents, but within that score, it is illustrated which teachers are using it effectively more often.

**Figure 4.2**

*Comparative Chart of Top-Rated Strategies*

The survey data were further disaggregated to examine the selection of N/A (Not Applicable) in Table 4.4. As previously noted, nine of the ten strategies received a N/A rating. The exception was Teacher Read Aloud; all 30 teachers have used Teacher Read Aloud as a reading strategy at some point in their instruction. Furthermore, the data revealed that 90 percent
of the instructional approaches have never been tried by some of the respondents. Aside from Teacher Read Aloud, the strategy never used by the fewest teachers was Explicit Teaching of Vocabulary, with only one teacher indicating he/she has never used that particular approach before. The respondent selected the yes option, indicating that he/she would try this strategy in the future. This data point signifies that 29 of the 30 teachers have explicitly pre-taught vocabulary in some way. In fact, according to Table 4.3, all of the teachers rated Explicit Teaching of Vocabulary at a three and higher, with the majority rating it a five.

The strategy that was rated N/A by the most teachers was Explicit Teaching of Grammar, with seven teachers indicating they have never used this strategy. Of the seven responses, five indicated that they would try it in the future, one indicated he/she would not, and one indicated that he/she was unsure whether or not it would be used.

The only strategy that was marked N/A in which teachers wrote a comment about the strategy was Extensive Free Reading. One teacher commented, it is “only used during RTI time.” The second comment referred to research on the topic, writing, “Studies have shown that independent reading conferences and coupled with independent reading are effective but not just DEAR.” This comment is referring to the research related to free reading that holds that it is not effective unless certain accountability measures are put into place. Otherwise, students may pretend to be reading when they are really not. If that is the case, Extensive Free Reading is a waste of time (Pennington, 2011). Survey data revealed that the teacher who wrote this comment gave the strategy a score of two: This strategy is not very effective. I don't use it very often. Of the three teachers that indicated they have never used Extensive Free Reading, two said yes, they would try it and one said no. The remainder of the responses can be seen in the table below.
Table 4.4

Survey Responses of N/A (Not Applicable): Teacher Perceptions of Strategies Never Utilized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Total Number of Teachers Choosing N/A</th>
<th>Number of Participants Who Responded, “Yes, I would try the strategy”</th>
<th>Number of Participants Who Responded, “No, I would not try the strategy”</th>
<th>Number of Participants Who Responded, “Unsure if I would try the strategy”</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Schema Theory (Background Knowledge)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>“Studies have shown that independent reading conferences and coupled with independent reading are effective but not just DEAR.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teacher Read Aloud</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>“only used during RTI time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teaching Text Features</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thematic Unit</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Extensive Free Reading</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Explicit Pre-teaching of Vocabulary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Morphology Instruction</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Fluency Instruction &amp; Practice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Explicit Grammar Instruction</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Implicit Grammar Instruction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of Interview/Focus Group Question 1: How are strategies implemented?

There are many ways to use each of the strategies, and indeed the way they are implemented may determine effectiveness. The method by which a strategy is implemented varies from teacher to teacher. One teacher may have success and another may not. Of the strategies that were implemented by the participants, the data were further examined to determine which items the teachers perceived as effective, which were not, and which were perceived as only somewhat effective. Figure 4.3 further expounds on the strategies that participants utilize by illustrating how he or she are specifically implementing the strategies in the classroom with ELs and how teachers perceive the effectiveness. The data revealed the top five strategies identified as effective by the interview and focus group participants. It should be noted that no strategy was rated a one, which indicates that teachers perceive some level of value in all 10 of the strategies.
Figure 4.3

Data Sorted in Levels of Coding for Research Question 1: What are teachers’ perceptions regarding best practice reading strategies for EL students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background knowledge and visuals help students connect to the text of a different time period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use short videos in science class to teach background knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use explicit pre-teaching of vocabulary because you can go into the vocab that may be important for that text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I pull out vocabulary that I think ELs will need in order to understand a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read aloud works well in math.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the students do peer read alouds. Lower students can hear the text read by a peer. They really respond to it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want students to want to read. Extensive Free Reading, with all of mine this year, has been huge; giving them that opportunity to read books that they want to read is huge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone has free reading time after lunch. They can read whatever they want to read, its free choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use thematic units in science; everything connects together, the experiments and reading the text and we have literacy activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic units allow me to bring in all sorts of activities and texts that all relate to one subject.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schema Theory (Teaching Background Knowledge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Teaching of Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Read Alouds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive Free Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Unit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axial Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Learning Strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selective Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Perceptions of Best Practice EL Reading Strategies Include Specific Language Acquisition and Language Learning Strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of Research Question 2

Which reading strategies are being used by teachers for EL students and what methods are teachers using to determine effectiveness?

Strategies Being Used by Teachers for EL Instruction

Each interview participant responded to the survey, but since the responses on the survey were anonymous, each interviewee was asked to indicate how they responded to each strategy on the list. Figure 4.4 outlines the grade level and subject matter of each interviewee. The shaded boxes denote that the strategy is one that is used by the teacher, at some point on the one-to-five Likert scale. Although the strategies discussed here are reading strategies, math teachers were purposely included in this sampling in order to get a well-rounded view of teachers that teach ELs. It must be noted that math is not just computation. There is currently a great deal of reading and writing in math instruction. Students must read story problems and they are also required to write sentences illustrating their math equations. Therefore, the use of reading strategies is not limited to English/Language Arts alone. In fact, Social Studies requires a great deal of reading as well. For this reason, it is important for all teachers to have a collection of reading strategies at their disposal. This is even more crucial for teachers of ELs.
Figure 4.4

*Data Sorted in Levels of Coding for Research Question 2: Which reading strategies are being used by teachers for EL students?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher #</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ELA/SS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Math/SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>ELA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis of Interview/Focus Group Question 2:** How are specific strategies chosen? (thought process behind decision-making)

There is a plethora of instructional approaches available to teachers. Choosing the most effective one to use can be complicated. The responses to the first interview question are shown in Table 4.5 which asked participants to explain their decision-making process when selecting which strategies to implement.
Table 4.5

Statements Answering Interview Question 2: How are strategies chosen?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher #</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Students are so different from year to year so I base decisions on who I have right now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I use pre-assessment (from the classroom and from the ESL teacher) to determine where to begin instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student input guides me in my choices of strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I base my decisions on what their [English] abilities are in the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I use what has worked in the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I sometimes think of something that I think would be good while I’m in the car, or somewhere, and I’ll try it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methods Teachers Are Using to Determine Effectiveness

Analysis of Interview/Focus Group Question 3: What was your method of evaluating the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of each strategy?

As previously noted, every strategy included in this study has merit and the potential to be effective. The success depends on the teacher, the methods by which the strategy is utilized, the strategy is implemented, as well as individual students. One aspect this study sought to discover was how teachers evaluated the strategies used and how the determination was made of whether to continue using it or not. As illustrated in Figure 4.5, teachers used many different forms of evaluation. Some were based on data, such as grades, tests/quizzes, and progress monitoring, while the majority relied on informal assessments such as exit tickets, asking questions, listening to students retell the concept, and student work. One form of evaluation, observation, rested on the teacher’s experience working with all students, especially ELs.
Determining the effectiveness of any strategy is crucial to the instructional process so that time is not wasted and students receive the most effective instruction possible.
Figure 4.5

*Data Sorted in Levels of Coding for Research Question 2: What methods are teachers using to determine effectiveness?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw Data</th>
<th>Open Coding</th>
<th>Axial Coding</th>
<th>Selective Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data, like grades, shows me where I need to reteach.</td>
<td>Formal Assessments: ~grades ~tests ~quizzes ~progress monitoring</td>
<td>Data Based Assessments</td>
<td>Teachers are Using Specific Data-Based and Formative assessments to Determine Effective Reading Strategies for ELs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look at data from PowerSchool and class quizzes and tests.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look at the STAR progress monitoring assessments as well as class learning checks.</td>
<td>Informal Assessments: ~exit tickets ~asking questions ~verbal retelling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit ticket, did they understand what the skill was.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask quick, little questions in guided reading to help me assess what each child is comprehending.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I check in with my ELs to see if there is anything they don’t understand or if they have questions about words in the text.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s usually instant, if they can tell me what we went over.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use the data from their sentences to see if they’re using morphology, like the -s or -ing properly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use the data from their vocabulary, whether they know or remember the word.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I also use their writing journals to see if they’re using text features like different types of punctuation, and spacing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I monitor their work to determine whether the strategy is effective.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use formative assessment to evaluate their learning and comprehension.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read the room to determine effectiveness.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing from previous experience and knowing my individual students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I start to see students struggling, especially lower readers, like ELs, that is a sign that approach isn’t working.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of Interview/Focus Group Question 4: Are there any strategies that you use that are missing from this list?

This study reviewed ten reading strategies for teaching reading to English learners. There are many more available to teachers. The fourth interview question asked teachers to list any strategies they used that were not on the list. One teacher said she could not think of any others; however, the remainder did have a few strategies they were using effectively. Table 4.6 lists the additional strategies that the participants found to be effective. Each of the items on the list below were given a rating of four (This strategy is very effective. I have used it before and will use it again) or five (This strategy is very effective. It is in my regular rotation of reading strategies) by the teacher who suggested it.

Table 4.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher #</th>
<th>Strategies Missing from This Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sight words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phonics/Phonemic Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Print-Rich Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scaffolding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Visuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer Tutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Peer Tutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Print-Rich Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Test Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choral Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No Additional Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Multi-meaning Words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore 10 strategies teachers can implement, utilize, incorporate to teach reading to English learners as well as analyze the perceptions classroom teachers have about the effectiveness of specific reading strategies for English learners. This chapter presented the findings of a survey, individual interviews, and a focus group discussion.

The survey utilized a five-point Likert questionnaire which was sent to teachers who have or have had previous classroom experience with ELs. The data from the survey results was compiled and then disaggregated to illustrate the distribution of responses.

Individual interviews as well as a focus group comprised the second set of data. Six teachers were interviewed and the focus group was assembled to further explore teacher perceptions of effective reading strategies for ELs. The raw data from the survey, the interviews, and the focus group discussion were analyzed to determine which strategies were viewed as most effective and least effective.

Open coding was used to organize the raw data by identifying and isolating distinct segments. The data were further reduced to discover patterns and themes using axial coding, which narrowed the data into subcategories. Finally, selective coding reduced the data to a core category which revealed the answer to these research questions:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding best practice reading strategies for EL students?
2. Which reading strategies are being used by teachers for EL students and what methods are teachers using to determine effectiveness?

It was discovered from the data that no single strategy was effective with every student. Additionally, results of how teachers perceived the level of effectiveness of individual strategies varied among teachers of different grade levels and subject matters. The data further revealed
that teachers used data-based assessments as well as their experience and knowledge of best practices to determine the effectiveness of strategies when teaching ELs as well as in which situations or lessons each strategy would be effective. Finally, the data revealed some reading strategies that were missing from the researcher’s list that teachers were using to effectively teach ELs. These strategies will be discussed further in Chapter Five, in addition to conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

ESL teachers only have English learners for a short period of time each day. The majority of the time is spent in core instruction. Many classroom teachers are not trained in language acquisition pedagogy. While teachers may get support and guidance from the ESL specialist, in large part, they must rely on their experience in differentiating for various groups of students. However, that experience is not to be underestimated. Teachers make the difference between an effective strategy and an ineffective strategy. In fact, research shows “that student outcomes in the general population are more closely tied to the quality of teaching than to the characteristics of the instructional program adopted” (Johnston, 2010, p. 19). It has been further suggested that teacher effectiveness can impact not just one year of school, but a lifetime. “Having a good teacher versus having a poor teacher, particularly in the early years, can determine whether a young student is put in an honor’s track or a remedial track” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 89).

Furthermore, “A student’s teacher may determine the difference ‘between entry to a selective college and a lifetime at a burger joint’” (p. 89).

While teacher effectiveness plays an enormous role in the instruction of students, there is another factor at work: the student’s ability to absorb and engage with that instruction. Steven Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that there are both internal and external factors which affect a student’s ability to both acquire and learn language, such as: motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, and distractions (Krashen, 2003). These factors can impede or block even a highly effective teacher’s instruction. Teachers of ELs must be aware of this and work to lower the EL’s Affective Filter. This may include the trial and error process of finding strategies that work for each individual student. What works for one student may not work for another. This
concept is the foundation of this study: the perceptions and decision-making processes of teachers when faced with choosing of instructional approaches when teaching ELs.

The theoretical framework of this study was based on two theories. The first is Stephen Krashen’s Five Hypotheses of Language Acquisition, mainly focusing on his Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, which holds that there are two ways that a learner obtains a second language, by picking it up, or acquiring it, and by learning it through direct instruction. The second is Jim Cummins’ theory of BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency), which differentiates between the two kinds of language students need to be academically successful. These theories were integrated into the survey questions as well as in the interview questions for the individual interviews and in the focus group discussion. Strategies that employ both language acquisition and language learning were the basis of the strategies discussed. The theory of social language vs. academic language and the importance of teaching students the difference between the two is the very foundation of each of the strategies examined in this study.

Research Questions

The research questions focused on teacher perceptions of best practices for reading instruction and the effectiveness of those perceived reading strategies on EL reading comprehension. Participants were given 10 research-based reading strategies for ELs to rate in terms of how effective the strategies were perceived.

1. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding best practice reading strategies for EL students?
2. Which reading strategies are being used by teachers for EL students and what methods are teachers using to determine effectiveness?

Instrumentation
Three sources of data were used to complete this study. The first was a five-point Likert scale survey which listed 10 researched-based reading strategies. Each of the five rating points had an explanation to aid in making a choice: 1. This strategy is not effective. I will not use it again; 2. This strategy is not very effective. I don’t use it very often; 3. This strategy is effective in some lessons, but not in other lessons. I use it case-by-case; 4. This strategy is very effective. I have used it before and will use it again; 5. This strategy is very effective. It is in my regular rotation of reading strategies. Additionally, there was the choice of Not Applicable, with a comment option of YES, I would try this strategy, or NO, I would not try this strategy. The second data point was compiled from six individual interviews in which the researcher and the participant began the discussion with four base questions, which drove the conversation. The final data point was a focus group which began with the four base questions and expounded on one another’s statements.

**Conclusions**

The answer to Research Question One was determined using all three sources of data: the five-point Likert scale survey, the individual interviews, and a focus group discussion. The survey results revealed that of the 10 strategies on the list, six of them were rated a number five, which is the highest rating, by the majority of participants. Those six strategies were Schema Theory, Teacher Read Aloud, Thematic Unit, Pre-teaching Vocabulary, Fluency Instruction and Practice, and Implicit Grammar Instruction. Teachers perceived these strategies to be the most effective when teaching reading to ELs. However, strategies did not have to be rated a five in order to be effective. In fact, the participants in this study agreed that a rating of three or higher constituted a strategy worthy of consideration. Some participants said even though they may rate a strategy at a two, they would still try it in certain situations. This is due to the fact that no one
strategy works on every student and no one teacher has complete success with a strategy every time it is implemented. The success or failure of a strategy depends on several factors, such as the context in which it is implemented as well as the individual student’s affective filter. Furthermore, strategies that have been effective in the past may not be effective again, even in the same situation or lesson. It is interesting to note that none of the 30 participants in the survey rated a strategy the lowest rating of one. This further supports the conclusion that although strategies may not always be effective, they all have merit and would be considered for implementation under the right circumstances.

Only one strategy received comments in the comment section: Extensive Free Reading. Although a great deal of research exists in support of this topic, some controversy surrounds it. Many teachers find free reading to be too unstructured for many readers, primarily struggling or reluctant readers. Students have been observed pretending to read or even sleeping during free reading time. This is certainly not the point of free reading, nor is it productive. One of the comments on Extensive Free Reading on the survey was, “Studies have shown that independent reading conferences and coupled with independent reading are effective but not just DEAR.” This viewpoint was echoed in the individual interviews as well as the focus group discussion. The participants agreed that if some structure is applied to the activity, then it can become an effective strategy. Some of the accountability measures the participants implemented for free reading were student-teacher conferencing on the book, a book review by students, and creative responses.

The interviews and focus group discussion provided raw data which were disaggregated to further support the answer to research question one. It was revealed, through open coding, that
the interviewees had rated the following as their five top strategies: Schema Theory, Pre-Teaching Vocabulary, Teacher Read Alouds, Extensive Free Reading, and the Thematic Unit.

Axial coding allowed the data to be further narrowed to discover two categories, Language Acquisition Strategies and Language Learning Strategies, in which these five strategies can be organized. As noted by Krashen, there are two ways in which language is obtained: by learning it and my acquiring it. Language learning occurs through direct instruction and language acquisition occurs in a natural, subconscious way. Participants provided ELs with opportunities for both types of language education. The language learning strategies, which were a deliberately incorporated into lesson plans were Schema Theory, Pre-Teaching Vocabulary, Teacher Read Alouds. The opportunities teachers provided for language acquisition in the classroom were Extensive Free Reading and Implicit Grammar Instruction. The interviewees were not aware of Krashen’s theory and had not implemented these strategies with that in mind. They were simply implementing what they considered to be best practices.

Research Question Two was answered using all three data sources as well. The first part of Research Question One asks, which strategies are being used by teachers for EL students? Survey data was compiled to determine which of the 10 strategies were being used, however the list of 10 strategies is not exhaustive. There are many strategies which research has shown to be effective for ELs. Interview participants supplied a list of 10 additional strategies they consider to be effective and which they used specifically with ELs. These strategies were sight words, phonics/phonemic awareness, whole language instruction, a print-rich environment, scaffolding, visuals, providing peer tutors (both English speakers and a speaker of an EL’s native language, if available), test strategies, choral reading, and teaching multiple-meaning words.
The second part of Research Question Two was, what methods are teachers using to determine effectiveness? This was answered using two sources of data: discussions with the interviewees and focus group participants. When asked, participants had at least one method, but in most cases, many methods which they used to determine the effectiveness of each strategy. Open coding revealed four categories of evaluation: formal assessments, such as grades, tests, quizzes, and progress monitoring; informal assessments such as exit tickets, asking questions, and verbal retelling; student work such as writing samples and journals; and teacher observation. Axial coding revealed two categories of evaluation. Formal assessments can be categorized as Data-Based Assessments and the remaining evaluation methods can be categorized as Formative Assessments. It is interesting to note that the smallest category is data-based. The majority of evaluation methods teachers used to determine effectiveness were grounded in the experience and expert opinion of the teacher.

Implications

The results of this study have implications for all teachers. According to the U.S. Department of Education, English learners are among the fastest growing populations in U.S. schools. Nearly 10 percent of all learners in the U.S. are ELs (English Learner Resources, n.d.). Although that percentage varies from district to district, it can be reasoned that nearly every teacher will at one time or another have an EL in their class. However, the implications go much further than that. Strategies for ELs do not exist in a vacuum. They are best practices. Strategies that have been researched specifically for ELs will be effective for all students, particularly those who are lower readers or are from low-literacy backgrounds. ELs do not need to be separated from the group to be taught these strategies, they can be taught in a group of peers, for the benefit of all.
Although the strategies are effective for a broad array of students, teachers need to be trained in language acquisition pedagogy such as Krashen’s Theories of Language Acquisition and the difference between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). The knowledge of language acquisition pedagogy will prompt teachers to be mindful of the strategies they implement and deliberate in the implementation of those strategies.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that future research be conducted to examine the 10 strategies that participants noted as missing from the survey list. The pedagogical basis of these strategies could be researched and assessed as to language acquisition/learning benefits.

It is also recommended that professional development be provided to all teachers, whether they have ELs in class or not. Training in language acquisition/learning pedagogy and theory will benefit ELs as well as English-only students who are from low-literacy homes and are below grade level. In essence, these students are learning a new language as well: academic language. The strategies that are effective for ELs are also effective for academic language learners. Professional development that is based on language acquisition will benefit all struggling learners.

Additionally, it is recommended that collaboration opportunities be provided to general education and ESL teachers to share successes and failures with instructional strategies. Furthermore, collaborative plan time would benefit teachers and students.

**Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine research-based strategies that were proven to be effective for teaching reading to English learners. Furthermore, this study examined
teacher perceptions of effective reading strategies and the methods utilized to evaluate the
effectiveness of those strategies. The data collected were analyzed to discover the trends and
themes that teachers identified. Further research will add to the body of this study by expanding
the repertoire of research-based, best practice strategies that teachers can use for ELs as well as
low-literacy English-only students. Professional development will prepare all teachers for the
unique challenges that English learners bring to class. Additionally, classroom teachers should be
supported by ESL specialists in choosing, implementing, and evaluating strategies. They must
also be supported and trusted to apply their vast experiences when working with English
learners.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A

Survey: Reading Strategies for ELs

Reading Strategies for ELs

Please rate the following reading strategies as to how you perceive their effectiveness in teaching English Learners. If you have never used a particular strategy, select N/A and then type YES in the comment box if you think it would be effective, type NO if you think it would be ineffective, or type ? if you are not sure. (The five rankings are the same for each question)

1. Schema Theory: Teaching background knowledge before the lesson is taught

2. Read Aloud: Reading a text that is at a higher reading level than the students can read independently or in a shared read
3. **Teaching Text Features** such as headings, bold lettering, captions, italics, maps and diagrams, and text boxes

This strategy is effective in some lessons, but not in other lessons. I have used it before and will use it again.

This strategy is very effective. It is in my regular rotation of reading strategies. N/A

If you have never used this strategy, please type YES if you think it would be effective, type NO if you think it would be ineffective, or type ? if you are not sure.

4. **Thematic Unit**: Using a thematic unit as a reading strategy

This strategy is not effective. I will not use it again.

This strategy is effective in some lessons, but not in other lessons. I use it case-by-case.

This strategy is very effective. It is in my regular rotation of reading strategies. N/A

If you have never used this strategy, please type YES if you think it would be effective, type NO if you think it would be ineffective, or type ? if you are not sure.

5. **Extensive Free Reading**: DEAR (Drop Everything and Read), FVR (Free Voluntary Reading), SSR (Silent Sustained Reading), etc.

This strategy is not effective. I will not use it again.

This strategy is effective in some lessons, but not in other lessons. I use it case-by-case.

This strategy is very effective. It is in my regular rotation of reading strategies. N/A

If you have never used this strategy, please type YES if you think it would be effective, type NO if you think it would be ineffective, or type ? if you are not sure.

6. **Explicit pre-teaching of key vocabulary**

This strategy is not effective. I will not use it again.

This strategy is effective in some lessons, but not in other lessons. I use it case-by-case.

This strategy is very effective. It is in my regular rotation of reading strategies. N/A

If you have never used this strategy, please type YES if you think it would be effective, type NO if you think it would be ineffective, or type ? if you are not sure.
7. **Morphology Instruction**: Teaching students to segment words into parts such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>旋转策略</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This strategy is not very effective. I will not use it again.</td>
<td>This strategy is effective in some lessons, but not in other lessons. I use it case-by-case.</td>
<td>This strategy is very effective. I have used it before and will use it again.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have never used this strategy, please type YES if you think it would be effective, type NO if you think it would be ineffective, or type ? if you are not sure.

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8. **Fluency Instruction and Practice**: Explicit teaching of fluency focusing on speed, intonation, and inflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>旋转策略</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>This strategy is effective in some lessons, but not in other lessons. I use it case-by-case.</td>
<td>This strategy is very effective. I have used it before and will use it again.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have never used this strategy, please type YES if you think it would be effective, type NO if you think it would be ineffective, or type ? if you are not sure.

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9. **Explicit Grammar Instruction**: Teaching grammar rules followed by practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>旋转策略</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This strategy is not very effective. I will not use it again.</td>
<td>This strategy is effective in some lessons, but not in other lessons. I use it case-by-case.</td>
<td>This strategy is very effective. I have used it before and will use it again.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have never used this strategy, please type YES if you think it would be effective, type NO if you think it would be ineffective, or type ? if you are not sure.

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10. **Implicit Grammar Instruction**: Teaching grammar within the structure of a text or within the context of writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>旋转策略</th>
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<td>This strategy is very effective. I have used it before and will use it again.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have never used this strategy, please type YES if you think it would be effective, type NO if you think it would be ineffective, or type ? if you are not sure.
Appendix B

Survey: Years of Teaching Experience

1. How many years have you taught English learners?
   - 1-5 years
   - 6-10 years
   - 11-15 years
   - 16-20 years
   - 20+ years

2. How many years have you been teaching overall?
   - 1-5 years
   - 6-10 years
   - 11-15 years
   - 16-20 years
   - 20+ years

3. What grade(s) do you teach?
   - K
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5
   - 6
   - 7
   - 8
Appendix C

Informed Consent Document

PROJECT TITLE-The Road to Fluency: Effective Reading Strategies for English Learners

INTRODUCTION
You are invited to join a research study to examine effective reading strategies and best practices for teaching reading to English learners. Please take whatever time you need to discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish to. The decision to join, or not to join, is up to you. In this research study, I am investigating teacher perceptions of effective reading strategies for English learners.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?
If you decide to participate you will be asked to participate in a Likert scale survey in which you rate reading strategies from one to five as to effectiveness. This will take approximately 5-10 minutes.

You may be asked to participate in an individual interview in which we talk one-on-one about the strategies and how you use them in your classroom.

RISKS
There are no risks involving this study. The IRB (International Review Board) of Carson-Newman University has given permission for this study. Additionally, ACS central office has granted permission for the study to take place.

BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?
It is reasonable to expect the following benefits from this research: gain a better understanding of which strategies are most effective for English learners in the classroom. However, I cannot guarantee that you will personally experience benefits from participating in this study. Others may benefit in the future from the information I find in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY
I will take the following steps to keep information about you confidential, and to protect it from unauthorized disclosure, tampering, or damage: Names will not be used in the study. Data files will be kept in a locked cabinet and kept on a password protected computer.

INCENTIVES
No incentives will be used in this study.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?
Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled, and it will not harm your relationship with the researcher or anyone.
involved in the study.

**CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?**

Call or text Beth Franks at 423-284-1164 or by email at efranks@athensk8.net if you have questions about the study. The chair of this study may also be contacted:

Dr. Julia Price, Director of the Carson-Newman University Advanced Programs, jprice@cn.edu