

Creating Confident Preservice Teachers for EL Students in the Changing World

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Abstract

English Learners (ELs) represent the most diverse group of students and a student population that has increased significantly in the United States. These students demand well-equipped teachers who have adequate preparation and pedagogical tools to meet their diverse needs. This research examined preservice teachers' (N=77) perceptions of preparedness and efficacy beliefs from three different educator preparation programs using a mixed-method study that collected data from a 30-item survey as well as candidates' narrative responses about preparation experiences for working with ELs. Findings included statistical differences in teachers' perceptions of preparedness based on the preparation program they were enrolled in (e.g., bachelor's or master's) and whether teachers were receiving an ESL/ESOL certification as part of their initial preparation. Moreover, preservice teachers reported that ESL coursework, specific workshops that honed into ESL pedagogies, and field-placement opportunities to interact with EL students were influential in improving their abilities and confidence in the classroom. These findings suggest the continual need for teacher education programs to embed related ESL coursework as well as placing preservice teachers in clinical settings with EL students to influence effective pedagogies for the success of EL students in the classroom and beyond.

Keywords: EL students, preservice teachers, self-efficacy

1. Introduction

1.1 The Problem

It is no doubt that the U.S. student demographic population has changed in the last 20 years with an enclave of diverse cultures from around the world. A major shift is the record number of English Learners (ELs) in the country (4.9 million or 9.6 percent of the percentage of public school students). This number is currently higher than in fall 2000 which was 8.1 percent or 3.8 million students (NCES, 2019). As the fastest-growing student population, ELs are highly heterogeneous with varying levels of English proficiency, socioeconomic backgrounds, immigration status, and schooling experiences. Students come from varied homes and contexts with different proficiency levels of English-speaking households or none at all.

Past research has informed us that the demographic reality of students from various backgrounds and cultural experiences in the U.S. has created an increasing demand for teachers who serve them. Today's preservice teachers should expect the likelihood that their future classrooms will include students whose first language is not English (NCES, 2019). Teacher preparation programs have a role in ensuring that new teachers have adequate preparation to teach EL students in the U.S. While improvements have been made to reform teacher preparation programs, less focus has been placed on effective EL instruction at the primary level and far less at the secondary level (Ramirez, Gonzalez-Galindo, & Roy, 2016). Unfortunately, state and federal policies have not adequately prioritized efforts, funding, or raised teacher training standards to serve ELs. The American Association for Employment (2017) suggested that a certain degree of teacher shortage in the areas of Bilingual and English as-a-Second Language (ESL) still occur across school districts nationwide. According to this report, many ELs are currently being taught in mainstream classrooms with teachers who have not acquired any related ESL/EL training.

1.2 Research Questions

Addressing teacher knowledge, skills, and abilities during preservice teacher preparation remains a critical step in determining whether teachers enter the profession prepared to support EL students' needs (Feiman-Nemser, 2018; Irvine, 2003; Ball & Forzani, 2009; McDonald, Kazemi, & Kavanagh, 2013). As such, the purpose of this research study was to examine the role of teacher preparation for working with EL students. The study's primary objective was to measure preservice teachers' self-rated efficacy to explore how various education programs (e.g., traditional undergraduate, adult-degree completion, and Master of Teaching) influence their preparedness for working with EL students. The research questions for this study included: 1) What perceptions were held by K-12 preservice teachers about their preparation experiences for teaching ELs? 2) How effective do K-12 preservice teachers feel in working with EL students? and 3) What factors influence K-12 preservice teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy about working with EL students?

1.3 Review of Related Literature

Prominent scholars in the field have argued that the lack of quality teacher preparation for culturally linguistically diverse (CLD) students has harmed minority students who represent the vast linguistic diversity in the country (Bunch, 2013; Faltis & Coulter, 2007; Hammerness et al., 2005). To exacerbate these issues, districts with growing populations of CLD or EL students are taught by new teachers who do not mirror diversity patterns since the majority of college education programs are dominated by female Caucasian students (Ramirez et al., 2016). As such, it is critical to examine research that pertains to quality preparation experiences for EL students, effective teaching practices for ELs, attitudes of preservice teachers toward ELs, and the factors that influence preservice teachers' efficacy for working with ELs.

1.3.1 A Call for Quality Preservice Preparation for Teaching ELs

It is no doubt that preservice teachers can expect that their future classrooms will include EL students (NCES, 2013; NCES, 2019). There has been research to indicate that preservice teachers feel unprepared to work with ELs. A past survey by NCES (1997) revealed that only 29.5 percent of teachers felt confident in their skills from their education programs to effectively teach ELs. Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) found that teachers did not feel that their preservice programs adequately prepared them to work with ELs, and feelings of preparedness were significantly related to their confidence and abilities to teach students effectively. Research has scanned the teacher preparation requirements for ELs across institutions and found that only less than one-sixth of institutions required preservice teachers to take courses in working with ELs in the classroom (Menken & Atunéz, 2001).

A study by Turgut, Sahin, and Huerta (2016) examined the effects of preservice teachers' preparedness to teach mainstream EL students from their enrollment in a semester-long course titled, "The Language Acquisition, Development, and Learning Course." The course was designed to prepare preservice teachers with linguistically and culturally appropriate instruction and assessment for ELLs in grades K-12 so that they have skills to create learning opportunities for EL students. Written reflections of 18 preservice teachers enrolled in the course were used as the primary data collection from pre- to post-course. Findings indicated that 89% of preservice teachers felt they were not prepared for teaching ELs noting factors that included a lack of knowledge and skills, language differences between teachers and students as potential barriers to effective teaching, a lack of experience with diverse populations, and finally, a perception of personality traits that contributed to their teaching. Post-course findings indicated that 17 of the 18 preservice teachers felt better prepared to teach ELs and attributed that to the acquisition of new knowledge, having the experience and opportunity to teach ELs as part of the course which fostered the development of empathy toward ELs' academic challenges, and developing a better sense of confidence for working with EL students as part of their enrollment in the course. Thus, the study contributed to the importance of preservice course preparation for teaching ELs.

Durgunoglu and Hughes (2010) surveyed preservice teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge of ELs relating to students' demographics, strategies, and assessment practices for supporting ELs in the classroom. Ratings for perceived preparedness and self-efficacy revealed that preservice teachers did not feel prepared to teach and address the needs of EL students. Responses from preservice teachers who felt not prepared to educate EL students were correlated with poor responses on their knowledge to incorporate assessment practices. On the contrary, preservice teachers who rated themselves more prepared scored higher on knowledge of strategies and assessment practices for ELs. The researchers also conducted observations of the participants during their student teaching to verify preservice teachers' self-rated efficacy and preparedness scores. Results of the observations showed how preservice teachers neglected ELs in the classroom since they did not feel prepared or had the appropriate tools to interact with them. Moreover, cooperating teachers did not provide much guidance

to support preservice teachers' knowledge base exacerbating their self-efficacy for working with EL students. The study demonstrated that preservice teachers who felt well-prepared in their preparation programs to teach ELs were able to engender better educational opportunities for EL students since they were more confident in their abilities and interactions with their students.

Aside from feelings of preparedness, other studies have found that many preservice teachers across the country were not required to take any related courses in language or cultural diversity as part of their initial licensure (Samson & Collins, 2012). Given that the current demographic reality includes an increased number of EL students, there is a growing demand and imperative for all teacher preparation programs to incorporate ESL methodologies as part of program requirements (García et al., 2010; Bunch, 2013; Tran, 2015). In addition, scholars have reached a consensus that what teachers need to know and be able to do should be part of the preparation experience to become effective in the classroom for all students (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2011; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). The lack of preparedness of preservice teachers has influenced educator preparation programs, institutions, and policymakers to consider adopting new requirements and standards as well as addressing best practices in working with ELs.

1.3.2 What Do we Know about Effective Practices?

To provide high-quality instruction for ELs, research has indicated that the knowledge base of teachers for ELs should include competencies from these areas: second language acquisition, teaching diverse learners, culture and pragmatic language use and specific English demands, curriculum and instruction, assessment, technology, and community contexts (Abedi et al., 2003; Ballantyne et al., 2008; Banks, 2000; Bunch, 2013; Echevarria & Short, 2013; Cummins, 1981; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hammerness et al., 2005). Derived from Shulman's (1986) perspective, teachers' practice is drawn from a knowledge base that includes (a) subject matter content knowledge, (b) pedagogical content knowledge, and (c) curricular knowledge. From this perspective, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) remains critical because of the interaction between content and pedagogy where teachers learn to organize, represent, and adapt the curriculum to serve the varied abilities and diverse interests of students (Shulman, 1987).

In addition to the scholars who have advocated for a range of teaching practices, the Center for Research in Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) (2020) has issued a set of five standards drawn from the sociocultural perspective that are vital principles of effective pedagogy for all students, and especially, for culturally and linguistically diverse students. These five standards include (a) joint productive activity where teachers and students are learning and producing together, (b) language development where teachers emphasize and support language and literacy across the curriculum, (c) contextualization where teachers are intentional for making meaning of the learning by connecting school to the student's lived experiences, (d) challenging activities where teachers provide opportunities for complex thinking and problem-solving, and (e) instructional conversation where teachers provide opportunities for dialogue and allow students to express ideas through questioning and sharing, and use dialogue to assist students' learning. Thus, these standards which were extracted from years of educational research form a variety of cultural, language, racial, geographic, and economic factors that help frame effective practices for majority and minority students across all grades, content areas, and ethnic, racial, and language groups represented in the United States.

In addition to the CREDE standards, research has identified the need for preparation programs to include content knowledge to help preservice teachers gain cultural awareness and effective methods for working with EL students. Hutchinson's (2013) study reviewed the effects of a three-credit course taken by preservice teachers to prepare them for working with ELs. The course required preservice teachers to observe ESL support classrooms for three days over 10 weeks, collect data, and record their observations and experiences. Preservice teachers submitted written reflections and results showed that they had limited experiences working with EL students in mainstream classrooms. A study conducted by Torres and Tackett (2016) on 199 preservice teachers' beliefs for teaching EL students found that candidates who took CLD courses as compared to candidates who did not take CLD courses felt better prepared for working with CLD students. The study suggested how CLD courses and exposure to EL students in the field were beneficial for enhancing candidates' beliefs since participants in the study reported higher self-efficacy and confidence for educating ELs in their future classrooms as compared to candidates who did not have similar opportunities. Finally, Schneider's study (2019) examined preservice teachers' reflections on their learning from a 2-credit foundations course in their education program. The authors collected data at two points. The first round of data collected during the introductory phase of the course showed that preservice teachers had negative attitudes and preconceived notions about EL students. They did not understand the difficulty of ELs having to learn a second language and believed that ELs' poor academic performance was related to their laziness or lack of motivation. The second round of data collected during the

final phase of the course with an embedded field experience showed that preservice teachers recognized the specific needs of ELs, considered themselves advocates for EL students due to learning about the laws and policies for EL instruction, and felt better prepared to work with EL students. The results suggested the need to introduce education students early in the preparation experiences as well as elevating the need for field experience so that teacher candidates learn about the specific needs of EL students while working with students.

Aside from foundational courses and field-based experiences, research has also suggested the essential need for preparation programs to provide opportunities for candidates to earn specialized ESL endorsements or certifications. Tran (2015) surveyed over 144 teachers and found that teachers who had exposure to courses in their preservice preparation as well as earned an ESL certification had improved self-efficacy and confidence. The study argued the need for embedded preservice coursework experiences to create substantial change in the teacher development process and for building teacher capacity to better serve EL students. As such, some teacher education programs have revised their programs to include foundational courses and curricula for EL teaching.

1.3.3 Relationship of Attitudes with EL Teaching

While a clear picture is known in terms of the requisite knowledge, skills, and pedagogy for effectively teaching ELs, there is a lack of understanding of the attitudes of preservice teachers toward teaching ELs as they enter preparation programs. What is known is that most U.S. teachers come from European-American, monolingual English, middle-class backgrounds, (Gay, 2005) and therefore, do not share the same cultural frames and perspectives as their students (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). The disconnect can lead to teachers not being able to respond to the educational needs of ELs, hence, the attitudes of preservice teachers toward EL students deserve attention and focus as part of the education journey of teachers.

Research has suggested that due to preservice teachers' limited experiences in working with students from diverse cultural and language backgrounds, a cultural and social gap exists between individuals entering teacher education and the students that they intend to teach (Cockrell et al., 1999). This lack of experience and interaction with diverse populations can lead to negative attitudes and perceptions resulting in stereotypes, implicit bias, and misconceptions (Souto-Manning, 2013). A study by Taylor, Kumi-Yeboah, and Ringlaben (2016) found that many teacher education programs do not adequately prepare teachers for the amount of diversity they will experience in their classrooms even though candidates agreed and expressed the need for more resources for diversity-related issues as part of their preparation experiences. Thus, the authors suggested that preparation programs need to adapt to changes and require significant training for preservice teachers so that they understand and recognize the importance of students' socio-cultural backgrounds, religious values, and language diversity as critical elements and the importance of embedding them into educational experiences for students.

Ajayi (2011) studied approximately 57 ESL teachers' identities (e.g., Hispanic, African-American, and White) and how they mediated their teacher roles while working with students in urban classrooms. Hispanic teachers from the study were able to relate to their ESL students because they went through the same process having been EL students before during their own educational experiences which promoted their awareness and understanding of how to teach ESL and the meaning behind the ESL identification. As such, Hispanic teachers felt more culturally and personally connected to Hispanic ESL students and they recognized how schools have undermined the experiences of ESL students as well as disrespected students who come from non-native English-speaking homes. Hispanic teachers in the study shared similar cultural identities with students from Spanish-speaking homes so they were more likely to promote multiculturalism and integrate students' backgrounds into lessons. Similarly, African-American teachers in the study were able to relate to their ESL students as ethnic minorities and recognized the implications in terms of access and resources. They understood the challenges and needs faced by their ESL students in the classrooms as well as the negative stigma associated with the "ESL" label that created lower expectations for ESL students having experienced first-hand the label of "uneducated" from their own schooling experiences in the United States. As such, they were willing to share their personal experiences with students, were creative in teaching methods to incorporate students' ethnic and cultural identities in lessons and were conscious of providing their ESL students opportunities to use their Spanish to bridge learning from school to home or vice versa. White teachers, on the other hand, noted that their upbringings were very different than their ESL students having attended schools that lacked diversity and lived in predominantly White communities. They viewed teaching ESL as a learning opportunity for themselves given that many ESL students were helping teachers learn about non-native students' languages and cultures. As such, they took on a more cross-cultural approach to teaching enacting several different strategies such as using visuals, *realia*, scaffolding techniques, conferencing, and writers' workshops to help their ESL students learn. White teachers were focused on outcomes during teaching rather than embedding students' identities in the classroom. They viewed their

roles as helping students learn the value of English in America, and therefore, believed that their ESL students should assimilate and immerse into mainstream culture. Thus, the study showed how minority teachers' sociocultural identities with familiar marginalized experiences regarding race with EL students can affect the way they interact with EL students. The study advocated for having positive attitudes about ELs and designing culturally relevant pedagogy for EL students' success in the classroom.

Other research extended the recommendation that includes the need for preservice and practicing teachers to develop affirming beliefs about ELs as well as an inclusive pedagogy for diverse students (Lucas & Villegas, 2011; McDonald et al., 2013). Guided by the theoretical lens of a culturally responsive linguistic framework (Lucas & Villegas, 2011), teachers must be able to examine the underlying reasons for instructional decisions for ELs while challenging previously held perceptions of ELs to develop their sociocultural consciousness (de Jong & Harper, 2011). Teachers should be more reflective in their practice to challenge their own biases as they become more intentional in bridging the home and school experience for CLD and EL students (Ramirez et al., 2016). Teachers also need to have a better understanding of diverse students and their families to promote positive relationships while learning how to integrate relevant instruction that honors the assets that EL students bring to the classroom.

1.3.4 Factors that can Affect Preservice Teachers' Confidence and Self-efficacy

Many teacher education programs do not require any language proficiency of their students even if research pointed to the benefits of a second language (Pizarro, 2013). The study of having another language (whether at home or abroad) has shown value for students as they recognize how an additional language is an advantage, especially when used in daily life. Coady, Harper, and de Jong (2011) suggested that teachers develop some level of bilingual proficiency after they surveyed Florida teachers and found the crucial benefits of bilingualism for increasing the cultural knowledge of teachers. The analysis of 85 survey responses in their study revealed a positive association between teachers' ability to speak a language other than English and their level of preparedness to teach ELs. The study highlighted several recommendations in preservice teacher education which included practicum field experiences to practice with EL students, coursework with deeper content knowledge or teaching ELs, and the promotion of EL students' home languages and backgrounds as part of preservice teachers' foundational understanding. Thus, Wessels et al. (2017) surveyed 244 preservice teachers about their attitudes toward teaching ELs and found that those who had acquired a level of second language proficiency had improved confidence in their abilities to work with ELs.

Studying abroad and international experiences have also been shown to positively affect preservice teachers' confidence levels in working with diverse students. Past research by Merryfield (1999) suggested that these experiences support the education of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are the basis of decision-making in an interconnected and culturally pluralistic world. Willard-Holt (2001) reported the value of international experiences on preservice teachers who visited Mexico as they documented the challenges and realizations of being a minority. Preservice teachers in the study reported a conceptual change in how they viewed teaching through a global lens and were less likely to prejudge students based on their cultural or linguistic difference. Similarly, Pence and Macgillivray (2007) found that international field experiences challenged preservice teachers' preconceptions of others as well as allowed them to question the dynamics of how schools should be structured. Other researchers captured the benefits of international travel experiences of preservice teachers to improve self-assurance, increase cultural awareness, dispel stereotypes and misconceptions, and ultimately, promote respect and understanding of all people and cultures (Sahin, 2008; Wessels et al., 2017). These studies point to how international experiences or the lack of them can influence the confidence and self-efficacy of preservice teachers.

Research has continued to capitalize on the notion that teacher expertise included a solid base of research-informed strategies, an understanding of the second language theories, a foundation in the content areas, an understanding of the effects that home and school cultures, and an appreciation of the identities and schooling experiences of ethnically diverse students. (Schleppegrell, 2004; Téllez & Waxman, 2006; Valdés, Capitelli, & Alvarez, 2010). Moreover, as aforementioned, having a relatable experience such as proficiency in a second language (Wessels et al., 2017), having field-based opportunities (Torres & Tackett, 2016), and having professional development or specialized training (Echevarria, Short, & Vogt, 2008; Kazemi & Hubbard 2008; Tran, 2014) could impact the confidence and cultural competency levels of preservice teachers as they work with EL students.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design

A mixed method was used to carry out the study to gather quantitative and qualitative data given the strengths of each approach. For quantitative data, a survey was adapted from an existing instrument used for inservice teachers to gather perceptions of preparedness in teaching ELs (Tran, 2014). The survey's internal consistency reliability score for preparedness items on the survey was 0.979 and for efficacy items was 0.9782 using Cronbach's alpha demonstrating a high intercorrelation between items. The survey was administered online to preservice teachers enrolled in various undergraduate, adult degree completion, and graduate education programs during the spring semester. A short description on the first page of the online survey included a message about voluntary participation, potential risks, the ability to skip any questions or stop at any time, anonymity, and protection, and offering consent by checking a box before completing the survey. Eligible participants included approximately 100 preservice teachers who were matriculated at a private university located in the Pacific Northwest completing their last semester of preparation for initial licensure for K-12 instruction offered at the state level. Preservice teachers were enrolled in three different types of programs (e.g., traditional undergraduate, adult degree completion, and Master of Teaching (MAT)). A total of 77 surveys (N=77) were returned. The survey instrument addressed teachers' knowledge and perceptions in their preservice course experiences as well as self-efficacy beliefs about ESL methodologies, multicultural education, and cultural/linguistic diversity during their practicum experience. Qualitative data included open-ended narrative responses submitted by candidates on what they perceived were most beneficial to their preparation experiences for working with ELs.

2.2 Instrument Used & Analysis

The instrument included 30 Likert scale items that were grouped into four categories: culture, teaching strategies, teaching behaviors, and assessment practices respectively. Teacher perception items were rated using a six-point Likert scale with one being not at all prepared to six being very well prepared. Teacher efficacy beliefs were rated using a similar six-point Likert scale but with one being very ineffective to six being very effective. Some closed-ended items included: candidates' demographic information (e.g., gender, ethnicity, bilingualism); setting and type of placement classroom during full-time student teaching (e.g., self-contained, team-teaching, etc.); the total number of hours completed in all practicum experiences ESL/EL coursework experience; the type of ESL program that the placement school supports (e.g., pull-out, push-in, sheltered/content-based); whether they took courses related to ESL/EL methodologies during their preparation program; whether they were obtaining an ESL certification as part of licensure, whether they had experience with ELs during clinical practicums; percent of ELs identified in the placement school; and whether there were EL students in their placement classroom. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to generate findings and to make comparisons across groups (Johnson & Christenson, 2004). Once the surveys were completed and returned, descriptive analysis, compare means, and paired t-tests were employed in Excel and SPSS to identify whether any correlations existed within variables using a statistical significance p-value (less than .05). For qualitative data, an inductive coding method was employed. Participants' responses were coded with in vivo codes (Creswell, 2013). Thus, codes were applied to keywords, chunks of text, and phrases to open-ended comments to generate themes to supplement qualitative data.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis of demographic information and related variables associated with candidates' program and practicum experiences are included in Tables 1 and 2 following.

Table 1. Demographics of candidates (N=77)

Age	Ethnicity	Gender
4% < 21 years-old	85% White/Caucasian	
67% 21-25 years-old	2% Black/African American	87% Females
14% 26-30 years-old	9% Latino/Hispanic	13% Males
13% 31-35 years-old	7% Asian/Pacific Islanders	

Table 2. Other variables from the survey (N=77)

Type of preparation program (K-12)	Obtaining ESL Certification	Bilingual in 2nd language	Taken courses related to EL students	Types of practicum-school settings	EL students in practicum experiences (if any)	Participated in professional development related to EL students during practicum (number of hours)
28% Traditional undergraduate (N=22)						38% NONE (N=30)
18% Adult-degree (N=14)	55% YES (N=42)	38% YES (N=30)	60% YES (N=46)	75% Elem (N=58)	89% YES (N=69)	33% < 8 hours (N=24)
completion	45% NO (N=35)	61% NO (N=47)	40% NO (N=31)	17% Middle (N=13)	11% NO (N=8)	24% 8-16 hours (N=19)
52% Masters of Teaching (MAT) (N=41)				8% High (N=6)		5% > than 2 days (N=4)

Candidates' self-rated mean averages across the 30 items related to the two scales of perceptions of preparedness and self-efficacy for working with EL students are included in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean Averages for Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Preparedness and Self-efficacy

Perception and Self-efficacy Item	Mean Perceptions	Score Mean Score Self-efficacy
<u>Culture</u>		
Develop a deep sense of cultural knowledge.	3.81	4.23
Develop an understanding and sensitivity that appreciates differences as well as similarities.	4.58	4.73
Incorporate cultural values into the curriculum.	3.81	4.21
Include students' home cultures into the classroom.	3.81	4.05
Develop relationships with families.	3.96	4.00
Engage families in educational experiences of their students.	3.68	3.88
<u>Teaching strategies</u>		
Encourage students to use their native language.	3.42	3.91
Tap into student's prior knowledge.	4.57	4.61
Use realia (real-life) objects as a teaching strategy.	4.31	4.51
Help students connect new knowledge to prior experiences.	4.50	4.65
Use a variety of vocabulary strategies in lessons.	4.14	4.38
Use visuals, nonverbal cues, demonstrations, and graphic aids as teaching tools.	4.64	4.65
Use a variety of technologies to assist in students' understanding.	4.23	4.35
Incorporate total physical response (TPR) methods in teaching.	3.35	3.73
<u>Teaching behaviors</u>		
Establish opportunities for students to interact.	4.75	4.81
Establish opportunities for students to speak to reinforce learning.	4.56	4.67
Adjust the speed of English speech delivery.	4.07	4.31
Model appropriate English use.	4.62	4.73
Provide oral directions that are clear and appropriate.	4.57	4.67

Create opportunities for students to practice their oral English.	4.49	4.56
Create opportunities for students to practice their written English.	4.36	4.50
Encourage all students to elaborate on their responses.	4.51	4.54
Scaffold instruction to help students understand concepts.	4.41	4.47
Use a variety of hands-on activities.	4.46	4.53
Incorporate student's responses into lessons.	4.47	4.47
Provide appropriate wait time for students to respond.	4.49	4.52
Encourage students to respond using higher order questioning.	4.43	4.36
Provide appropriate accommodations based on student's language proficiency.	4.00	4.27
Provide various formats of assessments according to student's intelligence and/or learning style.	4.14	4.21
Use a variety of technologies as alternative assessments.	3.98	4.04

Four perception items that received the lowest mean scores included: incorporating total physical response (TPR) into the curriculum at 3.35; encouraging students to use their native language at 3.42, incorporating cultural values into the curriculum at 3.81, and incorporating students' home cultures into the curriculum at 3.81. Nonetheless, mean averages did slightly improve from perception of preparedness to self-efficacy on 29 of the 30 items for preservice teachers across programs.

3.2 Correlational Analysis

Inferential statistics in SPSS were used to find whether any statistical significance existed with candidates' demographic backgrounds and a variety of other variables that included the type of program that candidates were completing for certification (i.e. traditional-bachelor's, adult-completion-bachelor's, or graduate-master's), whether candidates were obtaining an ESOL certification, whether candidates had ELs students in their practicum placement, and whether candidates were bilingual in another language. Paired t-tests were run against the 30 items for perceptions of preparedness and self-efficacy for working with ELs. Results indicated that statistical significance existed on the scale that measured perception items with a variety of variables such as candidate's ethnicity; candidate's program of completion (undergraduate versus graduate degrees); and whether candidates pursued an ESOL certification in addition to their initial teacher certification. The results of the tests are included below.

Ethnicity. After separating participant's ethnic backgrounds into two categories for White (N=63) and Candidates of Color (N=14), t-tests were run, and significant statistical differences were found between candidates of color versus white candidates of color in regards to their preparedness to:

Develop a deep sense of cultural knowledge ($t(27.286) = -2.41, p = .023$).

(1) incorporate cultural values into the curriculum ($t(75) = -2.181, p = .032$).

(2) include students' home cultures into the classroom ($t(37.784) = -4.284, p = .000$).

(3) encourage students to use their native language ($t(27.081) = -2.681, p = .012$).

(4) use a variety of technologies to assist in student's understanding ($t(75) = -2.676, p = .012$).

(5) incorporate total physical response (TPR) methods in teaching ($t(75) = -2.153, p = .042$).

Program. After separating the participant's program of completion into two levels for the Bachelor's degree (combined numbers for traditional and adult-degree completion; N=36) and the Master of Teaching degree (N=41), t-tests were run and the following significant statistical differences were found between candidates pursuing a bachelor's degree versus candidates pursuing a master's degree in regards to their preparedness to:

(1) include students' home cultures into the classroom ($t(75) = 2.299, p = .024$).

(2) encourage students to use their native language ($t(75) = 2.064, p = .011$).

(3) incorporate total physical response (TPR) methods in teaching ($t(75) = 3.982, p = .000$).

Certification. After separating whether candidates pursued an ESOL certification into two levels for Yes (N=42) and No (N=35), t-tests were run, and significant statistical differences were found between candidates' pursuing

an ESOL certification versus candidates who were not pursuing an ESOL certification regarding to their preparedness to:

- (1) include students' home cultures into the classroom ($t(75) = 2.427, p = .018$).
- (2) encourage students to use their native language ($t(75) = 2.404, p = .019$).
- (3) incorporate total physical response (TPR) methods in teaching ($t(75) = 4.139, p = .000$).

Qualitative data from the open-ended items on the survey included responses on what candidates perceived were most beneficial to their preparation experiences for working with ELs. As previously mentioned, responses were coded using in vivo codes (Creswell, 2013) taken directly from participants' comments. The codes were applied to keywords, chunks of text, and phrases from open-ended comments. After collating the data into groups identified by the code, themes were generated into three big ideas: (a) SIOP-related strategies learned in coursework, (b) workshops attended at placement schools that were specific to the needs of ELs, and (c) having the ability to work with EL students in practicum experiences. These themes are included in Table 4.

Table 4. Themes from open-end responses (pseudonyms used)

SIOP-related strategies from courses	Workshops specific to ELs' needs	Opportunities to work with EL students
<p>The SIOP model presented in class and the lesson creations using this model during the entire program assisted immensely in my practicum placement! (Mary, Caucasian, female, adult degree)</p> <p>I feel that I have many different ways to teach a variety of learners and get kids learning through GLAD and SIOP strategies. (Keira, African-American, female, traditional undergrad)</p> <p>Learning about sentence stems; another specific SIOP strategies. (Ashley, female, traditional undergrad)</p> <p>I would say that the most beneficial class has been the SIOP class. (Tori, female, traditional undergrad)</p>	<p>The workshops we had for ESOL were helpful. (Terry, Caucasian, female, MAT)</p> <p>The workshop on a Saturday class specifically about working with ESOL. (Samantha, Caucasian, female, MAT)</p> <p>The 8+ hours of our ELL workshops!! (Gertrude, Caucasian, female, MAT)</p> <p>I appreciated the workshops that were provided by a bilingual instructor. XX was a wealth of knowledge. (Ella, Caucasian, female, MAT)</p>	<p>In my student teaching placement, I have a newcomer student at a beginning proficiency level. She came with no English whatsoever. Working closely with this student has been the most valuable learning experience for me, because it has given me a chance to watch the progression of language acquisition in the early stages as well as stretch my understanding about ESOL strategies. (Rachel, Caucasian, female, traditional undergrad)</p> <p>The most valuable experiences really happened in my practicum. I have the whole gambit of ELLs in my classroom from the kids who moved here last year from Ukraine to my kid who missed 3 months because he was detained in Mexico and a kid whose English is nearly perfect and is struggling because his mom is being deported. My ELLs in my own classroom made all the research real. I had to find strategies that worked for them in their language, make up for lost time and understanding, and connect with them by learning some words in their language. It's been quite the journey, but definitely having a practicum experience with a high volume of ELLs was my most valuable learning experience. (Wilma, Caucasian, female, traditional undergrad)</p> <p>The most valuable learning experience was not through courses but through personal experience and through clinical student teaching hours, I had 10 ELL students, I learned so much from my CT and from the ESOL specialist at our school. (Jing, Asian/Pacific Islander, female, adult degree)</p>

4. Discussion

Mean averages from the perception and the self-efficacy scale from the survey helped to answer the first two research questions 1) What perceptions were held by K-12 preservice teachers about their preparation experiences for teaching ELs? and 2) How effective do K-12 preservice teachers feel in working with EL students?

It is clear from the mean scores represented in Table 3 that preservice teachers generally felt prepared from the 30-item statement related to perceptions about culture, teaching strategies, teaching behaviors, and assessment practices with self-rated scores ranging from 3.35 to 4.75. Preservice teachers generally felt efficacious in their abilities to work with ELs as indicated in self-rated scores ranging from 3.88 to 4.81 from the 30-item statement related to culture, teaching strategies, teaching behaviors, and assessment practices. There were statistical differences in teachers' perceptions of preparedness especially in terms of which preparation program they were enrolled in (e.g., bachelor's or master's) as well as whether they were receiving an ESL/ESOL certification or not. Candidates who were earning their bachelor's degree were enrolled in one of two preparation programs (traditional or adult-degree) which had embedded required coursework, a total of 13-credits, which allowed them to earn an ESL/ESOL state endorsement in addition to the initial licensure to teach in K-12 classrooms, contingent on the completion of all program requirements including passing scores on state content exams, ESOL Praxis, and the edTPA performance assessment. The 13-credit coursework consisted of four courses: Intercultural Communication (2 credits), Applied Linguistics (4 credits), Curriculum Design with ESOL (3 credits), and Classroom Assessment for All Learners (4 credits). The courses were designed sequentially, and each course was taken alongside other education courses during the program.

Given that the two bachelor's programs (traditional and adult-degree completion combined, $N=36$) required the 13-credit course content as part of candidates' preparation experience, it is without a doubt that these preservice teachers felt better prepared to include student's home cultures into the classroom ($t(75) = 2.299$, $p = .024$); encourage students to use their native language ($t(75) = 2.064$, $p = .011$); and incorporate total physical response (TPR) methods in teaching ($t(75) = 3.982$, $p = .000$) as opposed to preservice teachers who were earning their masters' degrees ($N=41$).

It is also important to note that some of the preservice teachers enrolled in the traditional bachelor's program had completed studying abroad and international experiences. While it is unclear how many of them ($N=22$) studied abroad, all of them had opportunities during their junior year (the year before clinical practice) to engage in Juniors Abroad, an intensive intercultural international experience where students travel overseas with university faculty for approximately three weeks to fulfill requirements of a cross-cultural general education course. Thus, the international experiences occurred in a variety of countries including but not limited to Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Thailand, Tibet, China, Vietnam, South Korea, Cambodia, Panama, Honduras, Guatemala, Peru, Ecuador, Russia, Israel, Croatia, Morocco, New Zealand, and Australia. As a result, the international opportunities that the preservice teachers engaged in likely allowed them to gain a deeper cultural perspective and also potentially affected their perceptions of preparedness with increased assurance and conviction for working with EL students as confirmed by prior research (Pence & Macgillivray, 2007; Sahin, 2008; Wessels et al., 2017; Willard-Holt, 2001).

Findings from paired t-tests related to candidates pursuing an ESL/ESOL certification as opposed to those who did not pursue an ESL/ESOL certification support the notion of quality preparation experiences. As such, teachers who sought an ESL/ESOL certification ($N=42$) as compared to those who did not ($N=35$) indicated they felt better prepared to include students' home cultures in the classroom ($t(75) = 2.427$, $p = .018$); encourage students to use their native language ($t(75) = 2.404$, $p = .019$); and incorporate total physical response (TPR) methods in teaching ($t(75) = 4.139$, $p = .000$).

The correlational examples relating to ethnicity, program, and certification may have influenced preservice teachers' perceptions and efficacy, thus, helping to answer research question 3) What factors influence K-12 preservice teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy about working with EL students? These findings suggest the increased need for teacher education programs to embed components of ESL/ESOL coursework material for preservice teacher candidates with their initial certification so that they have the foundation necessary to work with EL students (Samson, 2012; Schneider, 2019; Tran, 2015). Themes from open-ended comments further augmented findings to support the quality of preparation experiences in building teachers' pedagogical skills for working with EL students. As such, the specificity of coursework material that infused the SIOP model as required in the Curriculum Design with ESOL courses within the bachelor's programs (traditional undergraduate program and adult-degree completion) improved teachers' perceptions for working with EL students with

feelings of preparedness that were represented in the remarks provided by Mary, Keira, Tori, and Ashley. In addition, Samantha, Gertrude, and Ella, three students from the master's program, revealed that their experiences in the one-day ESL workshop which infused instructional strategies were the most practical and useful. The emphasis was on the fact that the workshop specifically tailored the content to help them learn CREDE standards as well as research-based strategies to effectively work with EL students, thus, promoting their positive perceptions. Through the required courses and the workshops that they attended, preservice teachers across programs emphasized how they drew on certain ESL practices to influence their perceptions and self-efficacy for future classrooms. Their comments reiterated notions from previous studies that continually call for an imperative of preparation programs to require ESL coursework in terms of theoretical, cultural, or second language methodologies as they foster deeper content knowledge and the pedagogy needed to better serve the growing population of ELs in American classrooms (García et al., 2010; Bunch, 2013; Tran, 2015). Moreover, the finding revealed the importance of ESOL coursework and the ability to foster preservice teachers' insight for educating ELs with increased confidence that can transfer into their future classrooms (Torres & Tackett, 2016).

In addition to coursework, preservice teachers should have opportunities in their practicum and clinical experiences to work with EL students. Table 2 indicated that 89% of participants (N=69) of the preservice teachers in this study were involved in practicum settings that included EL students. Comments from Rachel, Wilma, and Jing echoed the importance of practicum and clinical experiences which provided them with meaningful interactions with EL students to pull from theoretical components of language acquisition and work alongside cooperating teachers to transfer understandings into classroom practice. Wilma, a traditional undergraduate preservice teacher responded, "The most valuable experiences really happened in my practicum. I have the whole gambit of ELLs in my classroom from the kids who moved here last year from Ukraine to my kid who missed 3 months because he was detained in Mexico and a kid whose English is nearly perfect and is struggling because his mom is being deported. My ELLs in my own classroom made all the research real. I had to find strategies that worked for them in their language, make up for lost time and understanding, and connect with them by learning some words in their language. It's been quite the journey, but definitely having a practicum experience with a high volume of ELLs was my most valuable learning experience."

Wilma's remarks indicated how practicum opportunities enabled her to understand the deeper needs of EL students to enact scaffolding techniques learned from preparation courses within a real-life context of teaching and learning. Experiences such as the ones described by Wilma, Rachel, and Jing represent the significance of quality preparation experiences for improving teachers' pedagogical toolboxes as they engage in transforming theory to practice when working with EL students. As such, their comments highlight the importance of fieldwork and that preparation programs should entrench similar approaches that allow for meaningful opportunities between teacher candidates and EL students to build teacher competency and capacity for working with EL students (Torres & Tackett, 2016). Thus, the context where the learning occurred for these preservice teachers likely influenced their perceptions and confidence levels as they worked alongside EL students to become more efficacious and proficient in their craft. Coursework experiences must also engage candidates in reflective dialogue from their fieldwork to support ongoing teacher development specific to the needs of ELs as well as make necessary improvements in program design so that preservice teachers are adequately prepared for working with ELs in their future classrooms.

Finally, preparation programs should continue cultivating development in sociocultural consciousness (Lucas & Villegas, 2011) to affirm the identities of students' home cultures and languages through classroom projects and activities. The significance of the ethnicity finding revealed the difference of non-white preservice teachers as compared to their white counterparts who were more confident in their abilities to embed students' culture in the classroom. As such, the non-white teachers in this study (N=14) felt better prepared to incorporate cultural values into the curriculum, to include students' home cultures in the classroom, and to encourage students to use their native language. Moreover, the significant finding of this study concerning teachers' ethnicity reverberated a previous study by Ajayi (2011) who found that minority teachers were able to mediate their roles as they merged past experiences with students' present challenges to codify culturally competent lesson plans in the classroom for EL students.

5. Conclusion

This study provided an example of preservice teachers' perceptions of preparedness for working with EL students with recommendations for improving teacher preparation to create confident teachers to serve the increasing population of EL students. The literature on preparing teachers for EL students continues to grow with emerging studies on how to integrate EL teaching with content instruction. The field has become clearer on the content and curriculum for preparing teachers to serve EL students; however, continued work should be centered

on structures and procedures for supporting teacher learning in preservice education programs and through practice (Von Esch & Kavanagh, 2018; Grossman et al., 2009). Thus, the structures that outline and support these programs may also include required EL courses across undergraduate and graduate levels, adaptations to existing courses, or field requirements with EL students. Procedure changes may include mentoring or coaching options that allow for cross-collaborative experiences between preservice teachers/mentors/university supervisors to allow preservice teachers to enact pedagogies for EL students that they have acquired from professional feedback and more expert peers (Von Esch & Kavanagh, 2018). Emphasis and attention for teacher learning should be infused across all content areas and within teacher education programs with course-embedded projects and opportunities to engage in cross-cultural experiences with families, students, or others (e.g., community engagement, study abroad, international travel, etc.). Finally, preparation programs should address educational policies that have adversely affected EL students in the context of language, class, and race ideologies to increase beginning teachers' understandings and competencies for the praxis of social change to allow for the design of equitable academic experiences and culturally informed lessons during clinical experiences. In this way, teachers are better prepared to tackle a variety of content and salient issues that can occur in their practicum settings with appropriate tools to enact relevant pedagogy. The future of creating confident teachers remains paramount as quality preparation experiences permeate for the next generation of teachers to build cultural competence and inculcate positive attitudes of EL students for meaningful change and action in classroom practice.

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