Influence of Teachers’ Multilingual Identities on Supporting ELLs

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INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS’ MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY ON SUPPORTING ELLS

Abstract

The present Master of Teaching Research Project is a qualitative research study that explores the following question: What are teachers’ perspectives on the relationship between their own multilingual identities and the support they provide to ELLs? Through semi-structured interviews, data was collected from a small sample of North American teachers who identified themselves as being multilingual who worked to support English Language Learners in their classroom. From the interview transcripts, four themes emerged: participants describe their multilingual identity through a combination of their knowledge and experience attaining a second language, participants believe their preparedness to support ELL is informed by a combination of their own knowledge and experience acquiring a second language, participants indicate they face limitations in school and family support they encounter in their work, and participants recognize a range of school and family-related resources that support them in their field working with ELLs. Implications for the findings on the educational community and my own professional practice as a teacher are discussed, as well as, recommendations for strategies that teachers with or without a multilingual identity can implement in their classrooms.

Key Words: Bilingual, Multilingual, Strategies, Resources, ELL, English Language Learners, Supports, Barriers
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Immigration is a rising trend in Canada. With the rise of immigration into Canada, over 50 percent of the new immigrants arriving into Canada settle in Ontario (Faez, 2012). In addition to the increase of new immigrants moving into Canada, it has caused an increase in the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in Canadian classrooms (Faez, 2012; Webster & Valeo, 2011). In larger school boards in Ontario, like Toronto District School Board, almost half of the students in classrooms speak another primary language other than English (Faez, 2012). In this research study, ELLs and ELL students will also be used interchangeably. However, according to Ontario Ministry of Education (2008):

English language learners are students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario’s schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English (p. 5).

Moreover, ELL students can be Canadian-born or have recently arrived from another country (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). With the increasing number of ELLs in Canada, they are commonly integrated into mainstream classrooms (Coady, Harper & de Jong, 2011). In these mainstream classrooms, the responsibility of meeting the needs of the ELL students are increasingly placed on the mainstream classroom teachers (Webster & Valeo, 2011). ELL students’ academic success and outcomes are impacted by their teachers’ self-efficacy (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca & Malone, 2006; Walker, Shafer & Liams, 2004).
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To support the ELL students in the mainstream classroom, additional programs (English Literacy Development Program and English as a Second Language program) are provided by the school board (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). These programs are provided based on initial assessments on the ELL student to determine if the student requires additional support during their education to support them in learning English (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005).

The first program that ELL students can receive is called the English Literacy Development (ELD) program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). This program is provided for ELL students whose schooling in their country of origin were disrupted resulting in limited opportunity to develop literacy in any language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). The second program is called the English as a Second Language (ESL) program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). The difference of this program compared to the ELD program is that it is to help students who had previous educational opportunities and experiences to develop age-appropriate English literacy skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).

1.1 Research Problem

With the increasing number of ELL students in Canada (Faez, 2012; Rodriguez, Ringler, O’Neal & Bunn, 2009), there are reports of a mismatch between students and teachers of similar cultural and linguistic background, and lack of ELL training and courses (Faez, 2012; Walker, Shafer & Liams, 2004; Webster & Valeo, 2011; Hite & Evans, 2006). The population of “visible minority” students is rising quicker than the white population (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009). The concern is that having more diverse teachers of colour is that they may inspire other “visible minority” students of the same background and provide a positive impact to them (Ryan et al., 2009). As well, teachers in mainstream classrooms lack confidence and doubt their skills in
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being able to appropriately support and teach ELLs as a result of inadequate support and resources (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005; Téllez & Manthey, 2015).

Elementary teachers are the ones who are with the ELLs for the majority of the day, yet most of them do not feel adequately prepared to accommodating and teaching ELLs (Rodriguez, Ringler, O’Neal & Bunn, 2009; Téllez & Manthey, 2015; Webster & Valeo, 2011). Having positive attitudes and beliefs in their teaching influence their ability to support the ELL students (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Rodriguez et al., 2009). In turn, students’ achievements are also found to be influenced by teachers’ self-efficacy and teaching practice (Carprara et al., 2006; Téllez & Manthey, 2015; Washburn, 2006). Studies show that ELL students engage more in class activities and discussions when teachers use teaching and instructional strategies that are inclusive (Yoon, 2007; Yoon, 2008). Correspondingly, results from research have shown that when teachers intentionally exclude ELLs during lessons, ELLs tend to be more withdrawn from the lesson (Yoon, 2007; Yoon, 2008). Teachers who sees English as the main learning tool and language is seen to also limit ELLs learning in the classroom when their home language is considered to be an interference to learning a second language (Shim, 2014). Students may also face challenges in not having enough interaction and collaboration with non-ELL peers because teachers may not be aware of the value in peer inclusion (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). Having more interaction with non-ELL peers has been seen to promote ELL learning from their peers as much as they learn from teachers (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011).

Much research has focused on mainstream teachers’ self-efficacy in teaching and supporting ELLs (Carprara et al., 2006; Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Rodriguez et al., 2009; Téllez & Manthey, 2015; Washburn, 2006). It is important and will be useful for future teacher programs to shed light on the identity of multilingual teachers and how their multilingual
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identities may impact their teaching practices and pedagogies. This makes it necessary to look at how multilingual identities may inform and increase teacher’s knowledge and efficacy on feeling more prepared and confident to teach ELLs.

1.2 Research Purpose

The purpose of the study is to explore and learn teacher perspectives on how their multilingual identities impact the support they provide to their ELLs. A further aspect of the study is to look at how teachers’ self-efficacy affects their capacity to support the learning needs of ELL students and how their self-efficacy may change due to their multilingual identities. The number of ELL students are steadily increasing in classrooms today (Faez, 2012; Rodriguez et al., 2009), hence it is of importance to hear teacher perspectives on how their multilingual identities impact the support they provide to ELLs.

1.3 Research Questions

The main research question for this study is: What are teachers’ perspectives on the relationship between their own multilingual identities and the support they provide to ELLs? To further inquire about this study, sub-questions are:

- How do these teachers describe their multilingual identity and what it means to their professional identity and teaching practice?
- What aspects of their multilingual identities do these teachers believe informs their preparedness for supporting ELLs?
- What challenges do these teachers encounter in this work, and how (if at all) do their multilingual identities support them in meeting them?
- What are some key factors and resources that support these teachers in supporting ELLs?
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1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

As a foreign-born Canadian, I immigrated to Canada not knowing any English. Being an English Language learner who is able to speak a second language other than English proficiently, I am interested in exploring how this may influence teachers’ efficacy in teaching ELLs. I immigrated to Toronto when I was three years old and started junior kindergarten in a mainstream English-speaking classroom. I was never put in an ESL program and learned to speak English from being in class and interactions with my teachers and peers. I do not recall feeling excluded in class from not being able to speak English. There was generally a higher number of ELLs in the area where I grew up in, so teachers were supportive in our language acquisition. However, over my elementary years of schooling, my teachers only spoke English and did not have a teacher who used a second language other than English in class. Due to the lack of teachers who incorporated the use of a second language other than English in classes and teaching, I have developed an interest in how multilingual teachers can affect the way they support ELLs in the mainstream classroom. I want to learn more about strategies that teachers with multilingual identities may incorporate in their class due to their knowledge of how language is learned and how ELL students may learn from their own experience. Apart from the importance of knowing teachers who are able to speak a second language, it is also important to find more strategies to support monolingual teachers in their preparation to teach ELLs.

1.5 Preview of the Whole

To respond to the research questions, I will be conducting a qualitative research study using purpose sampling to interview 2-3 teachers about how their multilingual identify impacts their capacity to support the learning needs of ELL students in mainstream classrooms and how their multilingual identities inform their teaching practice. In Chapter 2, I review literature in the
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areas of teachers’ perceptions of ELL students, self-efficacy in teaching, multi-/bilingual identities, and best practices/challenges of supporting ELL students. Next in Chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design. In Chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of the existing research literature, and in Chapter 5, I identify the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, and for the educational research community more broadly. I also articulate a series of questions raised by the research findings, and point to areas for further research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature in the areas of teacher’s self-efficacy, multilingual teachers, instructional practices/strategies and challenges for supporting ELLs. More specifically, I review themes related to multilingual teacher identities and their self-efficacy in teaching ELLs. I start by reviewing the literature in the area of teachers’ perceptions towards ELLs and I consider how these perceptions impact academic and social outcomes. Next, I review research on the significance of teachers’ self-efficacy in order to understand how it affects teachers’ ability to support ELLs. From there, I look at some of the best practices and challenges in supporting ELL students in the mainstream classroom. Finally, I overview the significance of teachers’ multilingual identity and what research has developed about multilingual identities being able to inform teachers’ preparedness for supporting ELLs.

2.1 Teachers’ Perceptions of ELLs

Different perceptions of the inclusion of ELL students in the classroom setting and school community were found in Walker et al.’s (2004) study. Negative and positive attitudes were found depending on how the teachers viewed the ELL students. In the study, 70% of the teachers were not interested in having ELL students in their classroom. Conversely, similar statistics also showed that 78% of the teachers felt that the ELL students brought diversity to their class and school (Walker et al., 2004; Lee, Buttlar & Tippins, 2007). A further contribution to teachers’ negative attitude is viewing ELL students as a time burden. Our society also influences teachers’ perceptions of ELLs (Walker et al., 2004). Walker et al. (2004) found that teachers feel angry towards ELL students because they feel unprepared to teach them. It was also found that this change of attitude towards ELLs stem from the rapid increase of ELL students in their
INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS’ MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY ON SUPPORTING ELLS classroom, causing teachers to feel unprepared (Walker et al., 2004). Another study also shows the effects of teachers’ perception and their role to ELLs (Yoon, 2007). The teacher who viewed ELL students as the same as everyone else targeted his teaching towards the interest of non-ELL students, which caused ELL students to be disengaged because the lessons were not relatable to ELL students (Yoon, 2007). When another teacher viewed ELLs as equal to the rest of the class, it improved the ELLs interactions with their class because they were accepted as part of the community (Yoon, 2007). It is imperative to look at teachers’ perceptions of ELLs because the way teachers perceive them impacts the students’ academic and social outcomes (Walker et al., 2004).

2.1.1 The impact of teacher perceptions of ELLs on academic outcomes

Rist (1970), Walker et al. (2004), and Rodriguez et al. (2009) studied how teachers influence the academic outcomes of ELL students in school. Teachers’ expectations of how well students will perform at school influences the actual outcome of how well the students will perform (Caprara et al., 2006; Rist, 1970). When teachers have positive expectations for their students, it will have a positive impact on their learning. Vice versa, Obiako (1999) saw that when teachers have low expectations for students’ achievement, their learning and knowledge also lessens.

2.1.2 Known social outcomes deriving from teacher perceptions of ELLs

Aside from academic outcomes, teachers also play a part in the social outcomes of ELLs. Karabenick & Noda (2004) notes that teachers who held positive attitudes about their ELL students believed they were able to socialize at the same level as non-ELL students from the same classroom.
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Observations of two teachers with different approaches to teaching their ELL students found a difference in the ELL students’ social level and interaction in the class. ELLs participated more actively when the teacher used teaching strategies that included them and promoted their sense of self-efficacy (Caprara et al., 2006; Yoon, 2007; Pang, 2010). On the other hand, ELLs were quiet and did not participate when the teacher excluded them intentionally during the lesson and activities (Yoon, 2007). Consequently, ELL students take on a more active role in classroom activities when they feel accepted (Lee et al., 2007; Yoon, 2007). Similarly, Pang (2010) also speaks to the increased participation in speaking and sharing during class of an ELL student because the teacher created a safe and welcoming environment for the ELL students to bring in their culture.

2.2 The Significance of Teachers’ Self-efficacy in Teaching

The teaching strategies and level of confidence teachers exhibit has been linked with their self-efficacy (Caprara et al., 2006; Washburn, 2006; Téllez & Manthey, 2015). Teachers who exhibit high levels of self-efficacy on their pedagogical skills in teaching ELL students influences their actual performance in teaching (Téllez & Manthey, 2015). Similarly, when teachers lack confidence in their abilities to teach ELL students, their performance level also decreases (Téllez & Manthey, 2015).

Caprara et al. (2006) observed a link between teachers with high self-efficacy versus teachers with low self-efficacy and how that affected their pedagogies in teaching students. Results from Guskey’s (1988) study found that more effective teaching strategies and methods that encouraged students, motivated their self-autonomy, managed classroom problems, and catered to students’ special needs were implemented by teachers who had a higher level of self-efficacy (Cousins & Walker, 1995a,b; as cited in Carprara et al., 2006). These teachers were also
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able to provide a higher quality of instruction to support ELLs when they were confident in their teaching (Téllez & Manthey, 2015).

A contributing factor to teachers’ self-efficacy in teaching is their experience in teaching (Karabenick & Noda, 2004). In one survey, teachers with less experience held more positive attitudes towards teaching ELLs (Karabenick & Noda, 2004) and the more preparation teachers had for teaching ELLs, the more challenges they found (Gándara et al., 2005). In addition, Raudenbush, Rowan, & Cheong (1992) and Ross (1998) also observed a higher of self-efficacy was found in teachers who had students that were high-achieving in their schools (as cited in Carprara et al., 2006).

2.2.1 Related theory – self-fulfilling prophecy

As literature has displayed how teachers’ self-efficacy influences their teaching, a closely related theory is the self-fulfilling prophecy. The self-fulfilling prophecy is about one’s expectations about a second person, which leads to the second person acting in the way the first person believes the second person would act (Jussim, 1986). In the case of teaching, the self-fulfilling prophecy is the teacher’s expectations of the student and how the student fulfills the teachers’ expectations (Brophy & Good, 1974; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Jussim, 1986), so teachers’ expectations do influence students’ outcomes (Brophy, 1983; West & Anderson, 1976; Raudenbush 1984, 1994; Jussim & Harber, 2005). If teachers believe ELL students are capable, then it would influence the outcomes of ELL students in school positively.

2.3 Research on the Known Needs and Challenges of Supporting ELLs

Statistics for the support that ELLs receive shows that around 12% of ELL students receive no support or services for English development, around 50% receive some limited support in an all-English classroom, and the remaining 40% are in classrooms that incorporate
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their home language (Goldenberg, 2008). Findings also show that ELL students are scoring far lower than non-ELL students in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Goldenberg, 2008). However, these statistics are limited because they are taken from the United States.

Nonetheless, given these statistics, it is important for teachers and educators to understand the needs of ELL students and be able to reach out to them (Hansen-Thomas, 2008). To support ELLs in the classroom, recent research shows that teachers need to be able to meet their sociocultural, linguistic, and academic needs (Beal & Rudolph, 2015).

2.3.1 Known teaching strategies of overcoming challenges

To date, research has shown that to effectively support ELLs in mainstream classrooms, teachers should incorporate different cultures into the classroom, integrate the ELL students’ primary language into their learning and instruction (Hite & Evans, 2006; Gersten & Baker, 2000), use peer-assist/cooperative learning (Gersten & Baker, 2000), read aloud (Pang, 2010), and repetition of new words (Facella, Rampino & Shea, 2005).

2.3.1.1 Using visuals. Spoken words are harder to retain for ELL students who are trying to understand the teacher because it is in the moment (Gersten & Baker, 2000). Pang (2010) also speaks to this that it is important for students to be given pictures or visual illustrations. Teachers should use visuals such as story maps and graphic organizers that are concrete for the student to help reinforce the concept being taught (Gersten & Baker, 2000; Hite & Evans, 2006; Lombardi, 2008).

Lombardi (2008) also found that using visuals during activities encourages and motivates ELL students to participate which leads to more English learning and acquisition. Using pictures with actions also assisted students in better retention and comprehension of the vocabulary (Schunk, 1999; Facella, Rampino & Shea, 2005). Teachers can also encourage ELLs to create
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their own visual representations throughout the lesson to assist in their retention of information (Hite & Evans, 2006; Lombardi, 2008).

2.3.1.2 Maintaining/using native language. The native language of ELLs is important and has a positive impact on their English language acquisition and literacy skills as found in Cardenas-Hagan, Carlson, and Pollard-Durodola’s (2007) study of Spanish speaking ELL students. Gersten & Baker (2000) noted that using the students’ native language strategically can help with their higher order thinking. If teachers are able to, they can incorporate bilingualism in their teaching and classroom such as labelling the classroom in dual language, using the students’ native language when transitioning from one lesson to the other (Pang, 2010). Connecting to students’ native language can also increase vocabulary acquisition (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). Having other students who speak the same native language as the ELL can also assist them in translating and other class activities (Hite & Evans, 2006). Teachers can also address the diversity of the class by including books of different cultures and characters in the classroom (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011).

2.3.1.3 Cooperative learning. Another effective strategy for teachers to use in the classroom is cooperative learning. After the lesson, teachers can split the students into groups of four where students are at different levels (Calderón, Slavin & Sánchez, 2011). During group time, ELL students are able to interact with their peers and use English in a safe context that also allows them to practice English regularly and see other points of view (Calderón et al., 2011; Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). This is also beneficial for ELL students who may be more shy or reserved to speak to be able to speak in a small group as opposed to speaking in front of the whole class (Calderón et al., 2011). Gersten & Baker (2000) also found that cooperative learning can also facilitate an increase in language development because students are able to decontextualize the concepts faster through peer assistance.
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2.3.1.4 **Read alouds.** ELL students who have difficulty reading can benefit from teachers who do read alouds in class (Pang, 2010). Research has found that read aloud strategies can promote vocabulary and comprehension skill development for ELLs (Hickman, Polland-Durodola, and Vaughn, 2004). It also helps ELL students’ development receptive and expressive language skills (Lombardi, 2008). ELL students in Pang (2010)’s research showed better improvement in retelling and summarizing stories through read alouds.

2.3.1.5 **Repetition.** The last strategy found effective for teaching ELLs is repetition. Facella et al., (2005); Hite & Evans (2006) found that students were more motivated to use English on their own when they were provided with frequent opportunities of vocabulary repetition when learning new words. Students were also able to practice their English skills more often when teachers incorporated more repetition in their teaching (Facella et al., 2005).

2.3.2 **Challenges of supporting ELLs**

As teachers learn more about strategies on supporting ELLs, challenges to supporting ELLs also arise. Elementary teachers have been found to have the most challenges with ELL students as they are the main teacher throughout the day (Hite & Evans, 2006). Three main themes were presented as challenges to teachers; lack of time, inadequate support and resources, and communication barriers.

A frequent problem that teachers had is the lack of time when teaching ELLs (Gándara et al., 2005). There is not enough sufficient time for teachers to teach everything they need to teach and for students to learn everything that they need to learn (Gándara et al., 2005). Schools with pull-out programs for ELLs also took away their classroom time (Gándara et al., 2005). When working in small groups or individually with ELL students, teachers are unable to find enough time to do when they also have to work with the rest of the class (Gándara et al., 2005).
In the classroom, there is also a lack of support and resources for teachers to assist in teaching ELLs. There are not enough appropriate assessment materials and textbooks that are assessable to ELLs (Gándara et al., 2005). With the lack of appropriate teaching materials, teachers are often frustrated by the inability to support ELLs who fall in a wide range of academic and English levels (Gándara et al., 2005). There is also inadequate support from school district resources, policies and practices (Gándara et al., 2005). Many teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach ELLs because of the lack of ELL training and instruction programs (Dianda, 1992; Youngs & Youngs, 2001; Flynn & Hill, 2005; Meskill, 2005; Téllez & Waxman, 2005; Rodriguez et al., 2009).

The third challenge that is of importance to teachers is the communication barrier that exists with the ELLs and their families (Gándara et al., 2005). Teachers expressed their inability to communicate with the families and that the families were also unable to properly communicate with the teachers (Gándara et al., 2005).

2.4 The Significance of Teachers’ Multilingual Identity

There is a need to take a deeper look into teachers’ who have multilingual identities and how that may be of importance in their professional practice because their source of knowledge and beliefs are powerful influences in their work (Ellis, 2004). The reason for this may be because teachers who are bilingual have their own set of beliefs on how ELL students learn (Flores, 2001).

2.4.1 What is multilingual identity

To learn about how multilingual identities may influence teachers, it must first be defined. Baldwin, Longhurst, McCracken, Smith, & Ogborn (1999, p. 225) defines identity as “the products of discourses” and it is language that constructs your identity rather than social
INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS’ MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY ON SUPPORTING ELLS identities (as cited in Mills, 2006). From this definition, multilingual identity would be considered the identity constructed of multiple languages.

2.4.2 Impact on teaching practice

Knowing the meaning of multilingual teachers, we can look at what research has learned about how their multilingual identities may or may not inform teachers’ teaching practice and preparedness for supporting ELL students. Several non-native multilingual teachers, native multilingual teachers and native monolingual teachers were interviewed to learn about their experience as a learner (Ellis, 2004). When the teachers discussed their own personal experience as a language learner, it was found that the better they were in language awareness, the better they were able to understand the way their students learn (Wright & Bolitho, 1993; Ellis, 2004).

Faez (2012) also argued that teachers who spoke another language would be better prepared to teach ELL students because of their personal experience of learning English. Similar findings in Coady, Harper & de Jong’s (2011) research also saw that teachers who were multilingual and able to speak another language other than English proficiently voiced higher preparedness to teach ELL students. These diverse teachers were also seen to deliver more culturally relevant pedagogy for diverse students (Ryan et al., 2009).

Personal experiences learning language was a common finding for multilingual teachers on their teaching practice (Ellis, 2004; Coady, et al., 2011). Personal experience helped them to understand language structure such as phonology, lexis, grammar, syntax, etc. (Ellis, 2004; Coady et al., 2011). The teachers were also able to understand their own language learning strategies and their personal teaching preference when they were students (Ellis, 2004; Coady et al., 2011).
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Multilingual teachers were able to keep in mind different learning preferences in their classrooms and maintained their own preference in learning styles and strategies (Ellis, 2004). Ellis (2004) reasoned that monolingual teachers can only teach based on what they think might or might not work because only have a low level of understanding of what it is like to learn a language. Whereas, multilingual teachers know that their students will be able to learn the language as they have done successfully (Ellis, 2004). Another sample of Thai-speaking teachers also spoke to their understanding of students who cannot speak English and needs translation in their home language so that students can remember more of what they are learning (Hayes, 2009).

One bilingual teacher from Conteh’s (2007) study answered that “their [students’] behaviour changes…they’re much more accepting towards you because you’re identifying their identity, their culture”. Being able to speak another language other than English also increases communication between teachers and parents (Conteh, 2007). Parents are more comfortable in speaking with the teacher (Conteh, 2007).

2.5 Conclusion

In this literature review I looked at research on teachers’ perceptions of ELL students to see what outcomes it has academically and socially, the significance of their self-efficacy in teaching, some best practices and challenges in supporting ELLs in the mainstream classroom, and how multilingual identity may inform teachers’ preparedness for supporting ELL students. This review elucidates the extent that attention has been paid to teacher identities and perceptions and how it influences their teaching practice. It also raises questions about whether or not it is teachers’ multilingual identity that influences them to have a higher self-efficacy on supporting ELL students and points to the need for further research in the areas of multilingual teachers and
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how their identity influences their teaching strategies in supporting ELL students or how it may
not. In light of this, the purpose of my research is to learn how teachers’ multilingual identities
impacts their capacity to support the learning needs of ELLs and to learn how their multilingual
identities informs their teaching practice so that I can contribute further to existing research of
ELL supports and how it can further inform existing teaching programs of how to assist future
teachers to support ELL students.
3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology used in this research study. First, I start by reviewing the general approach, procedures, and data collection instruments. Then, I elaborate more specifically on participant sampling and recruitment. Next, I explain my data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations relevant to my study. I recognize a range of methodological limitations, but also speak to the methodological strengths. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief summary of key methodological decisions and my rationale for these decisions based on my research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured interviews with two to three teacher participants. In broad, qualitative methodology speaks to “research that produces descriptive data” (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015, p. 7). This type of research methodology also includes flexibility and openness during the learning process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Qualitative researchers aims to understand and study people’s experience and how they see things (Taylor et al., 2015). To do so, qualitative researchers also empathize and identify with the people they study (Taylor et al., 2015).

There is no best methodology for conducting a research study, whether you are using a qualitative or quantitative approach (Sogunro, 2002). Both methodologies differ in their own process and outcome (Sogunro, 2002). Unlike quantitative research which is measured with numbers and variables, qualitative research looks at the setting and the people holistically (Taylor et al., 2015). It is formed on words, reporting on detailed informants, and conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, 1994). Data collection also relies on developing understandings,
INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS’ MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY ON SUPPORTING ELLS insights, and concepts from patterns found in the data (Taylor et al., 2015). It uses a variety of materials to collect data, such as case study, personal experiences, life story, interview, and observation, to make meaning out of the individual’s lives (Taylor, 2005). Given my research purpose and questions of what I want to learn, taking a qualitative research approach is an appropriate approach because it allows me to draw on the experiences of my small sample of participants. It also allows for more in-depth answers to my questions.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

In qualitative research, the three main types of interview for data collection is structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Structured interviews uses the same questions and gives the same interview to all participants, making it most commonly used for quantitative research (Knox & Buckard, 2009; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews uses pre-determined open-ended questions but allows for flexibility during the interview for the interviewer to probe participants’ answers (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Unstructured interviews may differ from each participant as questions arise during the interview process (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

From these three types of interviews, the appropriate instrument for data collection given what I want to learn from my participants is the semi-structured interview protocol. My interview protocol includes pre-designed questions that are divided into five sections: background information, teacher perspectives/beliefs, teacher practices, challenges, and next steps. The semi-structured interview will provide flexibility in the pre-designed questions for prompts and questions to emerge during the interview process allowing for more in-depth dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee to hear about the participants’ lived experience (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).
3.3 Participants

Here, I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment, and I review a range of possible avenues for teacher recruitment. A section on participants is included to briefly introduce each of the participants for this research study.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

These are the criteria that was used to determine the teacher participants:

1. Teachers who are currently and have taught classes from K-8.
2. Teachers who have previous experience teaching classes with ELL students.
3. Teachers will be able to speak at least one other language other than English fluently
4. At least one participant will be working in Ontario.
5. Teachers have experience working in the education field for a minimum of 5 years.

To address the main research question, the participants that I interview need to have previous experience teaching and working with ELL students in their classrooms, so that I can draw upon their lived experiences. In addition, teachers need to be able to speak another language other than English fluently because I want to learn how their bi/multilingual identity may influence their teaching. Being in a P/J program, it would be beneficial to look at a sample of participants who are currently in a K-8 classroom. To see the impact that multilingual identities may have on the participants’ teaching experience, it would be necessary to look at participants who have been working in this field for at least 5 years.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures/recruitment

There are three main sampling techniques for qualitative research: convenience, purposeful, and theoretical (Marshall, 1999). Convenience sampling is the least rigorous of the three techniques (Marshall, 1999). It looks to select participants that are the most accessible
INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS’ MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY ON SUPPORTING ELLS (Marshall, 1999). Purposeful sampling is the most common technique in qualitative research (Marshall, 1999). It can involve a framework of variables based on the research area and question to select participants that fit into those variables (Marshall, 1999). Theoretical sampling involves samples that are theory driven and is the main technique for grounded theoretical approach (Marshall, 1999).

For the purpose of the small-scale nature of the study and methodological parameters, I will be using a mix between convenience and purposeful sampling. Based on the sampling criteria framework, I will be relying on my existing contacts and networks to recruit participants through email and phone calls.

3.3.3 Participant biography

Every participant is given a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of their identity. Alexandra and Carol are both teachers in the Ontario public school board, while Kevin is a teacher in the United States’ public school board.

Alexandra

Alexandra was a Grade 4/5 teacher in a junior public school at the time of the interview. She has been a certified teacher for 11 years, with 1 year of international teaching experience and 10 years in the public school board. In her ten years with the public school board, she has a wealth of experience teaching all subjects except French in the primary and junior division. She has experience teaching ELL students in her all her classes over the course of her current teaching career. She also describes herself as bilingual, being able to speak and understand Gujarati and English, and able to understand Hindi. Her interest in working with ELLs came from her own personal experience of being an immigrant and ELL in Canada.
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Carol

At the time of the interview, Carol was a kindergarten teacher. She has been teaching in the public school board for currently 8 years. In her teaching career thus far, she has taught in the primary and junior division, including experience as an ESL teacher. She teaches in a school in Ontario with over two-thirds of the students being ELL. She also describes her identity as being bilingual, speaking and understanding Cantonese and English. Carol’s interest in supporting ELL students stemmed from her own experience and understanding of the difficulty in learning a new language.

Kevin

Kevin has been a certified teacher in the public school board in the United States for 19 years teaching first grade. He teaches all subjects in Grade 1. He teaches in a school that is mainly Hispanic. Kevin was also one of the co-creators of the transition program which has been implemented in his school for the past 11 years where he teaches in mostly Spanish. His great interest for teaching ELLs came from the influence of society with the large population of ELLs.

3.4 Data Analysis

In qualitative research, the significance of data analysis is to interpret and report on the voices of the participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015). I conducted a thematic analysis involving organizing the data set; getting acquainted with the data; and classifying, coding, and interpreting the data (Rowley, 2012). The data from the interviews have been transcribed and coded individually. Smith (2015) describes the transcription convention as needing to transcribe the whole interview including interviewer’s questions and all spoken words or sounds (p. 64). Before analysing, the transcripts were also read and reread multiple times to become familiar with it as new insights arise as they are being reread (Smith, 2015, p. 67).
Coding refers to identifying topics, issues, similarities, and differences from the participants’ narratives as interpreted by the researcher (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The data has been coded and have been synthesized presented in themes that are meaningful (Sutton & Austin, 2015) relevant to my research purpose and question. I mainly used descriptive codes because it was easier to maintain the key idea in the participants’ voice. The descriptive codes from each transcript was connected into themes that emerged (Smith, 2015, p. 70). From the themes, I grouped them in clusters that Phillips, Montague & Archer (2016) referred to as bringing together data that was similar in the participants’ experiences. These clusters all had the same underlying theme that connects the data together. I also looked to null data that my participants did not speak to and discuss the significance of it.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Creswell (2013) informs us that ethical issues with the participants need to be considered during the research process. Three ethical issues that arise prior/during the interview process included minimizing the risk of unanticipated harm, protecting the interviewee’s information, and effectively informing the interviewees about the nature of the study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

To reduce the risk of unanticipated harm given the topic of personal multilingual experiences, it is possible that a particular question may trigger an emotional response from the participant causing the feeling of vulnerability. I minimized this risk by sending a sample of questions to the participants ahead of time, and reassured them throughout the interview and in the consent letter that they have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time and refrain from answering uncomfortable questions. To inform the interviewees about the nature of the study, a consent letter (Appendix A) was given to the participants providing an overview of the
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study, addresses ethical implications, and specifies expectations of participation. Participants
were asked to sign the consent letter to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. Participants’
identities are confidential and are given a pseudonym to protect their information. All data
pertaining to the participants’ including audio recordings has been stored in my password-
protected computer and will be destroyed after five years.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Given the nature of this study, the major limitation of this research is the population of the
participants. The study sample is limited to only two to three participants due to the ethical
parameters that I have for approval for the research study. Also, the findings are not
generalizable in a broader aspect because of the limited number of interviews that are conducted.
The sample size will not be large enough to generalize the results in regards to the research
question (Marshall, 1996). Another limitation to the participants is who they are. Participants for
the interview can only be teachers, so we are unable to learn from other types of participants
such as students or parents.

However, a strength of this methodology is not to generalize to a population (Creswell,
2013), but to delve in-depth on the research topic and on the participants’ lived experience
(Taylor, 2005). Being able to understand the meaning of the findings is more important than the
validity of the findings (Maxwell, 1992). In addition, another strength is being able to validate
the participants’ voice and experience through the interview. It is an opportunity for participants
to share their experiences and to also reflect on their teaching practices.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained and gave an overview of the research methodology used. I
started off by reviewing the general approach of qualitative research and highlighted key aspects
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of why this methodology was chosen, procedures, and data collection instruments. Next, I elaborated more specifically on the sampling criteria used to choose my participants who are experienced multilingual teachers that have classroom experience with ELL students. I explain the chosen sampling procedure of using convenience and purposeful sampling, and gave an introduction to each of the participants. From there, I described the data analysis procedure of transcribing the interviews, coding the data, and sorting them into common themes and topics of relevance to the research purpose and question. I identify the ethical review procedure and speak to the methodological limitations and strengths of the research study. Next, in Chapter 4, I report the research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss and present findings from semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face and via Skype with two teachers in the Greater Toronto Area and one teacher from the United States. The main research question that led the interviews and analysis is: What are teachers’ perspectives on the relationship between their own multilingual identities and the support they provide to ELLs? I have organized my findings into four main themes: participants describe their multilingual identity through a combination of their knowledge and experience attaining a second language, participants believe their preparedness to support ELL is informed by a combination of their own knowledge and experience acquiring a second language, participants indicate they face limitations in school and family support they encounter in their work, and participants recognize a range of school and family-related resources that support them in their field working with ELLs. These themes are then organized with subthemes according to the findings. I discuss the findings from participants and discuss the significance relating to Chapter 2 literature review. Then I conclude with summary of the significance of these findings to Chapter 5.

4.1 Participants Describe Their Multilingual Identity Through a Combination of Their Knowledge and Experience Attaining a Second Language.

Participants recognize their own identity as a person who is multilingual. They specifically highlight the aspects of their own language knowledge and personal experience which contributed to acquiring a second language. They all identify through language as a contributing aspect to their identity. Participants also spoke about their experience moving to another country that added to how they conceptualize their identity. Furthermore, the knowledge of language also
INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS’ MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY ON SUPPORTING ELLS fostered social circles. As participants speak to their multilingual identity, it provides significance to the participants’ work in teaching ELLs.

4.1.1 Participants identify as people who can speak more than one language.

All participants were able to speak two languages which was how they identified their identity as multilingual. When asked to describe their multilingual identity, Carol explained that “Cantonese I learned from birth by speaking it at home with my parents.” Alexandra also grew up in a similar situation where she learned to speak Gujarati while she grew up in India and was also able to understand Hindi from movies that she used to watch. Both participants, Carol and Alexandra, grew up speaking their mother tongue and learned English later on.

On the other hand, Kevin who also identified to being multilingual, grew up speaking English first. “My first is English and I did not start Spanish till I was 21.” The three participants all identified themselves as speaking two languages with a difference between English being acquired first or second. In the literature, Baldwin, Longhursts, McCracken, Smith & Ogborn (1999, p.225) defined identity as language that constructs your identity and this is significant to these participants as they also construct their identity through the languages that they can speak.

4.1.2 Participants identify as people who have moved to a new country.

In addition to the languages they can speak, all participants identified as coming from different countries and nationality. They all had a commonality to their multilingual identity as people who have experienced moving to another country. Alexandra first acknowledged herself as an immigrant as she spoke about her personal experiences. In particular, she said “when I first came to Canada, I’m an immigrant… I got here in grade 4.” Carol also had a similar perspective in her identity as she also identified as someone who immigrated to Canada when she was young.
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Such was also mentioned by Kevin who spoke of moving to a new country. For Kevin, he experienced moving to two different countries for school and teaching. He also spoke about the benefit of learning his second language through immersion in the culture and people who spoke that language, Spanish. Kevin explained “What really helped was when I went to Mexico for a semester… I helped a custodian at a local church and then the pastor and his family had me over for meals… I learned a lot more there than anywhere else.” Literature has pointed out the importance of having teachers of diverse backgrounds in classrooms because of the growing population of immigrants (Faez, 2012). My participants have demonstrated that it is important to have such diverse population of teachers who have valuable knowledge of moving to a new country.

4.1.3 One participant identifies as someone who was able to gain new social circles due to acquiring a second language.

While all participants described their multilingual identity, Kevin was the only participant that indicated a different experience from acquiring a second language. His experience may have been different from the other two participants due to the fact that his first language was English and second language was Spanish, while the other two participants learned English as their second language. Kevin stated,

It’s opened me up, like I said, to other people, other cultures, different ways of thinking, different ways of seeing things. So personally, it’s a huge value and me and my friendships today are with Spanish speaking people. It opened me up to new ways of seeing things, just new ways of behaving and the beauty of the diversity.
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Further, Kevin as he also spoke about his experience of building relationships with parents and people who do not speak English, and was also able to attend one of student’s birthday party because he was able to connect with the family due to the second language that he knows.

It is shown that being able to speak a second language has given Kevin the opportunity to creating more relationships with others who also speak the same language, and this adds to the value of his multilingual identity. Being able to speak the same language as their students and families, Kevin confirms the same benefit that Conteh (2007) found in his study, which is that speaking another language other than English can increase communication between teachers and parents.

4.2 Participants Describe That Their Preparedness to Support ELL is Informed by a Combination of Their Own Knowledge and Experience Acquiring a Second Language.

All participants described their perspective in how their practice in teaching ELLs had been connected to being prepared and equipped through their own experience and knowledge. It was shown that having personal knowledge for another language allowed for better understanding of how language is acquired. This knowledge led participants to learn about themselves and how that affects their understanding of knowing how to support ELLs. Having personal experience as ELLs developed participants’ empathy and awareness in what ELLs go through which better prepared them to find supports for them. Attaining professional and teaching experience also enabled participants to find more support in their work.
4.2.1 Participants recognize their own knowledge of language acquisition affects their preparedness in supporting ELLs.

From the participants’ discussions, a common pattern found to being and feeling prepared in supporting ELLs was their own recognition of language knowledge. Having such knowledge of language, participants were able to better support ELLs including their families as well. Kevin found it helpful in being able to communicate and confer with the families of ELL students when he is able to speak their language. He said, “Being bilingual means that I have so much better ability to communicate with their families, with their parents, and others.” He found that it was important to gain support from families because with family support, it leads to better support with the ELLs. This all comes from the ability of knowing their language.

The recognition of language knowledge was often referred to during the interviews. For example, Alexandra spoke about the knowledge she has about her own mother tongue allowed her to better understand how language is acquired. She explained, “My first language, it’s kind of like the structure of French… like conjugating, masculine, feminine… So I would take the words I know in English, translate them to Gujarati and then put it together.” This was also a common finding for multilingual teachers to gain understanding on language structure from their personal experiences learning language (Ellis, 2004; Coady et al., 2011).

Similarly, Alexandra and Carol both spoke about the background knowledge that they gained from speaking a second language and having the experience of moving to a new country and school. In the interview, Carol expressed, “it’s a whole new environment and having that knowledge of what it is has helped me better prepare myself to work with these students.” The center of it all is that teachers can better prepare themselves to work with ELLs if they draw on their own personal and background knowledge of language and how they learned it. When
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Teachers have an understanding of knowledge, they found themselves able to understand the way students learn because of their own language awareness (Wright & Bolitho, 1993; Ellis, 2004).

4.2.2 Participants recognize their multilingual identity informs their empathy and awareness in supporting ELLs.

As the conversations and interviews went on, it was discovered that participants were better equipped to support ELLs through empathy that was built in connection with their multilingual identities and experiences. All participants were able to draw on their own multilingual experiences and saw how that caused them to have understand what ELL students go through.

Carol stated, “Having the knowledge of how difficult it is being immersed into a new language really helped me – made me empathetic for the students that come into our country that don’t have any English.” It was also clear from Alexandra’s explanation that she also had the same experience of knowing what it feels like to be an ELL in the classroom when she first arrived in Canada. Alexandra also had the experience of teaching abroad, which put her in an ELL position again where she did not understand the language. All this contributed to her identity and led to her understanding of how her ELL students feel, which she called this coming from a “place of knowing.”

When Kevin was explaining his position in understanding ELLs, he described the benefit of how he is able to have awareness for ELLs language acquisition. He went on and said, “The fact that I’m bilingual, I understand very much how long it takes to learn a second language to a point where you’re comfortable with it.” It shows that the participants are aware of the state that ELLs are at because of their own experience which informs their practice. Ellis (2004); Coady et al. (2011) also stated that teachers who were multilingual had a better understanding of learning
strategies that may work with ELL, which shows that teachers’ multilingual identity did inform their teaching practice.

4.2.3 Participants recognize their teaching and professional experience informed their teaching practice in supporting ELLs.

In addition to having personal experience and knowledge of understanding how to support ELLs, all participants addressed the importance of their teaching and professional experience. All participants made comments about how long they have been working in the field of teaching and have had ELL students in their class every year since they started teaching.

With their teaching experiences working with ELL students, they have gained knowledge in supports and practices that work in the classroom that ELLs benefit from. Carol stated “Every classroom has ELL students… you’re bound to work with them so I’d say almost every classroom I’ve been in I’ve had to modify my program based on the needs of my demographic of the kids.” Alexandra and Kevin also made similar comments that through the years of gaining experience teaching ELLs, they have made modifications and accommodations to better support ELLs in the classroom. In their comments about teaching experiences, Karabenick & Noda (2004) outlined the relationship between teachers having and feeling more prepared in teaching ELLs because of their experiences in teaching.

In terms of their professional experience, participants spoke about the education and courses that they took which helped inform their teaching practice. Kevin spoke to receiving a post-secondary degree in bilingual education which helped him understand other cultures better. Alexandra and Carol continued on a similar note about their professional experience that they both attend ELL workshops and Carol has also taken her ESL AQ. By attending ESL workshops, it has helped Alexandra understand and find more tools that can support the learning styles of
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ELLs. Therefore, having teaching and professional experience has enhanced all participants’
teaching practice to support ELLs.

4.3 Participants Indicate They Face Limitations in School and Family Support They
Encounter in Their Work

The three participants spoke of the various challenges when working with students in their
class. Specifically, participants highlighted school-related challenges pertaining to their work
with ELL students. All participants agreed to the lack of resources that created a challenge in
their class and school when supporting ELL students. Moreover, participants spoke-to the
challenge of communicating with families and having families understand and support their child
in learning at school.

4.3.1 Participants recognize the need for more resources in their school when working with
ELLs

Participants described their classroom and school as a place that has challenges in meeting
the needs of their students due to a lack of resources. Participants all spoke of similar school-
related challenges when working in their classroom. Alexandra stated, “It would be great to give
ELL students like interactive tools, assistive technologies like laptops and translators and you
know those auto-translators and personal devices that can help them communicate better. We
don’t have funding for that kind of stuff.” She tells of the lack of funding that their school has for
these types of technology resources. This was also brought up by Kevin, who also referred to
technology when speaking about the lack of resources his students and families encounter. “With
the ones we’re with, I think moving into this day and age with technology is one [challenge]
because most of our families that come recently were living out in the country sides where they
didn’t have this available.”
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Carol also spoke about a similar challenge that she discovered while trying to support her ELL students. She specifically stated, “not enough resources, it depends on the educator and what kind of background they have prior to teaching a group of ELL’s and what they bring to the team.” In her explanation of resources, Carol also mentioned the need for money and funding for after school programs because it provides additional homework support for students but not all schools are able to have these programs. This is similar to what Alexandra and Kevin indicated with limited funding.

All participants have similar observations in regards to the barriers that they have come across when trying to accommodate to the needs of ELLs. In Goldenberg’s (2008) study, statistics have shown that around 12% of ELL students receive no support or services for English development and around 50% receive some limited support in an all-English classroom, which is a similar struggle the participants’ classrooms in this study faced. These statistics seem to reflect the challenges that teachers face because of the limited support received by ELLs.

4.3.2 Participants recognize the need for more family support when working with ELLs to strengthen their rapport with the school

Two of the participants recognized that in order to support the relationship between ELLs and their families with their school, there is a need for greater family support. Without family support, participants recognize that it is difficult for teachers to give further support for their ELL students because families do not understand the school situation. To strengthen this rapport, Kevin and Alexandra both raised a concern that they have observed in regards to the challenges they encounter with the ELL families.

The challenge that Kevin believes ELL families face is accessibility to resources. He specifically said, “Today, families need to become alongside of to teach them about even the
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accessibility of materials, textbooks, books in general through public libraries.” His approach to this is that if society supports the ELL families, then the ELLs will in turn, become more motivated to work hard. He continues,

I think schools and society in general could help by making more available to the parents, so that the parents could move in learning English... And I think that would carry into the students as well, because if they see that society cares about their parents, it’s going to carry into their attitude about school too.

The need for more family support was also found as a challenge from Alexandra as she provided examples of parents not having the understanding of their child’s current school to providing the support to their children. She discussed, “sometimes challenges can be from things like the parents not supporting you. That’s kind of a challenge sometimes because maybe they’re used to a high-end private school in their home country and they expect a certain kind of education level.” She continues describing, “The next challenge is parents not understanding the system. Like well in this country, my student was an A plus student, why now is he or she, first or all, modified, and second of all, still not achieving that A.” Gándara et al. (2005) found that teachers expressed a challenge of the inability to communicate with the ELL families and that the families were also unable to properly communicate with the teachers. This relates to the participants’ discussion about the difficulty in working with ELLs when they were unable to build a school-home communication with the students’ families. From these examples that the participants have provided, my study suggests that if families are able to be supported, then the rapport between the students and families and the school will increase because they realize they are cared for.
4.4 Participants Recognize a Range of School and Family-Related Resources that Support Them in Their Field Working with ELLs

All participants spoke of the types of resources and factors that impact the support they in the classroom. Specifically, these resources were found to provide support that benefit ELLs. Participants discussed how students were able to benefit in learning from having extra support from the school. Participants were also able to have a better understanding of their ELL students when they received support from their families. Additionally, participants spoke of the professional support that they receive from the Ministry.

4.4.1 Participants indicated that school resources provided extra student support in the classroom

When discussing about the types of resources that were beneficial, technology was the biggest piece of support found in common that all participants used in their classroom. With technology, students are able to use it for translation and helps ELLs communicate better. In addition to the use of technology, visuals and concrete tools were found helpful for instructional purposes to help ELLs who do not understand English. Carol states, “It’s always important to have visuals. That’s when the Smartboard comes in handy.” She discussed how she also uses technology for visuals to engage ELLs for learning. With the use of concrete visuals, research suggests teachers are able to help reinforce the concepts that are being taught to the students (Gersten & Baker, 2000; Hite & Evans, 2006; Lombardi, 2008). When the classroom is set up with word-picture association, students are found to understand what is going on better, as explained by Alexandra. Spoken language can move quickly and be harder to retain for ELL students (Gersten & Baker, 2000) so it is helpful for students in the classroom when participants use visuals in the classroom to help students connect the visuals with words.
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Colleagues were another piece of support that participants discussed including classroom assistants and other teachers in the school. Kevin found that paraprofessionals such as classroom tutors, were able to provide extra support for ELLs in his class that needs more one-on-one work. Alexandra also found strategy support in other colleagues at her school. She stated, “I go into a kindergarten classroom and talk to a kindergarten teacher… And they’ll give me some strategies to use.” Participants stressed the importance of collaborating with other teachers that will help them to find ways to support ELLs.

4.4.2 Participants recognize that ELLs were better supported with access to family support

“It’s important to get family support immediately”, Alexandra stated strongly. Participants discussed during our interview that bridging families with the schools are important for encouraging ELLs and gaining understanding of the student. Alexandra provided examples of how families and schools can be bridged together by stating,

It’s important to reach out to parents because the first thing I ask the parent is “How does he or she speak their home language? Does he speak well? Does he have a slur? Does he or she put sentences together well? Can she or he write your language?

When teachers are able to understand the background of where the ELL student is coming from, then they can be better prepared to accommodate to their needs, which is rooted in accessing their families for information. With background information, teachers are better able to understand the types of needs their ELLs have to find resources for them. On the other hand, Kevin discussed that ELL students would show higher interest in school if they recognized their parents and families were able to access resources for learning. When the students see their parents try in education, it also motivates the students to do
INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS’ MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY ON SUPPORTING ELLS well in school. It is noted that families play an influential role in ELLs which is why participants stress the importance of accessing families that would lead to finding ways to collaborate in supporting their students.

Extending participants’ discussions about the importance of having access to support from ELL families, Hansen-Thomas (2008) also says that teachers need to understand the needs of ELL students and reach out to them. Recent research by Beal & Rudolph (2015) show the need for teachers to meet the sociocultural and linguistic needs of ELL students. The importance of connecting to families is shown in Alexandra’s the example, which demonstrated how a teacher can reach out to families and gain understanding of their language and cultural background.

4.4.3 Participants recognize that Ministry resources provided professional support for working with ELLs

When asked about other resources that are useful for ELLs, participants noted that they received more professional support from Ministry resources, such as funding and documents. While the participants did not go into explicit detail about these resources, they did speak to examples of what is helpful.

Participants spoke of ELL curriculum support documents and textbooks, which provided extra support that they know is relevant to the curriculum because it is given by the school board. Updating curriculum documents also plays an important part in providing support, as Kevin spoke about the ESL curriculum they use, “We’ve changed our ESL curriculum, you know textbooks and all the other supporting materials that we use four times now.” Updating the training that teachers receive is also fundamental as mentioned by Carol and Alexandra. With updated curriculum textbooks and supporting materials, teachers are provided more relevant
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classroom support for the ELLs. For some teachers, they may have taken ELL courses many years ago and would be beneficial to have more training and workshops provided by the Ministry to keep up with current strategies, as indicated by Carol. This need for more Ministry resources was also found in Gándara (2005)’s research that there is a lack of appropriate assessment materials and textbooks.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, I looked at the influence having a multilingual identity on participants’ teaching and professional practice, the strategies they use to support ELLs and challenges to these supporting ELLs. Participants recognized their ability to speak a second language as a tool to developing empathy and understanding of ELLs’ learning. They spoke of the school challenges in resources in family support that limits their support. As well, the participants also provided their perspective in strategies and ways of how they can overcome these challenges through extra school resources, family involvement, and professional resources. These findings are significant to the existing literature because it further supports and aligns with the types of strategies that teachers can use that is found to work for ELLs. It also provides an outlook to how teachers can draw on their multilingual identity and knowledge for language learning to be more prepared in teaching ELLs relating to literature on multilingual teachers teaching ELL students in English classrooms. Next, in Chapter 5, I will discuss the implications and recommendations based on these findings for teaching.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I start by discussing the overall key findings and significance of this research study based on the research question: What are teachers’ perspectives on the relationship between their own multilingual identities and the support they provide to ELLs? I look at the key findings on strategies that multilingual teachers have identified. Then, I discuss the implications that these findings have on the educational community and my own professional practice as a teacher. Next, I provide recommendations for teachers with or without a multilingual identity on strategies they can implement in their classroom.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Significance

Overall, four main themes emerged from this research study:

1. Participants describe their multilingual identity through a combination of their knowledge and experience attaining a second language

2. Participants believe their preparedness to support ELL is informed by a combination of their own knowledge and experience acquiring a second language

3. Participants indicate they face limitations in school and family support they encounter in their work

4. Participants recognize a range of school family-related resources that support them in their field working with ELLs

All participants spoke about the significance of their multilingual identity in how they understood language acquisition and strategies for language learning. Participants recognized different aspects of their lives and experiences that contributed to their understanding of how they conceptualize their multilingual identity. They conceptualized their multilingual identity as
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being able to speak another language other than English, where literature also defined identity as
language that constructs your identity (Baldwin et al., 1999, p. 225). They also indicated
experiences of moving to a different country which contributed to how they view their identity as
well.

From the participants’ experiences of learning a second language and knowledge of how
they learned the language, they had a better understanding of how to support ELLs. They felt
better prepared in the classroom because they had personal knowledge of a second language
which assisted in communicating with their students and families. The participants were also
made more aware of how ELLs feel and think because of their own personal experiences which
allowed them to draw on their own multilingual identity to provide empathy for their
students.

Participants also faced limitations in their school and families in regards to the resources
and support they are receiving. Teachers recognized the challenge in supporting ELLs when they
are unable to communicate with parents because of the differences in understanding that parents
have in their child’s school, which was also found in literature. It was a challenge that teachers
expressed when they could not communicate with ELL families and vice versa (Gándara et al.,
2005).

Given the challenges that the participants expressed, they also indicated school and
family-related resources that were able to support them in their work. Using visuals and
technology was a huge resource that helped ELLs communicate and understand the concepts
being taught. This was also found in literature of teachers who used concrete visuals to help
reinforce the concepts that were taught (Gersten & Baker, 2000; Hite & Evans, 2006; Lombardi,
2008). Reaching out to parents and families of ELL students were also discussed by participants
as it is important to connect with families to gain more understanding on the background
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information of ELLs. It also allows for more collaboration between families and schools which leads to better communication and to find strategies to support the ELL students.

5.2 Implications

Given the findings from this research study, I outline the implications of my research for the educational community and my own future professional practice as a teacher committed to support ELLs in the classroom.

5.2.1 The educational community

Participants all highlighted the impact their multilingual identity has on their teaching practice because of the empathy they have developed from their own personal experience. When participants were able to understand the students and families’ home language, they were able to develop better communication and relationships with the families to bridge their home and school life. Participants acknowledged they were able to develop empathy for the students because of their personal experience of being an immigrant and learning a second language. Personal experienced helped the teachers understand language and strategies to learning a language (Ellis, 2004; Coady et al., 2011).

Lack of school resources, such as funding and technology limited participants in their classroom support to ELLs because participants also felt better equipped to work with ELLs when they were supported by school resources. With the appropriate resources, such as technology devices and funding for school programs, participants saw positive impacts to providing additional support for their ELL students. Having funding for technology in the class provided more visual and translation support to help reinforce the ELL students’ learning in class.
5.2.2 My professional practice

With my bilingual background, I have always had a strong sense of commitment and empathy towards ELL students. It is important for me to recognize the empathy and ability to relate to ELL students in my classroom. It will be important to know how I can support other teachers and students with the languages that I speak. If I was the only teacher in my school that was able to speak the students’ home language, I will be able to support my other colleagues and teachers in translation, that will benefit their students. Having insight into the strategies that the participants use in their classroom, it has also challenged me to look into my own language acquisition strategies and how I can employ those into my own teaching and classroom.

5.3 Recommendations

The recommendations that stem from this research study focus on strategies that teachers with or without a multilingual can implement in their classroom to support ELLs.

1. *Further professional development from the school boards and the ministry.* From the experiences of the participants, it is recommended that teachers be connected with more school boards and the ministry resources and workshops to further their learning in teaching strategies for ELLs. I also suggest all pre-service teachers to take a professional development course in teaching ELLs to better prepare themselves for their future classroom.

2. *Integrating students’ home language into the classroom.* All students should feel comfortable and be able to find a sense of belonging in their classroom. One of my suggestions for teachers who are committed to supporting ELLs is bringing in culturally relevant materials such as bilingual books and labels with multiple languages for ELL
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students to feel welcome in the classroom. I believe ELL students should also be able to speak in their home language if they are unable to communicate in English.

3. **Bridging students school life with their families with more communication.** As participants have spoken about getting family support, one way to help ELL students academically would be connecting with their families. This will provide teachers with more opportunities to learn more about their ELL students and their home life to seek ways in supporting their learning at school. Having more open communication may also help families understand their child’s school life to prevent any misunderstandings from cultural differences.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Further research should consider multilingual teachers who do not use other languages in the classroom and how they support ELL students. There is much existing research that provides strategies on ways to support ELLs in the classroom, but it may be beneficial to look into strategies multilingual teachers who only choose to use English implement in their classroom because there may be other multilingual teachers who only feel comfortable using English in the classroom. Additional research can also look deeper into how teachers can be more comfortable in integrating ELL students’ home language into the classroom as literature has shown it to benefit students’ learning.

5.5 Concluding Comments

ELL students are on the rise in Canadian classrooms (Faez, 2012; Webster & Valeo, 2011). Understanding teaching strategies that work in classrooms to support ELL students is important for in-service and pre-service teachers who have a passion in working with ELLs. For multilingual teachers, they have experience and empathy that other teachers may not have in
INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS’ MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY ON SUPPORTING ELLS regards to their personal experience of acquiring a second or even third language. Opening the avenue to learning about teachers’ multilingual identity and experiences can provide more insight into strategies that work for teaching ELLs in the classroom.
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References


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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date:
Dear _______________________________,

My Name is Christy Lee and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on teacher perspectives on the relationship between their own multilingual identities and the support they provide to ELLs. I am interested in interviewing teachers who are multilingual and have a minimum of 5 years experience teaching in classrooms with high numbers of ELL students. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic. Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Angela Macdonald. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy. Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Name: Christy Lee
Email: christyls.lee@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Angela Macdonald
Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form
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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 from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Christy Lee and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________

Name: (printed) ______________________________

Date: ______________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introductory Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to focus on teacher perspectives on the relationship between their own multilingual identities and the support they provide to ELLs. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your background information, your multilingual identity and how it informs or impacts your teaching practice, your experience teaching/supporting ELL students, and concluding with some questions about the kinds of things that support and challenge you. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background information
1. How many years of teaching experience do you have as a certified teacher?
2. What is your current position?
   a. What grade and subject are you currently teaching?
   b. Which grades and subjects have you previously taught?
   c. Do you have any other roles in the school? (e.g. councillor, coach, advisor, ELL support worker)
3. Can you tell me more about your school? (e.g. size, demographics, program priorities)
   a. Approximately what percentage of the students at your school are ELLs?
   b. What are some of the more common first languages spoken in your school?
   c. What does support for ELLs look like in your school? (e.g. ELL support teachers, pull-out, integrated, after-school programming etc.)
4. Aside from English, what other language(s) do you speak proficiently?
   a. What is your first language?
   b. How did you learn the languages that you speak?
   • What experiences have contributed to developing your commitment to supporting ELLs, and which have contributed to preparing you for this work in school and classrooms?
     o Personal experiences? (e.g. travel, living abroad, own experience as an ELL - Have you ever been identified as an ELL yourself?)
     o Educational experiences? (e.g. university course work, teachers college, additional qualifications, professional development)
     o Professional experiences? (e.g. employment positions, teaching experience)
   • How long have you worked in the area of providing support for ELLs?

Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs
1. What does it mean to be bi/multilingual to you? How does this aspect of your identity impact your everyday life?
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1. What are some of the benefits?
2. In your view, how does your bi/multilingual identity affect your teaching identity?
   a. How, if at all, do you see this as a resource for you?
   b. How, if at all, do you see it as a hindrance?
3. In your experience, what are some learning needs that you believe ELL students have?
4. In your view, how well do schools do in addressing these needs?
5. What are some of the barriers that stand in the way of meeting the needs of ELLs in schools?
6. How do you think schools could strengthen their approach to supporting ELLs?
7. In what ways do you think being bi/multilingual impacts the kinds of supports that you offer to your ELL students?
8. Do you think your approach to supporting ELLs would be different if you were only able to speak and understand English?
   a. If yes, how? In what ways?
   b. If no, why not?

Teacher Practices

1. What are some of the ways that you support ELLs and why?
   a. What are some of your instructional strategies and approaches to ELL support?
   b. How do you adapt your instructional strategies to support the needs of ELLs?
   c. Can you provide me with some examples of how you support ELLs?
      i. What are your learning goals?
      ii. What opportunities for learning do you create?
      iii. What resources do you use?
      iv. How do your students respond? What outcomes do you observe from them?
      v. How, if at all, do you differentiate your assessment for ELLs and why?
2. Do you integrate students’ first language into your teaching? Why/why not?
   1. If applicable, what outcomes have you observed when incorporating the students’ native language into learning?
   2. How, if at all, do you think your multilingual identity informs the strategies you use and the approach you take? How do you think it informs your assessment practice, and your understanding of how ELLs learn?
   3. How, if at all, do you draw on your multilingual identity as a resource for supporting ELLs?

Supports and Challenges

2. What challenges do you encounter in your support for ELLs? How do you respond to these challenges?
3. What range of factors and resource support you in meeting the needs of ELLs? (e.g. leadership in the school, demographics, parent community, access to technology, books, websites, music, guest speakers etc.)
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4. How do you think you could be further supported? (e.g., Ministry training, funding, resources)

Next Steps
1. What goals, if any, do you have when it comes to the support you provide to ELLs?
2. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to supporting ELLs and to drawing on their own multilingual identity as a resource toward that end?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.