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Issues, Challenges, and Needs of High School ESL and Content-Area Teachers in the Richmond Metropolitan Area

Seonhee Cho
Virginia Commonwealth University

HaNa Kim
Virginia Commonwealth University

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Seonhee Cho, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
MERC Research Director
Virginia Commonwealth University
School of Education
Department of Teaching and Learning
Richmond, Virginia

HaNa Kim
MERC Research Assistant
Virginia Commonwealth University

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Table of Contents

Introduction

In recent years, public schools in Central Virginia [1] have experienced a fast growing ESL population. School districts throughout the state have reported increases in their ESL population that range from 300% to 700% in the past ten years. Unlike states with big cities that traditionally have a high immigrant population, the Virginia schools where the number of English language learners (ELLs) has increased recently, are less likely prepared to meet the needs of this particular group of students (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004). With the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002), academic success is increasingly being measured by standardized exams in a variety of content areas, such as math, science and social studies (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Responding to the NCLB act, Virginia state policy expects all ELLs to demonstrate not only language proficiency but also academic proficiency in content area after their first year in the U.S. school system. This one-year exemption policy does not agree with the research findings that it takes 5-7 years, or even longer, for ESL students to achieve average grade-level performance (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1981, 1989, 1996s).

High school ELLs are particularly a vulnerable population. Second language acquisition becomes more difficult as students get older, the work high school students are expected to do is more sophisticated. Further, the extensive amount of subject-matter background knowledge, complex language structures, and large content-specific vocabulary are required. Collier's (1987) comparison of different age groups of ESL students' standardized test scores showed that arrivals at ages 12-15 experienced the greatest difficulty compared to their ages 8-11 and 5-7 counterparts. Thus, students

[1] The Central Virginia in this study includes MERC (Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium) school districts: Richmond City, Chesterfield, Henrico, Hanover, Colonial Heights, Powhatan, and Hopewell public schools.

arriving in the U.S. after their early teens, with limited schooling experience, a not-so-supportive family, or supportive school system, are likely to be more challenged and disadvantaged than their younger counterparts. Despite the needs of special attention and assistance to this particular group of students, ELLs who are mainstreamed with native speakers are often marginalized within the classroom (Harklau, 1994; Sharkey & Layzer, 2000). In some schools, it is reported that ELLs are placed in a low academic track (Harklau, 1994, 1999; Sharkey & Layzer, 2000). Either way, these students are neither exposed to a rich academic curriculum nor are they given the special assistance that they need to achieve grade-level academic proficiency.

The difficulty of meeting rigorous high-school academic standards is exacerbated by the choice of increasing numbers of immigrants that settle in areas that have little experience with immigration. Then they form relatively small immigrant enclaves where their numbers are too small to justify sheltered content-area classes such ESL science and ESL social studies. Becker (2002) claims that the demographics of the institution in which ELL's study can have an effect on the services available to them. In a large ESL program where ELL body constitutes 12% or more population, it is more feasible to offer sheltered content-area classes to help ESL students have access to content with special language assistance. However, small ESL programs with 5% or less ESL student population are less likely to offer sheltered content-area classes. Most ESL-centered high schools in Central Virginia fall into the latter category. Thus, sheltered content-area classes are virtually non-existent.

Literature Review

English Language Learners' Major Variables of Academic Success

Collier (1987, 1989) identified the major variables to affect ELLs' academic success are: age on arrival, length of residence in the United States and grade of entry into U.S. schools, formal education background including their grade-level content-knowledge, exposure to formal school education, family background such as parents' educational and economic status, prior exposure to western and urban lifestyles. Cummins (1981) classifies ELLs' language needs in two areas: BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). The former is the language students need to communicate on a daily basis, while the latter involves academic language that students need in content-area classrooms. Most uses of language in school fall into context-reduced, cognitively demanding school language (e.g., CALP) by fourth grade (Collier, 1987, 1989). According to Collier's (1989) analysis of ESL students' high-stakes testing scores, students arriving at ages 8 to 12, with a few years of L1 (First Language) school experiences in their home country, take 5 to 7 years to reach the average grade level performance by native speakers, while students with no schooling in their L1 may take possibly as long as 7 to 10 years, or never reach the average performance by native speakers without special assistance. What is notable in her research is that there is a close correlation between ESL students' schooling experience in their home countries and their second language (L2) academic performance. Therefore, students' first language (L1) and L2 literacy are closely related and generate positive impacts. From this angle, it is encouraged to use students' L1 in building their background knowledge of content subject.

Thus, Collier (1989) argues that "Consistent, uninterrupted cognitive academic development in all subjects throughout students' schooling is more important than the number of hours of L2 instruction for successful academic achievement in a second language" (p.527). Likewise, Echevarria, Vogt & Short (2004) note that "Well-implemented, cognitively challenging, not segregated, and sustained programs of five to six years duration" (p. 8) determines ESL students' successful academic achievements. All these claims equally value ELLs' cognitive development as well as English language developments.

Teaching English Through Content

A number of studies have suggested that teaching language through content is the most effective way of helping ELLs' academic language development (Gibbons, 2002; Harkalu, 1994; Layzer, 2000; Reeves, 2004; Sharkey & Carolyn, 2000; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). While learning English, ELLs should be able to simultaneously learn academic content. Because classroom environment is full of authentic and meaningful language sources, students are more motivated to learn than language only classroom. Further, students are able to learn grade-level content knowledge with opportunities provided to practice school or academic languages such as discussions and articulation of their thinking skills in a contextualized manner (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). Gibbons (2002) claims that "We cannot put ESL students' academic development on hold while they are learning the language of instruction. Ultimately, if second language learners are not to be disadvantaged in their long-term learning, and are to have the time and opportunity to learn the subject-specific registers of school, they need access to an ongoing language-focused program across the whole curriculum" (p.5).

Opposed to the claims that integration of content and language is the most efficient curriculum, Harklau's (1994) study revealed that ESL instruction did not match ESL students' academic needs in mainstream classrooms and that content-area classrooms were not matched with ESLs' needs. The findings of the Harklau's (1994) study showed that the curricula of ESL and mainstream classes were disconnected and that the mainstream classes failed to engage ESL students in academic language learning. While ESL classes deal with various language proficiency levels with fragmented and isolated, changing curricula, the content area classrooms require continuity of curriculum with the assumption of students' mastery of previous level. In terms of language input and interactions, content area classrooms have meaningful and authentic language uses though the focus of content subject is not in language development, whereas ESL classes offer contrived, slow-paced, remedial language instruction. Based on her findings, Harklau (1994, 1999) requests more responsive content-area instruction to ELLs' needs and more responsive ESL instruction to the needs of ELLs in content-area.

Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching English Language Learners

Penfield's (1987) study showed that ESL teachers and content-area teachers blamed each other for ESL students' academic failures. Content-area teachers did not believe that they were responsible for ELLs' learning, whereas ESL teachers perceived their own responsibilities as limited since the ESL students spent most of their time in mainstream classes. For instance, content-area teachers stated, "The ESL teacher's job is to take credit for bright students and to assign blame for slower students" (a content-area teacher in Penfield, 1987, p.34); "ESL is the job of ESL teachers. We are not hired to teach an ESL student English" (a content-area teacher in Penfield, 1987, p.34); "These students don't

even have basic English skills, and here they are in the middle school where they are supposed to read book chapters and novels and do literature study. I am an English teacher; I should be teaching literature, not the ABCs" (an English teacher in Fu's study, 2004, p.9). In response to the situation, an ESL teacher's response was: "Is the content-area classroom teaching them anything? These students spend most of their time in that room but only have me for an hour or two a day. How can they expect me to teach them everything" (an ESL teacher in Fu's study, 2004, p.9). Furthermore, ESL teachers' lack of expertise in content-areas makes them feel insecure and uneasy about teaching content-areas. As earlier noted, enhancement of standardized curriculum and tests with NCLB, accountability of content-area teachers for the results of standardized tests is greater than before. As a result, content-area teachers at secondary schools experience more frustration in having ESL students in their classrooms. In summary, it seems that ESL teachers believe learning in content-area classrooms benefit ELLs both in terms of language and cognitive development, while the content-area teachers believe ELLs need English skills first before they integrate into their content-area classrooms.

Lack of Training and Experience of Content-area Teachers

As addressed above, the role of content-area teachers in ELLs' academic achievements is significant, as ELLs spend much of their time in content-area classrooms with content-area teachers who have expertise in their respective content areas (Layzer, 2000; Sharkey & Carolyn, 2000; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Yet, content-area teachers reported that limited experience with ESLs, no training to work with ELLs, little guidance from the school administrators, limited time and resources, prevented them from helping ESL students appropriately (Reeves, 2004; Penfield, 1987). For instance, most content-

area teachers in Reeves' (2004) study would like to help ELLs, but their limited understanding and knowledge in working with ELLs inhibited them from instructing ELLs. The content-area teachers' expectations for ELLs were varied. Some had low expectations, expecting only the mere completion of task or work, as a content-area teacher put it, "Do their homework and ask questions when they don't understand. Kids who just hang in there and do their work, pass" (Sharkey & Layzer, 2000, p.361) or "As long as ELLs completed the worksheet, with correct or incorrect answers, they were considered to be successful" (Sharkey & Layzer, 2000, p.360). Some had the same expectations without any alteration in curriculum, instruction or assessment: "I realize you run the risk of frustrating the student, but it seems to me it would be frustrating functioning in a society where you don't know the language anyway, so you better get it over while you're in school rather later" (a content-area teacher in Reeve's study, 2004, p.54). Some had the same expectation as they have for native English-speaking students, but show empathy for ELLs. "She [an ELL] might take a little longer than the others…but I want her to do it like everybody else…she is still required to do the work like everybody else does. Just like this [assignment] for her is hard, but she's still required to do that" (a content-area teacher in Reeve's study, 2004, p.55).

Although what ELLs need is to learn grade-level content and have plenty of interactions with other peers, content-area teachers with lack of understanding and training in ESL instruction, dilute course content and engage students in low-thinking simple tasks (Verplaetse, 1998). It is mistakenly stemming from the misunderstanding between limited language skills and underdeveloped cognitive development. Sharekey and Layzer (2000) observed that content-area teachers ignored or excluded ESL students from participating in

class discussions and learning. Sharekey and Layzer (2000) further stated, "They [ESL students] were marginalized in their mainstream classrooms; their languages and lived experiences are devalued" (p.353). Notably, the content-area teachers in Sharekey and and Layzer's study tended to view "the ESL room as a content tutoring center; and the ESL curriculum did not help the students acquire the academic proficiency required for meaningful, comprehensible completion of tasks in their mainstream content courses" (p.353). In summary, these findings indicated that content-area teachers' frustrations in teaching ELLs in their classrooms often stemmed from their lack of experience, training, and communication with ESL teachers.

The Study

While the previous studies (Harkalu, 1994; Layzer, 2000; Reeves, 2004; Sharkey & Carolyn, 2000; Youngs & Youngs, 2001) were successful to broach critical issues related to content-area teachers' perceptions in ELLs' academic achievements, most of the studies developed based on classroom observations and interviews. As a result, the information available is not comprehensive. Voices of content-area teachers is little heard. Especially teachers' voices in the schools where ESL education has historically received little attention for various reasons, as introduced at the outset of this paper. To address some of these issues, this study set out with the following research questions:

1. What are the current practices of content-area teachers working with ESL students?
2. What challenges do content-area teachers experience in teaching ESL students?
3. What expectations do content-area teachers have for ESL students?

4. What types of support and training would content-area teachers like to receive in order to provide efficient instruction to ESL students?

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative survey research design. Surveys are usually the preferred mode of data collection when gathering information about a specific sample population (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). The questionnaire contained 13 Likert-scale questions and one open-ended question (see Appendix). The questionnaire focused on: 1) strategies used by science teachers to accommodate ELLs' special needs, 2) challenges they experienced, and 3) support and training necessary for effective ELL instruction. Individual questions were developed based on research in ESL education (Becker, 2002; Gibbons, 2002; Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004; Fu, 2004; Penfield, 1987; Sharkey & Layzer, 2000; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). The choices for types of challenges and accommodations in the survey questionnaire stemmed from Reeves' (2004) classifications of curricular, instructional, and procedural accommodations. Dalle & Thrush's (2006) study also helped developing the choices for types of training in the survey questionnaire. The survey was administered at the ESL-centered high schools in the spring of 2006. Participants were solicited at faculty meetings with 211 returning completed questionnaires. The returned surveys were analyzed using SPSS 15.0.

The Teachers

The teachers who participated in this study were 42 math teachers, 33 science teachers, 50 language arts/English teachers, 34 social studies teachers, and 50 other teachers. Among them, 85-88% held a primary licensure in the subject area that they were teaching. The years of teaching experience varied, ranging from less than one year to more

than 25 years. However, over half of the respondents had less than 10 years of teaching experiences (55.5 %). While 40.3% of the teachers were English monolingual, about 12.4% of the teachers indicated that they were bilingual. Nearly half of the respondents (46.8%) had learned a foreign language previously but were not proficient enough to communicate effectively in that language. Regarding their training experience in relation to ESL instruction in the past 10 years, about 59.2% teachers responded that they had attended in-service professional development, while 21.8% of teachers responded that they had taken language minority-related courses for undergraduate/graduate credits.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of survey participants (Frequency/ Valid Percent in Parentheses)

	Math	Science	Language arts/English	Social Studies	Others	Total
Subjects	42 (20.1)	33 (15.8)	50 (23.9)	34 (16.3)	50 (23.9)	209
Licensure in the subject	35 (85.4)	29 (87.9)	44 (88.0)	29 (85.3)		
Yrs. of teaching 0-9	17 (40.5)	24 (72.7)	28 (56.0)	24 (70.6)	23 (46.9)	116 (55.5)
Yrs. of teaching 10-24	13 (31.0)	6 (18.2)	14 (28.0)	4 (11.7)	15 (30.6)	52 (24.9)
Yrs. of teaching 25 or more	12 (28.6)	3 (9.1)	8 (16.0)	6 (17.6)	11 (22.4)	41 (19.6)

Results

Challenges

Teachers were asked to choose three of the greatest challenges they have experienced in working with ELLs in their classes. More than half of the teachers indicated that language barriers between them and ELLs, and ELLs' lack of background knowledge of content area challenged them the most. The third largest challenge turned out to be teachers' lack of time and resources to devote to ELLs. The majority of teachers perceived that cultural differences between teachers and ESL students was considered least challenging. For instance, social studies teachers rated "ESL students' lack of background knowledge of content area" challenged them the most (70.6%) and so did English teachers (68.0%). However, math and science teachers perceived "language barriers" their biggest challenges respectively (73.8% vs. 72.7%).

Table 2. Challenges in Having ESL Students in Classes (%)

Language barriers between you and ESL students	137 (65.4)
Cultural differences between you and ESL students	23 (10.9)
ESL students' lack of background knowledge of content area	121 (57.3)
ESL students' lack of motivation	45 (21.3)
Lack of guidelines and/or support systems at school levels	42 (19.9)
Lack of time and resources to devote to ESL students	100 (47.4)
Assessment/grading of ESL students	67 (31.8)

Academic Expectations for ELLs

In order to discern what expectations content-area teachers hold for ELLs, teachers were asked to choose three of the most essential skills that ELLs should know before integrating into their classes. The majority of content-area teachers expected ESL students to have English reading & writing skills and English speaking & listening skills before integrating into their classes. About 50% of the teachers perceived that study skills and basic knowledge of content-area were also important skills and that ESL students should have them before integration. However, the results varied across discipline-area. For instance, the majority of math teachers indicated "basic knowledge of content area" as the most essential skill (90.5%), while English teachers rated "English reading & writing" skills higher than "speaking and listening skills" (94% vs. 88%).

Table 3. Basic Skills ESL Students Should Know (%)

English reading & writing skills	174 (82.5)
English speaking & listening skills	180 (85.3)
Basic knowledge of content area	97 (46.0)
Study skills	105 (49.8)
Knowledge of U.S. school system & classroom function	36 (17.1)

Current Practices in ELL Instruction

Although some previous studies identified types of accommodations that content-area teachers utilized (Reeves, 2004), it is relatively unknown how content-area teachers accommodate ELLs. The result of this study showed that the majority of teachers tended to allow ELLs extra time and adjust their speech rate, while providing different

tasks/assignments or instructional materials were very rare. Content-area teachers consulting with ESL teachers was not frequent either, as only 27.1% of teachers consulted with ESL teachers "often" or "always."

Table 4. Current Practices of Content-area Teachers in ELL Instruction (%)

Types of Accommodation	Never/ Rarely	Sometimes	Often/ Always
I adjust my speech rate for ESL students.	41 (20.0)	93 (45.4)	71 (34.6)
I provide different tasks & assignments for ESL students.	120 (59.7)	59 (29.4)	22 (10.9)
I allow ESL students to have extra time in completing tasks.	24 (11.8)	56 (27.6)	123 (60.6)
I provide different instructional materials for ESL students.	115 (57.2)	52 (25.9)	34 (16.9)
I assess/grade ESL students differently from the native English-speaking students.	88 (44.0)	73 (36.5)	39 (19.5)
I pair up (or group) ESL students so they can help each other.	62 (32.8)	57 (30.2)	70 (37.0)
I consult with ESL teachers in order to better help ESL students.	76 (38.2)	69 (34.7)	54 (27.1)

Types of Support and Training

Regarding types of support the teachers would like to receive, the majority of teachers responded that bilingual instructional materials followed by professional training on how to teach ELLs would be the most important support. In contrast, bilingual teacher's assistance was considered the least important support the teachers would like to receive.

Table 4. Types of Support to Receive (%)

Types of support	Not Important	Important	Very Important/ Critical
Bilingual teacher's assistance	70 (37.0)	60 (31.7)	59 (31.2)
Bilingual instructional materials (e.g., dictionaries, bilingual glossaries)	33 (17.1)	67 (34.7)	93 (48.2)
Professional training & development workshops to teach ESL students	34 (17.3)	82 (41.8)	80 (40.8)

Following the question of support types, the teachers were asked what training they perceived to be useful in working with ELLs. The majority of teachers indicated that what would help them the most to effectively teach ELLs was to receive instructional strategies. The second most important training was assessment—how to assess and grade ELLs. Language training was viewed as the least helpful. It is, however, of note that social studies teachers, unlike the other content-area teachers, indicated "cultural understanding" as "very important" or "important" (90.0%).

Table 5. Useful Training to Instruct ESL Students Effectively (%)

Types of Training	Not Important	Important	Very Important
Language (e.g., Spanish) training	62 (33.3)	58 (31.2)	66 (35.5)
Understanding of second language development & learner variables	24 (12.6)	85 (44.5)	82 (42.9)
ESL instructional strategies	16 (8.2)	58 (29.9)	120 (61.9)
Cultural understanding	20 (10.6)	90 (47.9)	78 (41.5)
How to assess (grade) ESL students	29 (15.3)	64 (33.9)	96 (50.8)

Teachers' Perceptions of ELL Education

The final question of the survey was open-ended. The teachers were asked to express their opinions or thoughts in relation to teaching ELLs. Among 211 participants of the survey, 74 teachers responded. Their comments demonstrated a wide variety of views of issues concerning immigration, ELLs, and ELL education. About one-third of the responses regarding ELLs and their experience of teaching ELLs were positive. Some teachers stated that ELLs are "very motivated," "hard-working." A teacher particularly noted, "I really enjoyed working with my ESL students. They learn a lot and so do I." Three teachers expressed that ELLs were better than average students: "My ESL students often lead the class-I know I get the best of the group by the time they get to my class and they always do above the class average." Teachers were also aware that ELLs are not a unified group but are diverse like any other students regardless of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

T 1: Educators need to remember that our students are multicultural. There are other languages besides Spanish to consider so teacher training would have to reflect this.

T 2: I find that they are at either end of the spectrum. Some are extremely motivated and work very hard but struggle with the language. The others are not motivated but have good skills with the English language. I tend to see more students that need motivation and study skills rather than language enhancement.

A salient and yet controversial issue with regards to ELLs' mainstreaming was raised. Some teachers strongly believed that a segregated ELL education and a different set of academic standards should be the approach that U.S. school system adopts.

T 3: Children who do not speak/read/communicate English should not be put into SOL Science courses until they achieve a degree of language competency. It was not fair to the children. We should not be lowering standards to accommodate non-English. We should not be assessing on a different standard. Are we restructuring our educational program for illegal immigration?

T 4: ESL students need to be taught separately unless they are FLUENT English speakers; ESL students would benefit most from having ESL immersion instead of having our school system adapt to their languages.

T 5: I think ESL students should have English immersion training rather than have 'the system' adapt to their language. It worked for all 4 of my grandparents. I'm not trying to be mean—I do think that is best.

In contrast, some teachers perceived that ELLs' mainstreaming could be beneficial to both groups of ELLs and native English-speaking students:

T 6: I LOVE working with my ESL students. They bring enthusiasm and diversity to the classroom. Having ESL students in mainstreamed classes helps non-ESL students to know and understand and definitely appreciate other cultures. ESL students benefit greatly from being with regular students as it helps them not only learn VA/US history but to communicate verbally and in the written word in English. I can definitely see the difference between September and June.

T 7: Encourage them to take electives in the performing arts so they can converse with native speakers and overcome inhibitions regarding their use of and comfort with the English language.

Some teachers also expressed the difficulty of communicating with parents: "I found the biggest obstacle was communicating with parents." In addition, teachers have noticed that ELLs were isolated and there was lack of support: "Appear to be marginalized by teachers and administrators because they don't win scholarships or have 4.0 or greater averages. Some students' parents don't know how to moderate for them w/ teachers or administration." Notably, a teacher's comment reflected his or her critical awareness of ESL issues: "I have worked with ESL students in the past and believe that we need to focus on these issues. They are comprising a larger percentage of our population and as a result, affect our economy, culture etc. in a greater way."

As diverse as the current ESL issues are, so were the opinions of teachers in this study. The open-ended comments of the teachers shed light on the issues that Likert-scale survey items did not capture.

Table 6. Open-ended Comments (N=74)

Need more resources; training	10	Better than average students	3

Motivated; hardworking	10	Need instructional adjustments	3
Rewarding; enjoyable	8	Benefits of mainstreaming	3
Difficulty communicating with parents	7	Awareness of ESL issues	2
No mainstreaming	6	Isolation; lack of support	2
Diversity	4	Consult with ESL teachers	2
Lack of study skills; education; language skills	4	Other	10

Conclusion

Analysis of the data revealed the specific challenges the teachers encountered, accommodations made, and the support necessary when instructing ELLs.

First, regarding types of accommodations, teachers tended to use certain strategies more often than other strategies. For instance, adjusting speech rate or allowing ELLs to have extra time in completing tasks and homework were frequently used, whereas they rarely provided different instructional materials and/or tasks to ELLs. The reasons for this particular inclination are speculative. It is possible that allowing ELLs extra time and adjusting speech rate does not require much effort or increase workload on the teachers' part. However, the other types of accommodations, such as providing different instructional materials and tasks/assignments, may place greater demand on teachers who already have a host of instructional and non-instructional duties. It is also possible that teachers may not know how to adjust instruction, instructional materials, and tasks for ELLs.

Research consistently informs that communication and collaboration between content-area teachers and ESL teachers is critical for ELLs' academic achievements (Harklau, 1994; Hurst & Davison, 2005). Surprisingly, about 38.2% of the respondents in this study "never" or "rarely" consulted with ESL teachers. Compartmentalized disciplinary areas and possibly lack of interest in communicating beyond their own specialty areas in secondary schools may contribute to this lack of communication and collaboration. However, the reason for lack of consulting with ESL teachers is highly speculative and in need of further research.

Second, language barriers between teachers and ELLs, lack of ELLs' content knowledge background, and lack of resources and time turned out to be greatest challenges for the majority of teachers. However, teachers in different disciplines showed slight differences in what challenged them the most. For English and social studies teachers, students' lack of content background knowledge challenged them more than language barriers. This result can be interpreted in two ways. One, it is likely that ELLs who are placed in social studies and English classes have relatively more advanced English proficiency than ELLs in math or science classes. Two, it is possible that particular subjects such as English literature and U.S. history require students' background knowledge, the curricula of which are incremental as grade level is increasing. Thus, the ELLs who have not received their early years of education in the U.S. education system are more likely to lack the background knowledge that high school curricula demand as a base.

Third, teachers' had different views and expectations of what they viewed as being the most essential skill that ELLS should have before integrating into content-area classrooms. For instance, math teachers rated content background knowledge higher than

English skills. Among English skills, English teachers pointed to the importance of reading and writing skills over listening and speaking skills. Though it is dangerous to reach a generalization, the findings imply that challenges and expectations of all content-area teachers may not be identical depending on the subject areas. As no previous studies specifically addressed different needs and challenges of content-area teachers, it needs more scrutiny in future research.

Fourth, teachers indicated bilingual instructional materials were the most critical support they needed. As earlier noted, Collier's (1987, 1989) studies report students' former schooling experiences and their first language academic literacy skills had a significant impact on their second language academic achievements. A number of studies suggest using students' first language to assist their comprehensibility of complex academic content knowledge (Becker, 2002; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004; Echevarria & Graves, 2007). The teacher's wish to provide bilingual instructional materials resonates with the suggestions of prior research. Professional development and training on how to instruct ELLs was regarded as critical support. As very little research has been done on what types of support content-area teachers who work with ELLs need, the findings will help provide need-based support. Further a majority of teachers marked instructional strategies as the most important training, while language training was least important. Interestingly, however, social studies teachers perceived cultural training as the most useful. This finding is contradictory to the response to their challenges. Earlier noted, a majority of teachers, including social studies teachers, indicated that cultural differences between ELLs and themselves were least challenging. Although speculative, the concept of

culture can be differently perceived by teachers in different disciplines. Especially for social studies teachers, culture may have discipline-specific implications.

Finally, open-ended comments showed a broad spectrum of teachers' diverse views of ELLs and ELL instruction. While a third of the teachers expressed positive opinions of ELLs, some teachers expressed dissatisfaction with having ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Though studies consistently report that ELLs can learn better and faster when they learn English and content simultaneously, some teachers in this study were opposed to integrating ESL into content-area classes. The idea of segregated ELL education seemed to originate from their lack of understanding of language and content developments and lack of training on how to instruct ELLs. In addition, aside from teachers' need to have more resources, help and specific guidelines, it is of note that difficulty in communicating with ELLs' parents was one of the major concerns among teachers. This area also needs further investigation.

Suggestions

The findings of this study have implications for institutional support, teacher professional development programs, and classroom-level pedagogical strategies. Based on these findings and previous studies published, a few suggestions are proposed. Ideally, ELLs should have full access to appropriate curricula taught by qualified teachers using suitable instructional resources that match each student's language and grade-level to ensure academic success. However, it is an unfortunate reality that many schools can not provide such support (e.g., bilingual instructional materials, time, and specific guidelines). Previous studies imply that teachers' frustrations often originate from their feeling of helplessness and doubts about ELLs' ability to catch up with grade-level content (Penfield,

1987; Reeves, 2004). While the following list of suggestions is neither a quick fix nor a one-size-fits-all answer, it is the intention of the author that these suggestions will help teachers better accommodate the needs of ELLs.

ESL Instructional Strategies for Teachers

Training of instructional strategies is the most useful training for teachers. The following are practical instructional strategies focusing on this area: 1)increasing comprehensibility of texts and speech, 2) interactions of ELLs, and 3) teachers' linguistic and cultural awareness. Some of the following suggestions were adapted from multiple sources such as the sheltered instruction model of Echevarria, Vogt and Short (2004), Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) of Chamot and O'Malley (1994), Hurst and Davison (2005) and Echevarria and Graves (2007).

Increasing comprehensibility

1. *Adjust speech rate and enunciation.* While English is a stress-timed language, many other languages including Spanish are syllable-timed language (Rost, 2001). English tends to stress in one or two syllables and slur the rest of the word or sentence. This means that English sounds are often unclear to some speakers of other languages. Thus, pronouncing equally stressed words or sentences may increase students' comprehensibility along with adjusted speech rate. Additionally, longer pause between the commas and periods will help increase of ELLs' comprehensibility.
2. *Introduce key vocabulary.* According to Marzano (2004), teachers can help students build academic background by teaching key vocabulary. One of the strategies is to have students ***describe*** the terms, not ***define*** them. For instance, describing "civil

war" in relation to time, people, and events can lead to a deeper understanding of the term not to mention of gaining content specific-knowledge.

3. *Use visual aids.* One of the quickest ways to help ELLs to understand science concepts is to show drawings, pictures, and instructional video clips (e.g., unitedstreaming, National Geographic). When using instructional video clips, provide an anticipation guide before showing and avoid showing a clip longer than 3-5 minutes at one time.
4. *Provide information or directions to tasks both in oral and written forms.* For instance, write down or present key concepts and vocabulary while you are explaining verbally.
5. *Break down information, including directions, into sequential steps when presenting them.* Lengthy directions can be confusing. Provide steps to follow, preferably with bulleted points or visual cues.
6. *Connect students' prior knowledge/experience to new knowledge.* Prior knowledge of ELLs can be very different from what native English speaking students know. For instance, ELLs who grew up in a tropical area may have a hard time in conceptualizing four distinctive seasons, while they have a better grasp of tropical climate and life. Connecting what students already know to new knowledge is more critical for this reason.
7. *Use less text-dense instructional materials.* Text-dense passages and handouts can overwhelm students and discourage them from reading. Use graphic organizers (e.g., diagrams, T-charts, semantic-webs) for comparison and contrast, and

explanation of relationships and description of characteristics. Commercially available graphic organizer software can simplify this task for teachers.

8. *Teach learning strategies.* Students need to learn how to use text features such as titles, subheadings, pictures, drawing, figures, and graphs to gain information. These are skills that should be explicitly practiced in the classroom. In addition, it is critical to model, to demonstrate, and to show examples of final products.
9. *Use Technology.* Blogs, vodcasts, and podcasts can facilitate ELLs' self-study outside of the classroom. In particular, podcasts (audiofile) recorded by the teacher or classmates allows ELLs to practice listening while developing an understanding of grade-level content. Vodcast (videofiles) showing illustrations, pictures and animations along with explanations assist students' understanding (Colombo & Colombo, 2007). The widespread use of personal audio and video players increases accessible of these modes of instruction.

Increasing interactions

1. *Create heterogeneous group work.* Group work is critical in that it increases students' interaction time and is less intimating and therefore, students are more likely to speak out. Group work can also facilitate laboratory assignments and task-based science projects. Assigning and rotating specific roles to students in a group can encourage ELLs to participate in group work on a more equal basis.
2. *Pair up an ELL with an advanced ELL (possibly the same native language) and/or a native-speaking student.* Newcomers especially can benefit from this type of buddy system in various ways. Assigning specific roles to buddies can increase effectiveness of the buddy system. For instance, an advanced ELL with the same

language background can explain task and assignment directions using their native languages, while a native English speaking student can help with note-taking.

Increasing awareness

1. *Think like a linguist.* Be mindful of and analyze the languages that you are using in the classrooms as well as those that exist in the text and instructional materials. Formal and decontextualized language typically presented in texts and instructional discourse can increase difficulty in ELLs' comprehension. The major purpose of adjusting language to context-embedded and informal levels is to make content more accessible, thus increasing ELLs' understanding.
2. *Think like an outsider.* School and academic functions are cultural practices. The idea of thinking like an outsider will help you defamiliarize from what you are used to. For instance, classroom participation, asking for help from the teacher, and questioning grades are rooted in cultural practices. By raising your awareness of different cultural practices, you will be less likely to form biases against students. As a result, you will be able to see what you have taken for granted.

Increasing collaboration and communication with ESL teachers

Increasing collaboration and communication between ESL teachers and content-area teachers is one of thecritical strategies to help ELLs' academic success. This will help curriculum alignments between ESL and mainstream content-classes when collaboration and communication is encouraged at the institutional level.

1. Curriculum alignment between ESL and mainstream classes. In order to get the most out of both ESL class and content-area classes, ESL and mainstream curricula should be aligned. Chamot and O'Malley (1994) suggested, "a content-based ESL

curriculum should encompass the sequence and major scope areas of the standard grade-level curriculum (p.27)." Content-area teachers should be encouraged to identify basic content knowledge and skills they expect for ELLs to have before integrating into their classes, as this would serve as a valuable resource for ESL teachers to use to help prepare ELLs for mainstream integration. Because ESL teachers are often faced with challenges stemming from their lack of expertise in content-area, particularly at secondary level, the value of coordination and communication between ESL and content-area teachers can not be emphasized enough.

2. Set up a regular meeting time if possible. This is as much an administrative issue as it is a pedagogical one. Administrators must be made to understand the value of continual collaboration over one-shot professional development. These meetings can serve as the venue to address the issues related to ELLs. For example, you can discuss specific students' weaknesses, strengths, and progress with the ESL teachers and receive immediate feedback. In addition, these meetings can facilitate sharing the goals of each unit, instructional handouts, and assignments. In doing so, the ESL teachers will be able to provide more responsive instruction in their ESL classes to support the work of content-area teachers. In return, content-area classes will be more responsive to the needs of ELLs.

In addition to the practical suggestions, other support such as bilingual instructional materials and specific guidelines regarding ELL instruction should be provided for teachers.

Limitations of the Study

While this study sheds light on the issues that are related to high school content-area teachers in ELL instruction, especially in Central Virginia, the findings of this study may not be generalizable in other contexts. The contexts of ESL education vary from state to state, or even inside the state, and are affected by state policies for ESL education, size of immigrant communities, and ELL population of individual schools (Becker, 2002). Additionally, ELLs' different English language proficiency may result in different challenges, needs, and perceptions of content-area teachers.

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Appendix: **MERC ESL Study Survey**

The purpose of this survey is to gather important information about ESL-related academic needs of content-area high school teachers like you. Please do **not** indicate your name or any other identifying information on this survey so that your responses can be kept confidential.

Directions: Please answer all questions to the best of your knowledge.

1. **Primary** subject area you currently teach:
   a. Math
   b. Science
   c. Language arts or English
   d. Social studies
   e. Other_____

2. All subject areas that you hold licensure: ***(Circle all that apply)***
   a. Math
   b. Science
   c. Language arts or English
   d. Social studies
   e. Other_____

3. Total years of teaching experience in all school settings **(except for substitute teaching)**:
   a. None
   b. 1-4
   c. 5-9
   d. 10-15
   e. 16-24
   f. 25 or more

4. The number of ELLs in your classes for the current school year (Combine all ELLs across class sections):
   a. 0-3
   b. 4-7
   c. 8-13
   d. 14-19
   e. 20 or more

5. Circle the **three** biggest challenges you have experienced in having ELLs in your classes.
   a. Language barriers between you and ELLs
   b. Cultural differences between you and ELLs
   c. ELLs' lack of background knowledge of content area
   d. ELLs' lack of motivation
   e. Lack of guidelines and/or support systems at school levels
   f. Lack of time and resources to devote to ELLs
   g. Assessment/grading of ELLs

6. Circle the **three** basic skills ELLs need to have before integrating into your classroom.
   a. English reading and writing skills
   b. English speaking and listening skills
   c. Basic knowledge of content area (e.g., math)
   d. Study skills
   e. Knowledge of U.S. school system and classroom function

7. The following statements assess how you work with ELLs in your classes ***(Check one response for each item)***

	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often	Always
a. I adjust my rate of speech for ELLs.					
b. I provide different tasks and assignments for ELLs.					
c. I allow ELLs to have extra time in completing tasks.					
d. I provide different instructional materials for ELLs.					
f. I assess/grade ELLs differently from the native English-speaking students.					
g. I pair up (or group) ELLs so they can help each other.					
h. I consult with ESL teachers in order to better help ELLs.					
i. Others (specify:)					

8. Your language background:
   a. English (monolingual)
   b. Have learned a foreign language(s) but cannot fluently communicate
   c. Bilingual
   d. Other_____

9. If applicable, how helpful are your foreign language skills in teaching ELLs in your classes?
   a. Very helpful
   b. Somewhat helpful
   c. Not helpful
   d. Other_____

10. What types of support do you wish to receive to effectively teach ELLs? ***(Check one response for each item)***

	Critical	Very important	Important	Not important
a. Bilingual teacher's assistant				
b. Bilingual instructional materials (e.g., dictionaries, bilingual glossaries)				
c. Professional training and development workshops to teach ELLs				
d. Other (specify:)				

11. What would be most helpful for you to learn to help ELLs in your classes? ***(Check one response for each item)***

	Critical	Very important	Important	Not important
a. Language (e.g., Spanish) training				

b. Understanding of second language development and learner variables				
c. ESL instructional strategies				
d. Cultural understanding				
e. How to assess (grade) ELLs				
f. Others (specify:)				

12. Your current training background in relation to ESL or language minority students in the past 10 years: ***(Circle all that apply and record credit hours or days to the best of your knowledge)***
    a. Undergraduate/Graduate courses (Total credit hours_____)
    b. Professional development (Total days_____)
    c. None

13. What types of professional training or development would you like to receive in relation to teaching ELLs? (***Circle all that apply***)
    a. In-service professional development day
    b. Undergraduate/Graduate on-site course **(*Check all that apply*)**
        □ Evenings
        □ Weekends
        □ Summer
    c. Undergraduate/graduate online course
    d. Combination of on-site & online course
    e. None
    f. Other_____

14. Please write down any comments you have about working with ELLs:

Thank you for your participation!