Elementary Mainstream Classroom Teachers’
Perceptions and Teaching Practice towards English Language Learners

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Abstract

Teaching in the Toronto District School Boards (TDSB), the largest school board in Canada with the most diverse student population, many mainstream classroom teachers feel that they are not equipped with adequate knowledge to teach and support English language learners (ELLs) in their classrooms. This qualitative research used a literature review and two face-to-face interviews to investigate this issue, focused around teachers’ preparation and knowledge, effective teaching strategies, and personal learning experience. The findings of the study indicated the importance for mainstream classroom teachers to encompass appropriate pedagogical, theoretical, and cultural knowledge through professional development in order to provide ELLs with sufficient support to be successful.

Key Words: English Language Learners (ELL), mainstream classroom teacher, teaching strategies, attitudes
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

Due to the large number of immigrants from different countries around the world, students are becoming increasingly diverse in Canadian schools. Every year, Ontario receives more than 100,000 immigrants, with one-third of this population is under the age of nineteen. Moreover, three-quarters of these students are from countries where English is not their first language. In the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), the largest school board in Canada, 47% of the student population has a language other than English as their first language. Some schools in TDSB report that as many as 92% of these students require English language support. At the same time, only 36% of elementary schools have English as a Second Language/ English Literacy Development (ESL/ELD) teachers. Many schools with a higher percentage of students requiring language support do not have specialist ELL teachers. From 2009 to 2010, the percentage of elementary schools with ten or more ELLs that did not have specialist ELL teachers increased from 22% to 26% (People for Education, 2009). This report also indicated that in schools with only one or two ELL students, support was usually provided by a mainstream classroom teacher. Based on this situation, this study aimed to examine mainstream classroom teachers’ perceptions and teaching practice towards ELLs.

In the fall of 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education released its new ESL policy which aimed to “help all English language learners in the province by engaging them in learning that enables them to develop their talents, meet their goals, and acquire the
knowledge and skills they will need to achieve personal success and to participate in and contribute to Ontario society” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.7). Before 2007, there was no policy to ensure that all ELLs would receive support in English language learning. The 2007 policy stated that students should continue to receive ESL support until they achieve an acceptable standard of English. However, it did not make it mandatory for schools to direct funding to support ELLs. This disconnect between the schools’ needs and the policy made the situation even worse – as the percentage of ELLs continued to increase, the percentage of ESL teachers remained the same (People for Education, 2009). The situation called for better teacher training programs and professional development for mainstream teachers who work with ELLs (Cartiera, 2006).

The dynamic cultural and linguistic diversity and its challenges in educating ELLs within the schools has become a pivotal fact for policy makers and school boards, as well as mainstream teachers with large numbers of ELLs. Research indicates that many mainstream classroom teachers are not equipped with adequate knowledge about ELLs or about what constitutes effective instruction for them (Cartiera, 2006). In some schools, principals and teachers have raised concerns that the current situation is not meeting ELLs’ needs (People for Education, 2013). As English as a Second Language (ESL) is not a mandated component of most teacher training programs in Ontario, although there are a huge number of ELLs in many schools, most mainstream teachers have not received any ESL training. Therefore, it is important and beneficial for mainstream classroom teachers to acquire training or additional qualifications in order to work with ELLs effectively.

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007), English language learners may be Canadian-born or they may be newcomers from other countries. The Ontario
Ministry of Education defines ELLs as students who have “a first language other than English, or a dialect of English significantly different from the standard used for instruction in schools, and require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 8).

There are two kinds of language support programs in Ontario that ELLs can receive direct support from in order to meet their learning needs. One is called the English as a Second Language (ESL) program, which is appropriate for students who have attended school, can read and write in their first languages at an age-appropriate level. The other one is the English Literacy Development (ELD) program, which is for students who have had limited education access in their home countries, or have had limited chances to develop their literacy skills in any languages.

In addition to language differences, ELLs differ in age, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic background, levels of proficiency in their first language and many other ways. The top ten home countries of ELLs’ from 2007 to 2008 in Ontario were Philippines, India, Canada, Pakistan, Columbia, Iraq, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, China and Nigeria.

During the past ten years, research has found that ELLs have not received adequate support in mainstream classrooms due to the teachers’ lack of knowledge of how to support their needs (Yoon, 2008). As a result, finding effective ways to teach diverse learners has become the responsibility of all mainstream teachers (Zamel & Spack, 2006). Therefore, it is essential to study factors that affect mainstream classroom teachers’ teaching practices towards ELLs because these factors can significantly affect the expectations that teachers hold for ELLs’ learning and their teaching practice towards ELLs.
One of the challenges affecting mainstream teachers who teach ELLs is how to teach ELLs in a way that can help students reach their grade appropriate reading level (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). In provincial Educational Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests, the gap between ELL students and other native English speakers is decreasing but remains wide. According to the EQAO(2010)’s report, ELL students were 8 percentage points behind in Grade 3 math, and in Grade 6 reading the gap was 20 percentage points. Low achievement rates and high dropout rates were also reported for many ELLs (Valdes, 2001). This situation continues to challenge mainstream teachers and the current education system.

Research has also indicated that ELLs are one of the largest groups of students who struggle with literacy, vocabulary and comprehension (Pang, 2010). Some studies suggested that explicit language instructions need to be implemented for ELLs to help them understand academic content (Echevarria, 2006). While others suggested that teachers who teach ELLs must consider language acquisition knowledge in their instruction (Short, Fidelman, & Louguit, 2012). An understanding of first language and second language acquisition theory will assist teachers in understanding the ELLs’ language development. As the acknowledgement of language acquisition is central to the instruction of ELLs, teachers who have received courses and training related to working with ELLs typically have more positive attitudes in teaching ELLs (Youngs & Youngs, 2001). However, the reality is that most mainstream teachers often lack knowledge of second language learning and second language acquisition theories (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005). Another study indicated that despite the reality of the increasing population of students whose first language was not English, there were not enough teacher training programs to prepare teachers to work with these students (Waldschmidt,
As teachers play an important role in students’ academic achievement, their linguistic and cultural backgrounds are crucial for them to be successful in teaching ELLs. Mainstream teachers are facing difficulties in supporting ELLs within their classrooms where they have limited resources to improve language acquisition, lack professional development, and the wide range of proficiency levels among ELLs (Commins & Miramontes, 2006).

In addition to the lack of ESL training mainstream classroom teachers are receiving, they also bring preconceived attitudes, biases, and perceptions to the classroom (Walker, Shafer & Iiams 2004). However, there are few studies focusing on mainstream teachers’ attitudes and how teachers perceive their responsibilities toward ELLs in their classrooms (Yoon, 2008). Some mainstream teachers hold negative attitudes towards having ELLs in their classroom due to limitation in time and demand to meet students’ academic needs. In some studies, a few mainstream teachers believed that ELLs should not be placed in the classroom until they have reached the requirements at the appropriate grade level (Walker et al., 2004). This belief clearly shows the lack of responsibility of some mainstream teachers. Moreover, it would lead to negative consequences in terms of student’s self-esteem and academic study. Teacher’s low expectations and different teaching practices might undermine ELLs’ self-esteem by making the ELLs feel less capable than other students (Couch, 2010). In contrast, high expectations may boost ELLs’ academic achievement, because both the teachers and the students would work harder.

Purpose of the Study
Given the current problems mentioned above, it is noticeable that elementary mainstream teachers are facing a range of challenges in teaching ELLs in the TDSB. Therefore, it is essential to examine different mainstream teachers’ teaching practices towards ELLs and the corresponding effects that these teaching practices have on ELLs’ academic achievements, as well as the factors that affect teachers’ perceptions of and teaching strategies towards ELLs. These students spend the majority of their study time with their mainstream teachers who may have received little or no training to support their language needs. Teachers must be provided with sufficient professional development to effectively increase academic success for ELLs. In order to generate effective ways to improve both mainstream teachers’ teaching and ELLs learning, this qualitative study investigated factors affecting mainstream teachers’ teaching practices toward ELLs by collecting and analyzing data from two elementary mainstream classroom teachers who have no more than five ELLs in their classrooms. In the study, I chose two elementary mainstream teachers who used to be English language learners as my interview participants, due to my assumption that they would be better prepared in working with ELLs based on their personal learning experience. My research could be beneficial for school boards, administrators, mainstream classroom teachers, parents, and ELLs who are seeking improvement in mainstream classroom academic achievement and individual development. I hope the findings of this research would be beneficial to teacher candidates and beginning mainstream teachers by letting them reflect on their learning and teaching practice to meet the needs of ELLs.

Research Questions

The primary research question of the study was “What teaching practices are a small sample of mainstream elementary school teachers, who have experienced being ELL
themselves, using to support ELLs in their class, and what effects do they believe their practice has on these students?”

The research question was followed by three sub-questions:

1. How do educators perceive their preparation and knowledge about working with ELLs?

2. What factors affect mainstream teachers’ teaching practice towards ELLs and what are the effective teaching strategies in working with them?

3. What are the effective ways to improve the mainstream teachers’ professional performance towards ELLs?

**Background of the Researcher**

Being an English language learner and an internationally educated teacher candidate myself, I met great challenges in learning and teaching in Canada, because of the language and cultural differences. I received all my education from kindergarten to graduate study in China. What’s more, I majored in English in undergraduate study and completed my master’s degree in Teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages. During my graduate studies, I had a year and a half teaching experience as a Chinese volunteer teacher at a public elementary school in the United States. As a result of learning and teaching a second language, I developed a love and appreciation for these students. I have personally observed and experienced their strengths, challenges, and struggles. During the four practicums of my Master of Teaching program, I have gained more opportunities and experiences in working with some excellent mainstream classroom teachers. Their insights, efforts, as well as teaching strategies towards ELLs have greatly impacted my understanding and teaching practice. I believe that my educational background and teaching experiences have enabled me to gain a better
understanding of second language acquisition theories. Moreover, my prior experience provides me with a deeper understanding of ELLs’ needs in acquiring a second language, as well as the mainstream teachers’ concerns in teaching them. I hope this qualitative study could provide helpful information to teacher candidates who lack second language teaching knowledge and experiences.

Overview

Chapter 1 includes an introduction of the English Language Learners’ current situation in Ontario, the purpose of the study, the primary research question and the sub-questions, as well as how I came to be involved in this topic and study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature about the major elements relate to this study: mainstream teachers’ perceptions and attitudes toward ELLs, second language acquisition theories, teachers’ professional development, and teaching practices and strategies towards ELLs. Chapter 3 provides the methodology and procedure used in this study including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. It also includes the ethical review procedures and the limitation of the study. Chapter 4 identifies the participants in the study and described the data as it addresses the research question. Chapter 5 includes reflections, implications of the study, recommendations for practice, limitations of the study, and further study. References and a list of appendixes follow at the end.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this study was to explore factors that affect elementary mainstream teachers’ teaching practices towards ELLs that have an impact on their academic achievements. As statistics indicate that the population of ELLs will continue to increase, each mainstream classroom teacher will likely be responsible for teaching ELL students in their classes. The review of literature has been divided into four sections: mainstream teachers’ perceptions and attitudes toward ELLs, second language acquisition theories, teachers’ professional development, and teaching practices and strategies towards ELLs.

Mainstream Teachers’ Perceptions and Attitudes toward ELLs

Studies have shown that teachers’ attitudes towards their students are a predictor of students’ academic success (Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Because teachers with positive attitudes tend to be more willing to receive professional training, they are able to adapt their teaching practices and strategies to better meet students’ needs. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the factors that affect teachers’ attitudes toward ELLs. A survey conducted in United States elementary public schools indicated that the major factors contributing to mainstream teachers’ attitudes towards ELLs were: previous cross cultural experience, ethnicity, administrative support and specific training in working with ELLs. This research was based on the assumption that training and multicultural competencies were essential to providing qualified instructions for a diverse population of students in mainstream classrooms, and teachers’ attitudes played an important role in students’ learning (Krashen, 1981). Villegas and Lucas (2002) believed that teachers’ attitudes towards students would significantly affect the expectations they hold for student learning, their treatments towards students and what students ultimately learn.

Gay (2000) has indicated that culture was the heart of education. Because no matter
what teachers do, such as lesson or unit planning, instruction, or assessment, culture determines how they believe, behave, and teach. Teachers brought themselves, specifically their life experiences, histories, and cultures, to the classroom (White, Zion, Kozleski, & Fulton, 2005). Teachers who are respectful to cultural differences appeared to be more willingly to expect their students to be successful despite their cultural, racial, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds (Nieto, 2012). Teachers’ attitudes can improve or hinder the learning achievement of ELLs. Sometimes teachers’ expectations are grounded in cultural beliefs that might be unfamiliar to ELLs because the students were from non-dominant cultures (White et al., 2004). Many mainstream teachers have the stereotypical perception that ELLs have limited abilities to reach high levels of academic achievement (Cabello & Burstein, 1995). Others viewed ELLs as an obstacle to overcome rather than a resource to build on in the mainstream classroom (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Some teachers even correlate ELLs’ language ability with their cognitive potentials (Harklau, 2000). Mainstream teachers need to become more open-minded and raise their awareness towards the linguistic and cultural differences in their classrooms. Teachers who have better cultural understanding typically are more responsible in supporting the students’ linguistic and cultural needs (Shepard, 2000).

Yoon (2008) suggested that teachers consider ELLs to be more burdensome than the native English speakers in their classroom. However, in another study which examined 437 elementary classroom teachers’ perceptions and attitudes toward the “inclusion” of ELLs, the researcher found that elementary mainstream teachers had positive attitudes toward class modifications, time constraints, educational environment, general attitudes, and training, but they had negative attitudes toward having adequate ELL training (Yoon, 2008). Furthermore, the study indicated that elementary mainstream teachers had
negative attitudes toward second language acquisition. Lastly, the study claimed that new teachers showed more positive attitudes towards ELLs than experienced teachers, and female teachers were more positive than male teachers (Griffin, 2008).

Because of their language deficiency, ELLs are disadvantaged in assessment and evaluation if there are no accommodations for their specific learning needs and differences. As assessment is a crucial part of effective education, it is essential for mainstream teachers to know how to evaluate ELLs’ achievements. Moreover, teachers’ knowledge of how to assess ELLs could affect their attitudes towards them to some extent (Lenski, Ehlers-Zavala, Daniel, & Sun-Irminger, 2006).

Studies have shown that teacher’ perceptions and attitudes towards ELLs would affect their academic achievement. Some researchers stated that even though teachers’ beliefs were important to their preparedness in teaching, it is not enough for teachers only have positive attitudes to support ELLs. Besides maintaining positive attitudes, teachers need to gain appropriate pedagogical, theoretical, and cultural knowledge to be more effective in supporting and increasing ELLs’ academic achievements.

**Second Language Acquisition Theories**

In order to know what teaching practices and strategies are appropriate and effective to use with ELLs, teachers’ need to understand the theories of second language acquisition (SLA). One of the popular theories is Stephen Krashen’s (1982) five hypotheses of SLA: the acquisition and learning hypothesis; the natural order hypothesis; the monitor hypothesis; the comprehensible input hypothesis; and the affective filter hypothesis. Since then, these hypotheses have become the basis for most language acquisition theories. Although the theories are varied in research methods and aspects, their impact on ELLs’ language development remained.
Most SLA theories consider that there are several sequential stages of language development, ranging from lower levels to higher levels, in second language learning. The following stages are identified in many second language developmental theories (Thomas, 2011):

1. The silent/ receptive or preproduction stage: In this stage, students communicate with minimal language.

2. The early production stage: Students are able to express their ideas with short phrases.

3. The speech emergence stage: During this stage, students are able to speak simple sentences and ask questions using approximately 3000 words.

4. The intermediate language proficiency stage: Students are learning almost 6000 words and sharing their ideas with more complex sentences.

5. The advanced language proficiency stage: At this stage, students have developed academic language proficiency and they can complete their school work with some help.

Cummins (1979) indicated the distinction between two types of proficiency, a Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), and a Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). The BICS represents the fluency in daily communication. However, CALP refers to a higher level of ability to understand and express academic language (Cummins, 2008). In addition, in contrast to the relatively rapid acquisition of conversational language, ELLs require at least five years to catch up to native speaker students in academic language skills.

Mainstream teachers can provide qualified and effective support to ELLs when they have a better understanding of the stages of second language development. Besides this, the awareness of the development stages of English speakers is also helpful in supporting
ELLs’ learning (De Jong & Harper, 2005). ELLs are not a homogeneous group. They have a wide range of proficiencies in the language skills, experiences, and background knowledge. A research study conducted at the University of Florida suggested that it was useful for teachers to understand ELLs from a bilingual and bicultural perspective (De Jong & Harper, 2005). The study indicated that teachers should develop their knowledge of bilingual students in terms of their personal linguistic histories and cultural experiences. Mainstream classroom teachers should learn about ELLs’ prior education and their life experiences in their home countries even though they might come from unfamiliar linguistic and cultural backgrounds as this knowledge would assist teachers in understanding how ELLs’ linguistic and cultural experiences affect their learning. A lack of knowledge about students’ backgrounds may cause a failure to provide effective support for ELLs’ academic achievements.

In another research project (Pappamihiel & Lynn, 2014) indicated that it was critically important for ELLs to not only maintain their first language, but also continue to use it. Losing first language may have significantly negative impacts on ELLs’ second language acquisition. In summary, mainstream teachers need to understand both the difference and similarity between ELLs’ first language learning and second language learning.

In an investigation of mainstream teachers’ beliefs and experiences with ELLs, Musara’s (2013) study was based on social-cultural theory, social critical theory, and culturally responsive pedagogy. These three perspectives are the fundamental components of a critical pedagogy, which is extremely important and useful for teachers who have ELLs in their classrooms. The social-cultural perspective was greatly influenced by Vygotsky (1978). He believed that language was the tool for thinking and
it helped to create cognitive development. As ELLs participate and interact in classroom activities, all the experiences that they encounter begin to transform their cognitive development. Therefore, ELLs’ prior cultures and languages are directly connected and will affect their second language learning. In order to give meaningful instruction and provide challenging activities to foster ELLs’ zones of proximal development, teachers have to acknowledge ELLs’ linguistic and cultural experiences and incorporate them in daily teaching practices.

**Teachers’ Professional Development**

Research indicates that beginning teachers tend to be less prepared than experienced teachers to teach students from diverse backgrounds (Dee & Henkin, 2002). But Flores and Smith’s (2008) study claimed that teachers’ teaching experience did not directly relate to their positive treatments toward ELLs. They found that less experienced teachers were more prepared, and were more willing to create an inclusive and equitable environment for all the students.

As stated in the research problems in chapter one, although there are a large number of ELLs from increasingly diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in many of the elementary schools, most mainstream teachers had not received adequate ESL training (Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Furthermore, ESL is not a mandated component of most teacher training programs in Ontario. There are many Ontario faculties of education for training teacher candidates who will face the challenges of the diverse students’ population in the mainstream classrooms. One study explored current teachers’ preparation practices through teacher candidates’ perspectives. The findings showed a strong disconnect between these programs and the teacher candidates’ self-efficacy in
terms of meeting the ELLs’ learning needs. Participants in this study indicated that they needed more linguistic knowledge training and deeper understanding of the language acquisition process (Webster & Valeo, 2011). Many of them expressed their preference in learning about ELLs through practicum, as well as practice, rather than the traditional course study. Additionally, they also indicated the needs for learning content knowledge, explicit instruction with demonstrations, and practical strategies.

The specific educational requirements for ELLs call for improving and inclusionary practices in teachers’ professional development. Karabenick and Noda (2004) found that mainstream classroom teachers needed more resources and training to meet these challenges. However, O’Neal’s (2008) research suggested that although teacher participants felt they lacked training to support ELLs, they could still provide effective teaching in their classrooms. This was the only study that I had read that suggested teachers could provide effective teaching without having specific training.

In De Jong and Harper’s (2005) research, they examined the gap between good teaching practices for fluent English speakers and effective practices for ELLs. Based on their study, they proposed a framework that described the nature of knowledge and skills that teachers must have in order to teach ELLs more effectively. It addressed mainstream teachers’ preparation in three aspects: understanding the process of second language acquisition; the importance of language and culture in teaching and learning; and the need to set explicit linguistic and cultural goals.

In Hutchinson’s (2013) study, which examined pre-service teachers’ knowledge of working with ELLs, she found that because these teachers had limited opportunities to
work with these students, there were demands to provide experiences in teacher training programs which would allow pre-service teachers to confront and understand their attitudes and assumptions about working with ELLs. In this study, the pre-service teachers developed an appreciation and understanding of the needs, as well as challenges, to support ELLs after they took the courses and teaching practices. In addition, the study also suggested that mainstream classroom teachers should be provided with adequate preparation for working with ELLs, such as knowledge about second language acquisition and teaching strategies. Hutchinson (2013) believed that teacher training programs should serve the purpose of bridging the preparation gap for mainstream classroom teachers. The study found that through training, pre-service teachers gained considerable knowledge and understanding about English language learning and strategies to support ELLs. Therefore they developed the sensitivity and the empathy they need to support ELLs.

Research on teachers’ training suggests that teachers require more knowledge in culturally responsive teaching (Couch, 2010). Questions related to teachers’ perceptions of ELLs and how these perceptions affected the ways teachers interacted with, instructed, integrated culture, and viewed training were questioned by researchers. Santamaria (2009) pointed out that integrating students’ cultures into instruction would increase ELLs’ learning and that teachers’ failure in integrating culture might cause students’ low academic achievement. Therefore, there is a strong desire for mainstream classroom teachers to receive more training in becoming culturally responsive teachers.

**Teaching Practices and Strategies towards ELLs**

As more and more culturally and linguistically diverse students are enrolling in
Ontario’s elementary schools, one of the major challenges for mainstream teachers is how to provide sufficient and qualified support to ELLs. Even though the challenge is significant, it is less clear what strategies and practices mainstream classroom teachers can provide to improve their teaching of ELLs. These problems are caused by insufficient research and information, inappropriate educational policies, and the teachers’ lack of understanding of ELLs (Verdugo & Flores, 2007). Much of the research on effective instruction for ELLs focused on bilingual or structured-immersion, rather than mainstream classroom teaching.

Research has raised the question: how can mainstream teachers get involved in ELLs’ language learning process? Language acquisition theories have revealed four major principles that could be implemented into the mainstream classrooms for ELLs (Jameson, 1998): increasing comprehensibility (using cues, prompts, visuals, hands on activities and cooperative learning experiences to make academic content more understandable); increasing interaction (provide students opportunities to develop their language skills through communication with their peers, teacher/ student conferences, or project based learning); increasing thinking/ study skills and developing students’ higher level thinking skills (by modeling, reinforcing, and setting high expectations); and utilizing students’ first language to increase their comprehensibility. Research on effective language teaching identified some strategies that were appropriate and specific to ELLs: using or allowing students to use their first languages; incorporating ELLs’ cultures in teaching; adjusting teachers’ language; linking language learning with content learning; and providing ELLs with all source of opportunities of communicating (Hite & Evans, 2006).

According to research conducted by Genesee (2006), teaching students to read in
their first languages would promote higher levels of reading achievement, ELLs learned in a similar way as other English speaking students, and instructional modifications were indispensable for ELLs. The use of students’ first language was important, since it would help to clarify, elaborate and enhance the information that was explained in English. Research findings suggested that the first language and second language proficiencies are related to each other (Cummins, 2009). Therefore, first language proficiency should be required for English learning in the classroom. Moreover, studies also demonstrated that ELLs whose first languages were maintained at home performed better at school (Cummins, 2008). Karabenick and Clemens’s (2004) qualitative study found that even though many teachers encouraged students to use their first language, others considered it as a hindrance to ELLs’ language learning.

Challenges that made a balance between fundamental and higher levels skills were effective in teaching ELLs (Verdugo & Flores, 2007). Good teaching for ELLs meant assisting their learning without undermining their self-efficacy and risking their falling behind others in academic achievement. Hansen-Thomas’s (2008) shelter instruction method was specifically designed to ensure ELLs receive work as challenging as the English speakers. For example, teachers could break down challenging academic tasks into smaller chunks to make learning more manageable; provide adequate wait time for ELLs to process and respond to questions and prompts; modify any assignments, worksheets, and both in-class activities and homework by simplifying the language and using the students first language for clarification if possible (Verdugo & Flores, 2007). As the explicit instructions are important for all students especially for ELLs, teachers should implement all challenging tasks with explicit instructions (Lucas et al., 2008).

A qualitative study conducted by Hite and Evan (2006) explored how 22 first-grade
teachers perceived the implementation of instructional strategies. They further examined the data gathered from surveys and interviews in six categories: adjustment of teaching approach, modifications issues, parent interactions, affect and classroom philosophy, peers as teachers, and the use of first language. The study showed that first-grade teachers would take a further step to enhance the instruction for ELLs through all the strategies mentioned above, while higher grade teachers might not be as comfortable in making accommodations as the first grade teachers were in the same situation. In addition, although teachers have recognized the problem that parents could not always be available to help students with their homework, none of the teachers in the study made adjustment to ELLs’ homework.

For ELLs who are struggling academically and had limited English language proficiency, teachers could use a thematic instruction approach to teach content and language accordingly (Gersten & Baker, 2000). This method could make knowledge meaningful by connecting topics to students’ real life, whereas the traditional approaches of teaching language skills have focused on separate elements such as phonetics, vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar. Moreover, there should be an incorporation of content and vocabulary to help ELLs to understand instructions.

Cooperative activities and scaffolding instruction are essential to the academic success of ELLs (Walqui, 2006). Teachers can also use cooperative activities, designed to engage ELLs in the learning process, with all their students. Cooperative and collaborative learning has been recognized as the effective methodology in developing ELLs’ language proficiency and academic skills. ELLs feel safe and comfortable in participating in a collaborative environment that offers opportunities for them to share their ideas with each other. Scaffolding instruction is used to increase academic success
for ELLs, as well as other students (Walqui, 2006). Teachers use scaffolding instruction such as modeling and paraphrasing to offer timely and instant support to students until they could achieve the requirements independently. Teachers should strengthen and enrich language practices in order to help ELLs successfully complete tasks, not just simplify or minimize challenges for them (Thomas, 2011).

My research study investigated the effectiveness of practices and strategies offered by mainstream classroom teachers, who used to be ELLs themselves, and the influence that teachers’ knowledge base has on their teaching practice towards ELLs.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on the factors affecting mainstream classroom teachers’ perceptions and practices towards ELLs’ academic achievement. Although studies have shown that teacher’ attitudes would affect ELLs’ academic performance, they cannot be the only factor that determine ELLs achievement. Research indicates that mainstream classroom teachers must encompass appropriate pedagogical, theoretical and cultural knowledge to be effective, and utilize professional development programs to the increase academic achievement for ELLs.
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

My proposed study was qualitative in nature and included a review of literature and face-to-face interviews with two teachers. The literature reviewed in chapter 2 has shown that mainstream teachers’ perceptions and attitudes would affect their teaching, as well as ELLs’ learning (Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Factors like teachers’ previous cross-cultural experience, ethnicity, administrative support and professional training all contribute to teachers’ attitudes and teaching practice with ELLs. Mainstream teachers with a good understanding of second language acquisition theories and diverse cultural knowledge tend to encompass appropriate and effective teaching practice and strategies when working with ELLs.

Procedure

My research was conducted in elementary schools within the TDSB. With the primary research question “What teaching practices are a small sample of mainstream elementary school teachers, who have experienced being ELL themselves, using to support ELLs in their class, and what effects do they believe their practice has on these students?” in mind, I examined the following questions:

1. How do educators perceive their preparation and knowledge about working with ELLs?

2. What factors affect mainstream teachers’ teaching practice towards ELLs and what are the effective teaching strategies in working with them?

3. What are the effective ways to improve mainstream teachers’ professional performance towards ELLs?

Due to my experiences teaching Chinese language and cultures to English speakers and I am now personally studying abroad as an English language learner, and receiving
more training in teaching second language learners than the average teacher candidate, I believe that I am perfectly situated to raise awareness of helping ELLs and provide them with effective instructions in the classroom. In my study, I have made the same assumptions about mainstream classroom teachers who have the similar background as me.

By using informal semi-structured interviews, this qualitative study investigated the research questions through collecting and analyzing data from two elementary mainstream teachers who have no more than five ELLs in their classes. In order to find qualified participants, I looked at the online information of elementary schools in Toronto District School Board, and consulted with my professor who was in charge of arranging our practicum placements. Beyond that, I also looked for help from school secretaries and teachers in my practicum schools. The collected data could potentially be used to increase participants’ understanding about perceptions and practice for their ELLs. The findings of the study could additionally add to the existing knowledge of effective teaching strategies for ELLs and be used in teachers’ professional development.

**Instruments of Data Collection**

In-depth and semi-structured interviews were employed to examine teachers’ shared perceptions of and teaching practice towards ELLs in mainstream classrooms. The pre-designed interview was useful as it would encourage and lead the participants to think and reflect on the research topic. These interviews were the major component of my data collection. All the interviews were taken at convenient time periods and places that were negotiated with the participants in advance. In the interviews, I asked them questions related to their English learning experiences, professional training, and teaching experiences with ELLs (Please see the full list of interview questions in Appendix B).
Participants

Research has shown that mainstream teachers can provide qualified and effective support to ELLs when they have a better understanding of the stages of second language development. So in this study, purposeful criteria were used to select participants who are current mainstream teachers. As people tend to understand the meaning of a phenomenon through the participants in qualitative studies, I thought it was important to sample for teachers who I could learn from. Both of the selected teachers were my associate teachers of my practicums and both met the following criteria:

1. They are full-time mainstream classroom teachers in TDSB elementary schools with relatively high academic achievements.
2. They have at least three years teaching experience with ELLs in mainstream classrooms.
3. They have no more than five ELLs in their classrooms.
4. They do not have TESL certification.
5. They can speak a second language or have taken course and training related to teaching ELLs.

My first participant, Nicole, has been teaching at her current school as a mainstream classroom teacher in the TDSB for the past twenty-five years. She grew up bilingual since her mom spoke French while her father spoke English. I chose her to be my participant because of my familiarity with her through my practicum. In addition, I had the opportunity to observe and learn from her excellent teaching regarding to her ELL students. My second participant, Tina, is a current mainstream classroom teacher in the TDSB who has been working for ten years. She immigrated to Canada with her family when she was ten years old. At that time, she spoke little English and was put in ESL
classes. Having heard my research topic, Tina agreed to participate due to her closeness with the main issues being discussed and desire to share her learning and teaching experiences.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Information for the study was collected through face-to-face interviews. After all the data were gathered, I read the transcribed interview data as a whole. I then organized the information in table form and sorted it into different subjects. After that, I used different coloured markers to highlight the important quotes and insights, which helped me to code for the themes in line with my research questions. I also took notes for further inquiry while read along. Then, I further examined participants’ responses and try to find more themes.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

In the study, I followed the ethical review approval procedures for the Master of Teaching program. Creswell (2007) indicated that the qualitative researcher would face many ethical issues through the whole process, such as in data collection, data analysis, and dissemination. I gave my participants the consent form which explained the purpose and procedures of the study (see Appendix A). The confidentiality and anonymity of participants was ensured throughout the research. Both of the participants were selected based on the requirements in the criteria. During the study, I maintained a trusting relationship with the participants to create a comfortable interview environment. They were notified that they were would not be at risk nor directly benefit through their involvement in this project. Also they could decline to answer any specific questions and were free to change their minds and withdraw their participation even after they have
consented to participate. I shared a copy of my notes with the participants to ensure accuracy and will destroy the audio recording after the research has been published.

Limitations

One of the potential limitations of this study was the small sample size. Only two mainstream teachers were chosen and interviewed in. This fact limited the generalization of the research findings. Also, because I could not speak with any ELLs or conduct in-class observations, the semi-structured interviews were the only method for the data collection. Another particular limitation was the assumptions that I have employed when I create the participants’ selection criteria. Also, participants might provide biased information during the interviews due to their own learning and teaching experiences, as well as cultural backgrounds.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

In this section, I analyzed the statements made by my participants, Nicole and Tina, and analyzed how they relate to the major themes of my study. Overarching themes that emerged from one-on-one interviews included (a) personal experiences; (b) impact on teaching; (c) teaching strategies; and (d) professional training. Furthermore, subthemes existed within each theme, which helped to narrow the focus of the findings and to allow differences in participant responses to be distinguished. Excerpts from data sources were provided where appropriate. Discussions of the themes themselves, and how they relate to my overall research question and my literature review, were left in chapter five.

Personal Experiences

Within the theme of personal growth, participant responses were further categorized into negative learning experiences, positive English second language learning experiences, and parental influence. It is important to note that in the former subtheme, negative learning experiences, included feelings of both isolation and confusion.

Negative Learning Experiences

Both teacher participants shared their personal stories on the negative learning experiences as an ELL when they were at school. Specifically, they both commented on how these experiences made them feel disconnected, isolated, and confused when they started to learn English. For example, Tina commented on how being in a new environment created the feeling of isolation:

And I remember that it was just very different, like I felt so disconnected. And so then I started regular school in September, and again I felt the same kind of isolation. I was always surrounded by people like my classmates and my teacher, but I was always alone too, right? I felt that I couldn't do anything, I just felt very isolated.

She also explained her confusion:
I didn't really know what was happening around me. Everything was...You know, I could hear people blah, blah, blah, like they were talking obviously but I didn't know what they were saying. I had been very confused and not understanding, you know why I had to learn like, you know, nouns, adjectives, like I didn't really care about that. That's not how I wanted to study language. It's just not how I had studied language as a young person back home.

The other participant, Nicole, also explained her confusion:

And I couldn't understand why other children did not understand my parents and did not understand me. They think I was doing a baby talk. But I did not know the English word you are a fool or you are a dumb, whatever kids do when they are being mean and silly. So that part I found hard. So I felt a little bit alone sometimes.

Positive English Second language Learning Experiences

Because both of the participants had the experience of being in the ESL classrooms, they could both recall the learning experiences with their ESL teachers. They both commented on how their successful learning experiences influenced their language learning. For example, Tina commented:

Like I obviously went to ESL class and I had a wonderful ESL teacher. She took us out into the community and I remember one lesson she took us out to the supermarket and then she would walk around with us. And she would point things out, you know, "apples, bananas", and whatever. And we would repeat the words but it was so powerful.

The other participant, Nicole, shared:

And I remembered my teacher, I was frustrated, my teacher said,"Are you kidding? This is fabulous!" Her name was Miss Glaver. She said "This is fabulous! Nicole, look at your ideas that you have. So the way you wrote them, you know, you switched some of your words, who cares? You are thinking in two languages! You can do this in both. So we will just work on some of the grammar rules." Miss Glaver, that was grade 9, and I will never forget her. Because she told me it was fantastic.

Parental Influence

Although both participants had some English language learning experience, they grew up in different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It was important to notice that
Tina immigrated with her family at the age of ten. Her conception of language learning and cultural awareness were greatly influenced by the parents. As she indicated in the interview:

Well, when I was young, when I was going through the public school system, my parents insisted that I speak our language at home. They were not negotiating about that. But my father, after I asked him, he just explained to me that he doesn't want me to lose our own language. He wants me to preserve our culture and that I would be grateful for that one day. He was right. I am very grateful.

Impact on Teaching

Within the theme of impact on teaching, subthemes included positive attitudes towards ELLs and awareness of ELLs’ needs. In the interviews, both of the participants commented on how their personal learning experiences impact their teaching. Nicole shared her understanding: “I get it, that's how it impacts it. I get it, I've lived it. I know it.”

Positive Attitudes towards ELLs

Participants in this study referred to their personal learning and teaching experience and both of them demonstrated their positive attitudes towards ELLs. For example, Nicole indicated her perceptions of ELLs:

Also, teaching it. I never baby children. I never did that as a teacher. I just immerse them, just let it be casual. While you have a classroom with kids who can read and can't read, it was just a different way of helping him learn how to read. It’s the same, as any other child who can't read, except it was just language.

The other participant Tina also commented:

You know, the ELLs, are hardly ever the students that I have behaviour issues with, because they're very observant to what's going on around them. I find in my experience and they tend to go with the crowd. Because the whole idea is that they don't want to stand out. That's the whole point, you come, and you want to blend.
Moreover, both participants indicated the positive attitudes towards students’ learning competence and their understanding towards their academic performance when they were asked in what areas ELLs tend to thrive academically. For example, Tina commented:

And so I looked at my students… like students who come with nothing, nothing like I did, like zero language in English. And trying to understand you know, what they have, like what knowledge do they have inside of them. Because very often I find that it's just the matter of language and given the right situation and the right circumstances, it is really easy to tell that, you know, these children are very bright. Ah, well to be honest with you, I've seen ELLs thrive in all areas.

It is important to note that even with both of the participants indicating their positive attitudes towards ELLs, they sometimes still felt teaching ELLs can be difficult, and they were confused about proper teaching methods and disappointed with some of their results. Tina shared her thoughts:

It can be very difficult. Ah, it was a little bit, how do I say, it was a little bit disappointing for me. I felt like maybe I wasn't doing the right things. You know, I really wasn't sure what more things, and like what else could I try. I couldn't communicate with him. So, and I think as a result, I think that's why he had some of the behavior issues that he did.

Awareness of ELLs’ Needs

Participants made comments about their awareness about teaching ELLs and understanding ELLs learning needs. They discovered the awareness was a natural thing for them as teachers; also they both benefited from their personal experiences. Participants explained that these experiences were important to them because they were able to understand their ELLs thoroughly. For example, Tina said:

Because, I think during those years when I was learning English, I think those years helped me to develop my intuition, like among other skills. Because when you are blocked linguistically from expressing yourself and from understanding others, so you have to somehow get along in the world. You have to know how to read people and know kind of what they
want, right? And I think it helped me a lot in the sense that it helped me develop that particular, I don't know, connection or communication with the people. So it really has impact it, because I understand the frustration.

In addition, participants explained that based on their personal learning experience, they had a better understanding of both the theories and practice of second language acquisition. Even though neither of them had adequate professional training, they felt confident and beneficial from their early experiences. For example, Nicole noted:

I think if you are going to learn a second language, the time to do it is when you are younger. Because you don't even notice that you're doing it, like myself growing up… It could be frustrating. Because when you learn a language later in life, you think in your first language, and then you change it over.

**Teaching strategies**

Within the topic of teaching strategies, subthemes included effective teaching strategies, as well as communication with parents. Because both participants were able to understand ELLs learning needs, they constantly made connections with ELLs and engaged them in the classroom. As Tina commented:

So when I look at, like when I see ELLs in my classroom, like, I really try to make an effort to, while, there is one thing that I always insist on and that is I always try to make a connection with them. Because for me, my experience of being isolated will always stay with me. You know that being alone in the crowd. There is an expression. I remember that very very well in my mind.

Moreover, both participants demonstrated their respect to ELLs’ first languages and their cultures. For example, Nicole said:

So I always make sure that no matter what any ESL student says, I don't laugh. I go "really, so what does that mean? Show me.” And they say something, all the other kids laugh, I will go "no, no, no! That makes sense in their language... I always let the students teach me some of their languages, which make them feel proud of themselves. And they love doing it!

*Effective Teaching Strategies*
In terms of effective teaching strategies, both participants would draw on their learning experience to implement similar teaching strategies to accommodate ELLs in the class. First of all, the participants always provided ELLs visuals and manipulatives. For instance, Nicole commented:

I always try to provide drawings, ah, to provide pictures, to provide manipulatives, and to even like to have the students show me how. I've had labels up all over the place. You know, like when we were going out for recess now, and just casually pointing so as not to make the child feel weird. Recess and I would have a chart with a playground. Ok, so everybody line up at the door. And the door would say door with the picture with the door. So I did a lot of that in grade one.

More than that, participants would have one-on-one conferences with ELLs and be expressive to ensure they understand certain concepts. Both participants found this process was time consuming. As Nicole stated:

But if there are [misunderstandings], then I would read with them, I would explain, I would talk, and I would make it very clear. If they still need help, then I would get them to ask, to read, and tell me what it is they think they're supposed to. I think saying things in a different way, maybe even breaking down the task…

The other participant also believed that we should treat ELLs as the other native English language speakers, but to repeat when they do not understand. For example, Tina shared her teaching experiences:

And other thing with grade three, I would not get the baby, kindergarten books to read. That's just too babyish. I would take a regular grade three book, just do it differently. I would read to them, that story, or have them read. So they don't feel singled out. Little thing like in math, I would say "How many digits? And I say basically it's the fancy word for number." So, if you repeated enough, she will remember that's the word.

In addition, both participants mentioned the effectiveness of getting help for translation. For example, Tina shared her former experience:
I even have gone so far as to ask other students to translate for me. I’ve had two students, one speaks English and the other doesn't. But they speak a common language. So I have asked other students to translate for me...like translating, either from an adult or from perhaps even another student in the class or in the school, or sometimes there is sibling.

Alone with translation, participants also used lots of body language to demonstrate what to do with ELLs. Nicole explained, “When it's time for them to write. Then, I might gesture for them to sit down. I also, I might walk them over to their seats.”

Furthermore, modeling was one of the common strategies that they implemented in teaching ELLs. For example, Nicole shared her method in teaching writing:

And when he would do his writing, I'd always have him to draw a picture first, and then describe it to me. And I would just label. I did a lot of labeling on the picture, so I would say "Look, you wrote a story." I would write a sentence and he would under print. And then was able to read it back to me, especially the words that were in labeled in his picture. I just did tons of that. It was fast and was easy. And by the end of the year he had a big book.

Besides spending time on individual conference and differentiated teaching, both participants highly suggested partnering up ELLs with other native English speakers in the class. Like Tina said, “it’s a win-win situation.” As she further explained:

I might partner them up with another student, some child you know, just a happy and nice kid, not hyper whatever. “Here you go! This will be your buddy and look after them, take them outside.” And that also helps the regular English speaking child feeling empowered like they are doing a good job. So, I always buddy them up. And you can have the child read to them.

Last but not the least, teachers should make ELLs feel empowered. Both participants suggested valuing ELLs work and providing formative feedback to them. Nicole shared a story about one ELL student, “I made a big deal out of any writing that she did do, and I sent her to the office to go and share it. And I put it up on the wall.” They found it was important and effective to help ELLs build their confidence and self-esteem in that way.
Communication with Parents

Parents are children’s first teachers, and they know their children best. Both participants realized the importance of working collaboratively with the parents. For example, Tina commented:

And so, lovely parents, who were really interested in supporting her daughter in the classroom and knew what she [the student] was up against and worked closely with me.

Furthermore, both participants recognized the importance of communicating with parents, especially when they were not familiar with the Canadian education system. Like Tina indicated:

Yeah, connecting with parents I think is a really big strategy, because you can explain to them how the Canadian system works. I think for parents to understand what's important and what's been assessed. Tell them that these are the tools that they need to focus on; if you want to focus on anything, focus on reading. It affects every subject.

The other participant Nicole also suggested connecting the parents and family to various resources in the community if they were new to it. She explained that:

So that they can take their child to the library, they can take them for, you know, swimming lessons or skating, or whatever. So the child has a variety if experiences and is learning and practicing language everywhere, not just with you in the classroom.

Both participants mentioned that ELLs tended to be identified with learning disabilities if they had problem learning their first language. Therefore, communicating with parents on how ELLs learn their first languages at home was very essential. Nicole commented that:

And that's one of the first things we talk to parents about. When we have an ELL learner, couple of weeks goes along, and you noticing that they are struggling and even in their own language. So I speak to the parents “how do you find them with their language at home?” And quite often parents will say “They are ok. But they're maybe not doing as well as their brothers and
sister.” That's when you have trouble, when there's a learning difficulty, or learning disability of sorts.

**Professional Training**

On the topic of professional training, both participants commented on the limited training for teaching English as a second language they had received. Nicole started her teaching career thirty years ago. She indicated that she had never received any kinds of professional training for working with ELLs during her teaching training. While Tina started teaching ten years ago, and she did not take any courses that were offered specifically for teaching ELLs. As she commented, “No, I haven’t officially taken any courses. But I do remember that we had some training during my teacher training program. We talked about how to teach ELLs in the classroom, but that was just something already embedded in the course. It was a small section of the course.”
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

The following chapter continues the discussion of the previous chapters. First, it begins with a further examination of the literature review in chapter 2 and the findings of the interviews in chapter 4. Then, it summarizes findings and certain implications and recommendations are presented. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations and potential areas for future studies.

Reflection

Influence of Personal Learning Experience on Teaching

There were several links between the findings mentioned in the literature review and the interviews in regards to teacher attitudes and perceptions towards ELLs. In the first part of the literature review, studies indicated that mainstream classroom teachers’ attitudes towards ELLs could be both negative and positive. What’s more, teachers with positive attitudes tend to be more willing to receive professional training, and they were able to modify their teaching practices and strategies to meet all the students’ needs. Research showed that teachers who were respectful of cultural differences appear to be more willing to support their students to be successful despite their cultural, racial and language backgrounds (Nieto, 2012). That is to say, teachers’ attitudes can improve or hinder the learning achievement of ELLs. Therefore, mainstream teachers need raise their awareness toward the linguistic and cultural differences in their classrooms. Teachers who have better cultural understanding will act more responsible in supporting students.

In my interviews, both participants indicated their positive attitudes towards ELLs. Instead of considering these students as a burden, both Nicole and Tina demonstrated their empathy and patience in their teaching. Because they had the experience of being isolated, disconnected, and confused at school, it was natural for them to relate to ELLs
and be more patient and understanding when teaching them. In addition, they benefited from both of their positive and negative learning experiences. On one hand, they were able to recall the positive learning experiences and apply some effective strategies learned from their teachers. Thus they felt very confident and comfortable teaching ELLs, even though they had little professional training. On the other hand, they were more sensitive to identify the emotional and behavioural changes of the ELLs and knew how to support them.

*Effective Teaching Strategies*

There were connections between the literature review and the data collection in terms of effective teaching strategies towards ELLs. All the researchers referenced in the literature review and the participants in this study indicated that it was important to identify and respect the diversity of students. Jameson (1998) revealed four principles that could be implemented into mainstream classrooms for ELLs, namely, increasing comprehensibility, increasing interaction, increasing thinking/study skills and developing higher level thinking skills, and utilizing students’ first language to increase their comprehensibility. Other research on effective language teaching identified some suggestions that were appropriate and specific to ELLs: incorporating ELLs’ cultures in teaching; adjusting teachers’ language; and linking language learning with content learning (Hite & Evans, 2006).

The finding of the interviews supported these principles. Both Nicole and Tina constantly used visuals, body languages, and cooperative learning experience to increase interaction and provide their ELLs opportunities to develop their language skills with their peers and teachers. Furthermore, they recognized the importance for students to use their native languages. They both believed that students’ first languages should be
welcomed and encouraged to assist them in English language learning. Nicole strongly encouraged students to share and teach their first languages in the class. In addition, both participants demonstrated their respect for ELLs’ first languages and cultures. They were highly aware of the necessity of recognizing and representing the identities of each student in the classroom.

Hansen-Thomas’s (2008) study suggested the importance of providing ELLs with the same level of work as other native English learners. Because of the language deficiency, ELLs are disadvantaged in assessment if no accommodations were made for them. However, it does not mean teachers should have lower expectations of ELLs and only give them simplified work. It is essential for mainstream teachers to know how to evaluate ELLs’ development. In the interviews, both participants shared their positive attitudes towards ELLs in terms of their learning competence and academic performance. Based on that, they did not make accommodations by simplifying the work, but modifying their instructions and providing more support. Moreover, they also demonstrated the understanding of how to assess these students: to evaluate how they demonstrate their learning, not the way they choose to do it.

Professional Training

Both the literature and interviews made it clear that mainstream classroom teachers often do not feel prepared to face the challenges of teaching and supporting ELLs in their classrooms. Many teachers, like Nicole and Tina, felt that they receive limited professional training related to teaching ELLs. Instead, they were able to excel and feel comfortable to work with ELL based on their personal learning experiences. If they did not have these experiences and knowledge about learning a second language, there is the possibility that they would not be as effective at teaching ELLs as they are. They
represented a small group of teachers who could speak another language. However, the vast majority of the teaching professionals in Toronto only speak English. Therefore, they need additional professional training that provides knowledge, resources, and teaching strategies for working with ELLs. As it was indicated in Hutchinson’s (2013) study, teacher training programs bridged the preparation gap for mainstream classroom teachers and developed the sensitivity and the empathy they need to support ELLs.

Both participants believed that a lack of preparation of mainstream classroom teachers who work with ELLs was evident. In Ontario, ESL courses are not included in any teacher training programs. Therefore, teachers have to spend time and money to take additional qualifications on their own. Studies showed that many teachers did not feel adequately prepared to teach ELLs and they did not receive enough training to teach them effectively. Even Nicole and Tina had the experiences of facing great challenges and difficulties when teaching ELLs with little training and support. This clearly indicates the need for further teacher training programs in Ontario to better prepare teachers to effectively teach linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Implications

The findings of this study have great implications for teacher candidates, mainstream classroom teachers, parents, school administrators, and ELLs who are seeking improved academic achievement and individual development.

First, it is evident that there are disconnects between teacher training programs and current mainstream classroom teaching practice towards ELLs. As the student population becomes more and more diverse in regards to language, culture, and ethnicity, it is vital to remedy this situation in order to prepare teachers to be effective and confident in teaching ELLs. As mentioned in chapter 1, in the TDSB, 47% of students have a
language other than English as their first language. There is no reason why Ontario teacher training programs could not provide the necessary knowledge and support to teacher candidates. Therefore, teacher training programs should raise the awareness of the issues presented in this study and search for ways to improve the current situation.

Next, I believe this study is useful for stakeholders of the school community by providing some practical and effective strategies for teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms, which have been tested by the participating teachers. Since many teachers do not have enough professional training in teaching ELLs, I sincerely hope they will find the literature review and the strategies helpful to some extent. Moreover, they can adapt and implement some strategies according to their own classroom situations.

For me, this study is important as it leads me to fully recognize and understand the current situation of ELLs’ learning and teaching in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, I become more aware of the urgency of solving this issue and the importance of gaining adequate professional training. I have learned a lot from my interview participants, not only the teaching strategies, but their passion and their love towards their students have greatly influenced me. I feel more confident and able to be better prepared to teach a diverse group of students.

**Recommendations**

As we tend to bring in our identity, cultural and linguistic background into our teaching, teachers should require more knowledge in culturally responsive teaching pedagogy. Each of those factors will affect teacher’s perceptions and attitudes towards ELLs. Failure to integrate students’ culture and language might cause low academic achievement. Therefore, it is recommended that more training be offered in becoming
culturally responsive teachers. Moreover, it is essential that teachers recognize and respect the diversity of students, as well as their prior knowledge.

In addition, I believe that the most effective and successful teaching is the joint force of students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Therefore, teachers need to work collectively and collaboratively within the educational community. It is essential and helpful to communicate with parents and other people who work with ELLs. In this way, teachers can have a better understanding of their students and be able to support them.

Limitations

There were certain limitations in this study as I mentioned in the previous chapters. One of the unavoidable limitations is the small sample of interview participants. Participants might provide biased information during the interviews due to their own learning and teaching experiences and cultural backgrounds. A greater number of participants would be desirable since they might provide more adequate and insightful information on this issue. In addition, the semi-structured interviews were the only method for the data collection. It would be helpful to observe and communicate with ELLs’ to learn their opinions about the effectiveness of teaching strategies.

Further study

My recommendation to researchers for further study is to examine the correlations between teacher knowledge and the effectiveness of their teaching strategies. To be more specific, which kind of knowledge is more helpful and useful to be included in teacher training programs? The other suggestion I would make is to investigate how to effectively differentiate these teaching strategies to ELLs of all language levels.
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying the teaching practice of mainstream teachers towards ELLs for the purposes of a graduate research paper. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Mary Lynn Tessaro. My research supervisor is Dr. Jeff Bale. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of an initial 40 minute interview that will be tape-recorded. Subsequent interviews may be necessary if further information is required following the transcribing and data analysis portion of the research project. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, or another private and professional location that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. If requested, this study will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in any written work, oral presentations, or publications. Regardless, this information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. Since this interview will discuss obstacles both private and public, these interviews may provide a limited risk to your relationship with the school community. For this reason anonymity will be provided to you in regards to your identification within this research project, upon your request.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.
Yours sincerely,
Lin Sui
suilin1987@163.com

Mary Lynn Tessaro
marylynn.tessaro@utoronto.ca

Jeff Bale
jeff.bale@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Lin Sui and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name (printed): ___________________________________

Date: ______________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your experience of learning a second language?
2. Would you share your experience of having any kinds of ESL training?
3. Can you describe an experience you’ve had with professional development for working with ELLs?
4. How did the professional development you received change your thinking about English language education and ELLs?
5. Now that you’ve had some professional development on working with ELLs, can you tell me about a lesson plan you created with ELLs in mind that you think went really well?
6. How and what accommodations do you make for ELLs in lesson planning?
7. What are some strategies that have been effective and successful in your teaching ELLs?
8. Based on your experiences with ELLs in your classroom, in what areas do they tend to thrive academically?
9. If you could change one thing to make it easier for you to support ELLs in the classroom, what would that be?