



## BREAKING THE INEQUITABLE EDUCATION CYCLE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS THROUGH POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

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### Abstract:

This study employed qualitative evidence synthesis (Saldaña, 2012) to critically examine and systematically analyze 63 studies published between 2000-2018 reporting positive educational impacts on English language learners (ELLs). Drawing on Scarcella's (2003) academic English literacy framework and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2001), this study demonstrates three mechanisms to improve ELL outcomes. First, teachers should use both culturally responsive practices and knowledge of language acquisition. Second, fostering family and peer supports creates positive learning environments. Finally, long-term solutions require policies addressing the socio-politico-economic disparities affecting ELLs. These results show, in a synthesized fashion, an approach to equitable quality education for ELLs.

**Keywords:** culturally responsive teaching, English language learners, instructional strategies and practices, education policies, sociocultural environment

### 1. Introduction

Enduring inequalities exist in many areas of education, such as in access to quality schooling, educational achievement, dropout rates, college entrance, and completion

rates. Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are at a particular disadvantage (Menken, 2006; Hirschman, 2016). Since inequalities are deeply rooted in history and often originate from economic disparities, they are hard to eradicate. However, English language learners (ELLs) and ethnic minorities are found to be at a particular disadvantage given that researchers have documented that the American education system engages in subtractive schooling, a practice by which schools inherently work to reduce the knowledge of their home culture in exchange for an American education (Valenzuela, 1999). Moreover, society will continue to reproduce these unequal disparities without intervention (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). However, a democratic society promises an equal education to everyone, which if done properly, would eradicate social gaps. Thus, it is important that policymakers and practitioners implement strategies to break this pattern. The study aims to reveal what educational policies and practices that research has shown to positively impact ELLs' achievement and call for the implementation of long-term research-based policies and practices supporting ELL's education. Understanding the unique but complex needs of ELLs, we posit that to break such a cycle requires examining and implementing strategies that address the multiple dimensions known to influence learning. Therefore, this study systematically reviewed research of policies and practices published in English between 2000 and 2018 aiming to disrupt the unequal and subtractive education and to provide positive outcomes for ELLs.

The main research question is: What educational policies and practices lead to equitable education for ELLs? Within this question, we ask three sub-questions:

- 1) What are the current educational policies that have a positive impact on ELLs learning outcomes?
- 2) What social-cultural factors create positive learning environments for ELLs?
- 3) What are the best instructional practices that promote learning for ELLs?

### **1.1 Contextual Issues**

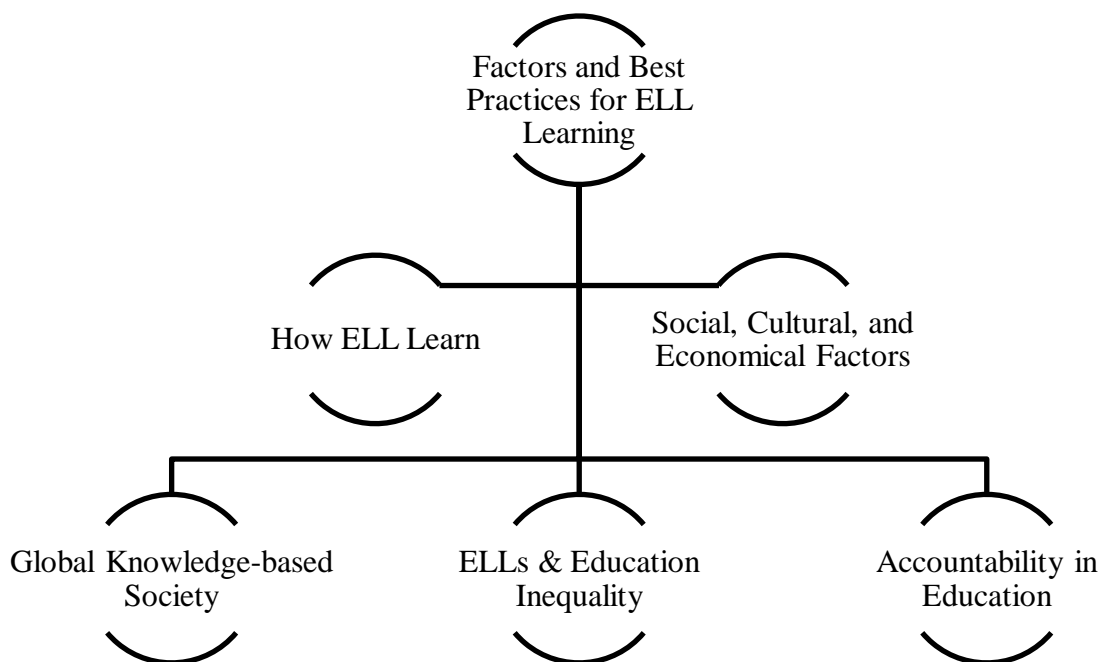
The increased migration of people from across the world and the higher birth rates for racial/ethnic minority groups in the United States increases the diversity of the American student population (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015). Ten percent of students enrolled in K-12 education in the United States in 2013 were ELLs (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). However, by 2030 this figure is expected to increase to approximately 40% (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2005; Samson & Collins, 2012). Furthermore, approximately 25% of American students today are either immigrants or the child of an immigrant (Camera, 2016).

The rapid growth of the ELL population has not been matched by sufficient growth in language educators or in general education teachers' knowledge of how to best work with them. As a result, many ELLs are provided an inequitable education (Menken, 2006). Nevertheless, schools are ethically and legally obligated to provide quality education to all students (Samson & Collins, 2012). Furthermore, schools are held accountable for ELLs' achievement.

Since 2000, three-quarters of the existing research focuses on developing teacher candidates' affirming view on diversity (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015), which certainly plays an important role. This particularly makes sense given that the majority of ELLs are of a racial or ethnic minority background. However, these students also need to be examined separately. Thus, it is imperative to identify strategies that ensure ELLs' success (Cochran-Smith, et al., 2015). Earlier studies indicate specific effective teaching strategies as case studies, but more empirical studies on their usefulness are still needed.

## 1.2 The Framework of the Study

Following the proverb "*it takes a whole village to raise a child*", this study examined the larger social environments that bear positive learning impacts for ELLs. The foundational context of this study is represented by Figure 1, which is consistent with the historical-social approach to teacher education studies (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015). The bottom level depicts contemporary challenges. The middle level represents the changing concepts of how ELLs learn and the lenses through which the practices and factors in educating ELLs are viewed. The third level describes what research says about breaking inequalities for ELLs.



**Figure 1:** Sociocultural context of the study

The researchers critiqued, evaluated, and interpreted studies through a multidimensional framework of academic success, borrowing from both Scarcella's (2003) English literacy framework and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994a), we also position education as also being affected in the home and community, and through policy.

### **1.3 Multidimensional Framework of Academic English Literacy**

Two important concepts in ELL education presented in the multidimensional framework of academic English literacy are linguistic capital and sociocultural capital (Scarcella, 2003). Scarcella's (2003) framework includes ELLs' development in linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural aspects, and he refers to academic English literacy as "*a variety of English used in professional books and characterized by the specific linguistic features associated with academic disciplines*" (p. 9). In order to succeed in the U.S. academic community, ELLs' language skills need to move from daily conversation to academic discourses. This move, however, requires teachers to be attuned to the cognitive and sociocultural dimensions of learning.

### **1.4 Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The culturally responsive teaching framework raises awareness and provides strategies for using the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of learners from diverse ethnic groups as conduits for effective teaching (Gay, 2001). Culturally responsive teaching has proven to be effective in meeting the learning needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Ford, 2015; Harmon, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2010). Integrating meaningful culturally responsive content into the curriculum requires building bridge between ELLs' home culture and school culture, developing relationships among teachers, students, parents, and the administrative leaders, and legitimizing the cultural backgrounds of everyone (Gay, 2001).

### **1.5 Methods of Systematic Review**

The researchers employed qualitative evidence synthesis (Saldaña, 2012), a systematic review methodology, for this study and searched six research databases: Education Research Complete, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), JSTOR, Google Scholar, OneSearch, and ProQuest. The keywords searched included "best practices," "culturally responsive teaching," "ELL and instructional strategies," "education policies," "family support," and "sociocultural environment". Approximately 150 published works were generated from the preliminary search dated between 2000 and 2018. From these identified practitioner papers, policy briefs, empirical studies, and literature reviews, the researchers read to ensure that the article specifically addressed ELLs and at least one positive instructional or policy practice. After this secondary article selection protocol, 63 studies met the criteria and were included.

Using the framework of qualitative evidence synthesis methods (Saldaña, 2012), researchers read through the articles and coded them manually and independently, examining them for major themes. They then discussed and compared their themes in order to collaboratively identify common findings, subsequently presented in the results section.

## 2. Findings

The findings highlight that a multi-faceted approach must be taken to break educational inequities for linguistic minority students. The facets must include supports from systematic policy, schools and teachers, and families and peers. Ladson-Billings (1994b) has long maintained that teacher dispositions and their training matter in students' learning. Additionally, teachers with culturally responsive and socially just teaching practices and knowledge of English language acquisition and assessment have a significant effect on student learning outcomes (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015). Thus, improving the policies that encourage knowledge and skills for working with ELLs for all teachers is one way to improve the educational outcomes for these students (Samson & Collins, 2012). Family and peer supports also improve positive learning outcomes for ELLs. Policies and practices addressing socio-politico-economic disparities between ELLs and non-ELLs will positively impact ELL learning in the long term.

### 2.1 Using Policy to Break the Cycle

Policies advocating equal opportunities for ELLs to benefit from the educational system and effective academic support from school districts emerged as the most crucial issues and require additional attention. Despite the U.S. Department of Education's mandate to serve ELLs with appropriate resources under Title VI, policies for ESL education have not been centralized at the federal and state levels. This means that states and districts have substantial decision-making power in determining how to assist ELLs in ESL programs (Núñez, Rios-Aguilar, Kanno, & Flores, 2016). It is essential to define ELLs and identify their needs in order to provide sufficient resources by the federal, state, and local levels.

One of the first policies supporting ELLs' educational rights was the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) of 1968 (Petrzela, 2011). Reports showed that BEA was intended to allow ELLs to fully participate and adjust in social, cultural, economic, and political contexts in American educational settings (Moran, 1988; Núñez et al., 2016). Many educators, policymakers, and parents, especially Latino families, advocated for a bilingual education program as a pathway for ELLs to adjust to the target language community (Moran, 1988). Limitations of BEA were identified, namely, the bilingual education programs were regarded as remedial courses for students who had language deficiency instead of promoting bilingual and bicultural learning environments. However, limited funds were supported by state and local levels which resulted in insufficient implementation and lack of resources (Petrzela, 2011). The true impacts of bilingual education, therefore, are difficult to ascertain without adequate resources and attention.

Two policies for ELLs have dominated the directions and decision-making process in the 21st century: (1) at the federal level, a transition from bilingual education programs to emphasizing mainly English language acquisition; (2) at the state level, school districts are re-evaluating the needs of bilingual education instruction, ESL instruction, and

English immersion programs (Núñez et al., 2016). The debate between whether English-only instruction or bilingual education instruction has a stronger impact on academic attainment has been an unsettled issue often affected by the political change in the country (Thomas & Collier, 2002). Proponents of English-only instruction policy claim that bilingual education instruction hinders ELLs to learn English because they rely on their first language too much in the classroom (Reuters, 2018). They also believe that using only one language in the classroom helps and encourages ELLs to interact and communicate with other non-ELLs more efficiently in the long run. While several states implemented English-only instruction policy (i.e., Arizona and Massachusetts), many educators and local administrative leaders advocate for bilingual education instruction. For instance, California state passed a law to cease the English-only instruction law in 2014. Supporters of bilingual education instruction policy argue that using bilingual instruction helps ELLs, especially very low English language proficiency students, to comprehend basic English instruction. Putting ELLs who have limited English language proficiency into the general classroom results in frustration for not only ELLs but also instructors and non-ELL peers. Moreover, English-only instruction may decrease positive affect by discouraging ELLs to recognize and appreciate their heritage as well as home culture and values (Reuters, 2018).

Until recently, limited research has emphasized standards, knowledge, and skills that both ESL and general educators need in order to provide effective instruction for ELLs in their classrooms (Samson & Collin, 2012). The next section introduces educational practices and strategies for ELLs and evaluated their impact on ELL learning.

## 2.2 Using Curricular and Instructional Strategies to Break the Cycle

### A. Professional development and teacher preparation programs

Samson and Collin (2012) evaluated the professional and state-level standards for teacher education, teacher certification programs, and teacher observation rubrics. Their study aims to identify the gap between policies and practices in ESL teacher education. The study proposed three domains that all teachers should focus on in the classroom: (1) oral language development, (2) academic language, and (3) cultural diversity and inclusivity. Teachers should provide friendly environments for ELLs to develop their oral language skills so that ELLs are able to communicate ideas, negotiate meanings, ask critical questions, and discuss academic topics with their peers and teachers.

In addition to oral language skills, academic language and preparation exert strong impacts on higher education enrollment and success (e.g., Adelman, 2006). However, these exertions sometimes are devoid of cultural understandings. In addition to limited language proficiency, ELLs encounter the difficulties of transitioning from home culture to school culture. Teachers and students should learn to accept, explore, and respect the value of diversity and to interact in a multicultural learning environment. Teachers need to know how to apply culturally responsive teaching approaches and inclusive teaching practices to engage ELLs in the classroom (Martins-Shannon & White,

2012; Samson & Collins, 2012). Culturally responsive teachers understand their student's cultural backgrounds, embrace those multicultural components in the classroom, and use them to create materials and frame instructions (Peercy, 2011). Research shows that collaborating community cultural groups through art exhibitions offer an intercultural understanding and initiates discussions on diverse values (Powell, 2012).

## **B. Major ELL program models**

Three major ELL program models were reviewed: pull-out and push-in instruction, sheltered English instruction, and bilingual instruction. This present study critically evaluated and analyzed research reporting both positive and negative impacts in their efforts on the education of ELLs.

### **a. Pull-out and push-in instruction**

Debates between pull-out and push-in instruction have been widely discussed over decades in the field of ESL study. Pull-out instruction refers to ESL specialists pulling ELLs out of their general classes to work in small groups in other classrooms. Push-in instruction means ESL specialists come to the general class to support ELLs in a subject-related content class. As a recent contribution to this debate, Haynes (2016) proposed a hybrid model combining push-in and co-teaching models for all ELLs and provided additional pull-out support for new incoming students or very low-language-proficiency students. This additional support provides the opportunity for such students to receive additional explicit instruction.

### **b. Sheltered English instruction**

Sheltered English instruction is defined as an approach for teaching ELLs with language and content instruction. Sheltered English instruction aims to develop ELLs' grade-level content area knowledge and English academic literacy. Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) proposed 30 essential components of sheltered English instruction categorized into themes in terms of preparation, building background knowledge, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, application, lesson plan delivery, as well as evaluation and assessment (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004). Integration of meaningful and effective sheltered English instruction into the ESL curriculum remains a complex topic. To achieve a successful sheltered English instruction program, two primary aspects need to be delivered. First, educators should offer sufficient modified English instruction for ELLs, but they should exercise caution to not oversimplify the materials (The Education Alliance, 2018). Presently, all students, including ELLs, are required to meet the content standards, so oversimplifying the subject-matter content knowledge could be a drawback for ELLs' academic success. Another aspect is to avoid fossilization of language use at basic interpersonal communicative level. Rather, educators need to involve ELLs in higher-level thinking activities and develop their cognitive and academic language skills (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004).

Sheltered English instruction plays an important role in school districts, curriculum design, and teacher training programs. By providing explicit academic language support and standards-based content instruction, ELLs are able to improve

their academic language proficiency, increase content knowledge, and be more prepared for non-sheltered English courses. This results in narrowing the academic achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs and aligns with the goal of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy. Further, SIOP suggests that sheltered English instruction should be integrated into school-wide and district-wide plans for teacher training programs. The components of the professional development should include culturally responsive teaching, multicultural theme-based curriculum, multicultural and multilingual classroom management, assessment, and school-parent collaboration (The Education Alliance, 2018). Given the fact that SIOP has been widely used in K-12 settings, few studies evaluated the effectiveness of the SIOP (Echevarria, Short, & Power, 2006; Núñez et al., 2016). Hence, the evaluation of the relationship between the SIOP model and ELLs' academic performance are needed for future studies.

### **c. Bilingual instruction**

Bilingual instruction refers to teaching academic content in both ELLs' target language and first language. Some literature suggests that target language should be taught monolingually and language learners' first language should not be used in the classroom. Recently, the assumption of this monolingual teaching approach has been challenged and re-evaluated (Hall & Cook, 2012). Lee (2012) supports this new movement and shows that English-only teaching approach is not preferred by either ELLs or instructors. Rather, the movement of bilingualism and bilingual instruction should be implemented (Lee, 2012).

In the bilingual instruction classroom, the degree of both language use in the classroom varies depending on the bilingual program models: (1) transitional bilingual education or early-exit bilingual education, (2) two-way or dual language immersion bilingual education, and (3) late-exit or developmental bilingual education (Bilingual Education, n.d.). In transitional bilingual education, ELLs' first language is simply a vehicle to assist development of their English proficiency and content knowledge. The program aims to help ELLs catch up with subject-matter content knowledge. ELLs usually stay in this program less than three years, and the skills they acquire in the first language are transferred to their second language.

Two-way bilingual education is also called dual language immersion bilingual education. This program not only benefits ELLs but also non-ELLs who want to become bilingual (Bilingual Education, n.d.). Language immersion means both student's first language and second language are used in the instruction across various subjects and topics. Usually, an ideal classroom setting includes half native English speakers and half native speakers of the specific target language (ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, 1994). For instance, Spanish is the most commonly used language other than English in the United States. Therefore, many two-way bilingual programs teach both English and Spanish in the classroom. Both ELLs and non-ELLs are exposed to bilingual and bicultural environments, allowing them to develop their academic literacy in both languages (Krashen, 1991), build intercultural competence, and enhance their self-esteem and confidence.



Late-exit or developmental bilingual program also aims to use ELLs' first language to serve as a foundation to develop their academic language skills and enhance content knowledge in both languages in transitioning to the mainstream classroom (Bilingual Education, n.d.). This program is relatively long and takes approximately six to seven years to complete.

### **C. Practices for ELL Learning**

Results of effective educational practices and strategies for ELLs merge into six themes, including relationships and connections; academic language teaching; vocabulary techniques; motivation and engagement; and computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Appendix 1 summarizes the educational practices the researchers identified.

#### **a. Relationships and connections**

Collaborative environments allow ELLs to build relationships and connections with their peers and teachers. Through group work and actively participate in discussions, ELLs are able to enhance their communicative skills and negotiate meanings (Chaitanya & Ramana, 2013; Ciechanowski, 2009; Gao, 2012; Iddings, Risko, & Rampulla, 2009; Samson & Collins, 2012; Siwatu, 2011).

Many studies support the concept of active participation and group work (Chaitanya & Ramana, 2013; Ciechanowski, 2009; Iddings, Risko, & Rampulla, 2009; Protacio, 2012; Wong, 2018). Chaitanya and Ramana (2013) applied the Collaborative Action Research (CAR) method by using role play as a tool to encourage engagement and active participation. The results showed that the CAR offered more opportunities for ELLs to discuss issues collaboratively, accomplish problem-solving tasks, and reflect on their performance.

Peer relationships are also crucial to language learning. Protacio (2012) investigated ELL reading motivation through peer support. The interviews with the participants revealed that ELLs were motivated to read English because they wanted to learn about the new target language culture and be affiliated with their American peers.

#### **b. Academic language teaching**

Teaching academic language and integrating English language instruction into content-area teaching are keys to narrow the academic achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs (Percy, 2011; Samson & Collins, 2012). Research supports this claim stating that academic preparation programs and teaching academic literacy in high schools dramatically impact postsecondary education enrollment and success (Núñez et al., 2016). Regardless of ELLs' language proficiency, factors that contribute to ELLs' low academic performance are (1) lack of access to higher-level university preparation courses in K-12 (Callahan, Wilkinson, & Mull, 2010; Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Kanno & Kangas, 2014; Núñez et al., 2016); (2) inadequate resources and support in the school districts (Valdés, 2001); and (3) insufficient ESL programs to support ELLs' special needs (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010).

Explicit academic instruction has also been shown to be important for ELL success. Percy (2011) proposed five components to promote ELL academic success: (1)

promoting mainstream content in ESL classrooms, (2) emphasizing academic language and culture, (3) offering support in ELLs' first language, (4) explicitly teaching reading and writing strategies, and (5) applying a culturally responsive teaching approach. Samson and Collins (2012) support this by suggesting that language teachers should teach academic vocabulary intensively in its various contexts. While providing feedback in academic language, explicit feedback and prompts are the most effective (Yang & Lyster, 2010). In doing so, ELLs corrected their own errors and were more aware of their productive skills through explicit feedback from instructors and peers.

### **c. Vocabulary techniques**

To achieve higher-level academic and cognitive language skills, ELLs need to build their vocabulary literacy. Research strengthens the crucial nature of vocabulary instruction for ELLs and suggests that various instructional strategies that incorporate multimodal teaching are the most effective (Biglari & Farahian, 2017; Ciechanowski, 2009; Freyn & Gross, 2017; Helman & Burns, 2008; Manyak, 2010). For example, Manyak (2010) conducted a study on the multifaceted, comprehensive vocabulary instructional program (MCVIP). The ELL participants in fourth and fifth grade received a MCVIP approach comprising well-structured, multi-layered, and intensive lesson plans. The program allows ELLs to develop a sense of word consciousness, culture, and enthusiasm towards learning, as shown both in academic data and teacher surveys. Helman and Burns (2008) find that multimodal instructional techniques are similarly important for building ELLs' reading proficiency and fluency. They specifically posit that instruction should include strong feedback as the instructor checks students' comprehension of the vocabulary in different contexts. Finally, Freyn and Gross (2017) demonstrate that a multimodal instructional approach for teaching English idioms and complex vocabulary was more effective than traditional strategies. Students were able to connect to difficult concepts and were more motivated to learn about the topic in depth.

### **d. Motivations and engagement**

Literacy engagement is suggested to be a "*primary determinant of literacy achievement*" (Cummins, 2011, p.142) for ELLs. Studies promoted motivation and engagement through various approaches and learning styles based on students' needs; for instance, collaborative task-based approach (Chaitanya & Ramana, 2013), self-selected reading topics and materials (Protacio, 2012), visual aids to facilitate and motivate beginning level ELLs (Manyak, 2010), appropriate computer-assisted language learning (CALL) approach to enhance motivation (Agbatogun, 2014; Ciechanowski, 2009), and supportive environments created by teachers and peers (Iddings, Risko, & Rampulla, 2009; Protacio, 2012).

Identifying factors that hinder students' motivation and engagement in language learning is crucial to prevent the limitation of these approaches. Manurung and Mashuri (2017) sought to reduce ELLs' speaking skills de-motivating factors. Fifteen de-motivating factors were identified, including lack of knowledge about the topic, a lack of practice, a lack of strong a vocabulary and grammar, a lack of confidence, and a lack of being accustomed to speaking English. The implications of the study show that teachers'

roles are both important during the preparation phase and teaching-learning process. During the preparation phase, teachers help ELLs to build their background knowledge and learners' belief. At the teaching-learning phase, teachers are both instructors and facilitators to help students develop their learner autonomy.

#### **e. Computer assisted language learning (CALL)**

Integrating meaningful linguistic and cultural content through the use of technology in ESL curricula is an ongoing discussion. Technology could either benefit or impede ELLs' learning. Therefore, educators need to ensure they select appropriate technological tools for ESL classrooms. Different technological applications achieve different learning outcomes. Language educators should first identify ELLs' needs and learning objectives to select appropriate tools for ELLs. For instance, a previous study suggested that ELLs' academic writing proficiency improved through the use of flipped learning (FL) module compared to the group that used a traditional teacher-centered approach (Limia, Dewitt, Alias, & Abdul, 2017). The FL method allows ELLs to focus on interactive activities that involve collaborative discussions in class. Further, the FL method encourages ELLs to be active agents in language learning and triggers critical thinking skills in academic writing.

Multimodal teaching is another method that has been widely used to meet ELLs' learning needs. This approach promotes lexical knowledge (Freyne & Gross, 2017) and offers opportunities for diverse representation and interpretation of multimodal texts that allow critical literacy practices (Ajayi, 2009). Multimodal teaching also helps students better understand subject-matter content knowledge (Choi & Yi, 2016) and increases academic literacy through collaborating multimodal tasks (Hafner, 2014; Yi, King, & Safriani, 2017). This method permits students to gain confidence and learn ways to express their own perspectives through multimodal presentations (Choi & Yi, 2016; Yi, King, & Safriani, 2017).

Studies also showed that learner autonomy could be fostered through CALL (Agbatogun, 2014; Ciechanowski, 2009). A study compared three different approaches to investigate the impact of each approach on ELLs' communicative competence (Agbatogun, 2014). The approaches included the use of Clickers (an electronic response device), the communicative approach, and the lecture method as a control. The findings indicated that the most significant improvement of ELLs' communicative competence was through the use of Clickers. The results suggest that it is important for ELLs to speak the target language in an authentic environment, which could encourage them to become involved in more conversation.

### **2.3 Using Sociocultural Knowledge to Break the Cycle**

ELLs' academic success is also impacted by their sociocultural experiences including family norms and values, parent-teacher relationships, teacher-student relationships, and social constructivist learning. Many ELLs come from families with limited knowledge of academic resources and under-resourced school districts. This leads to unequal access to education and college-level job opportunities (Núñez et al., 2016). Regardless of funding

and special need programs, social relationships and interpersonal support play imperative roles in ELLs' schooling and capacity to succeed (Núñez et al., 2016). These informal and friendly relationships that ELLs develop with instructors and peers, casual study groups, tutors, and family members could positively influence the adjustment of ELLs to academic communities. Appendix 2 summarizes the literatures addressing the sociocultural needs of ELLs.

### **A. Family norms and values**

Studies suggest that it is crucial to identify ways that the school culture (values, norms, and practices) differs from ELLs' home culture so that educators could implement strategies and instructions to reduce the impact of the mismatch between ELLs' home culture and the school culture (Aguirre & Zavala, 2013; Finley, 2014; Martins-Shannon & White, 2012; Samson & Collins, 2012; Siwatu, 2011).

In order to achieve this goal, the integration of meaningful cultural instructions into the curriculum is needed. A culturally responsive teaching approach addresses cultural and ethnic norms and values of ELLs in the classroom. Culturally responsive teachers need to understand the diverse nature of ethnic groups, norms, and educational expectations of ELLs' families. Each culture has its own standards for academic success, social rules of communication, prohibited behaviors, motivation and engagement, as well as individual learning styles (Martins-Shannon & White, 2012). For instance, a student from China may seem to be introverted or passive in answering questions; however, the student might instead be trying to display humility. In her culture, letting other people speak first is a way of showing respect. In this situation, teachers could assign collaborative group activities, such as role plays, jigsaw approaches, and debates to engage all students to actively participate.

In other scenarios, home culture could conflict with school culture (Martins-Shannon & White, 2012). Teachers should be aware of these situations and understand the reasons why ELLs are uncomfortable to express themselves or behave in different ways. For example, in some cultures, parents might request for a change of their daughter's seat in the classroom due to her gender. To connect home and school culture, teachers can work with parents and invite them to share their stories from multicultural perspectives with the class. Exposing students in multicultural and multilingual environments fosters understanding and respect for other cultures.

### **B. Parent-teacher relationships**

Teachers should communicate with parents and engage them into ELLs' learning process and academic journey (Finley, 2014). Many studies demonstrate strategies to communicate with parents suggesting that teachers should not only contact parents regarding ELLs' bad behaviors but also good behaviors or accomplishments from schools (Martins-Shannon & White, 2012; Siwatu, 2011). A study found that pre-service teachers are most confident in their capacity of organizing a parent-teacher conference in a friendly environment so ELL parents do not feel intimidated; however, pre-service

teachers had less confidence in communicating with ELL parents in terms of ELLs' achievement and collected information about ELLs' home culture (Martins-Shannon & White, 2012).

To involve parents in ELLs' school lives, teachers should first understand ELLs' backgrounds and their lives at home. Teachers could create assignments to build ELLs' portfolios including ELLs' profiles and interests in addition to a parental letter and parent surveys (Siwatu, 2011). These assignments aim to help teachers understand ELLs' academic interests, academic strengths and weakness, and individual learning styles, as well the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the ELLs' families. At the school district level, funds and leadership for parent partners programs including parent-teacher conferences, parent-teacher association (PTA) events, parent volunteering, and teacher-parent workshops offer more opportunities for parents to participate in ELLs' school life (Finley, 2014).

Studies also revealed that family resources and support stimulate ELLs to learn about content-based knowledge, such as math and science (Civil, 2007; Turner et al., 2012; Martins-Shannon & White, 2012). Moll and Gonzalez (2004) suggested that schools must use families' funds of knowledge (FoK), defined as, "*the knowledge base that underlies the productive and exchange activities of households*" (p. 700) to build stronger relationships. For example, this can be used by ELLs when they learn about math concepts by participating in household activities from their home countries. This approach encourages ELLs to appreciate their own heritage and use it as their prior knowledge to enhance their academic literacy.

### **C. Teacher-student relationships**

Studies suggest that ELLs learn more effectively when teachers develop caring relationships and create friendly learning environments (Finley, 2014; Johnson & Owen, 2013; Siwatu, 2011). In order to do so, teachers could incorporate ELLs' cultural backgrounds and previous knowledge into the curriculum so that the learning experience is meaningful and welcoming. Johnson and Owen (2013) proposed four strategies to help teachers build relationships with their ELLs in the classroom in terms of (1) validating through caring, (2) valuing intercultural experiences, (3) providing a safe and friendly learning environment, and (4) respecting and incorporating ELLs' first language in the learning process. The research suggests engaging in practices such as praising ELLs for their accomplishments using a phrase in their native language encourages them to engage in the learning process and enhance their motivation to come to school, while also helping them maintain their identity (Al-Amir, 2014; Johnson & Owen, 2013; Siwatu, 2011).

### **3. Conclusion**

This study drew on the rich literature on the impact of the current policies and learning environments that ELLs encounter and the relationships between teaching practices and

ELL learning. The study explores in tandem the research, policies, and practices that might disrupt the unequal and subtractive education in order to build a bridge between educational theories, research, and classroom instruction. The findings suggest that educators and policymakers should emphasize effective educational practices and strategies for ELLs in terms of building relationships and connections with ELLs, providing explicit instructions in academic language, offering vocabulary techniques, engaging ELLs to enhance motivation, and applying appropriate CALL approaches. Sociocultural aspects and culturally responsive teaching approach should also be introduced in teacher training programs. Through culturally responsive teaching instruction, teachers are able to collaborate with ELL families and understand the ELL family norms and values. Although many groups experience educational inequality, many ELLs as a linguistic minority also face difficulties as members of an ethnic minority group. The integration of both linguistically and culturally appropriate practices at various levels, from policy to classrooms, is necessary to understand the complexity of students' backgrounds. This systematic literature review sheds light not only on the importance, but also on the complexity, of breaking the inequitable education cycle through policies and practices for ELLs in American schools. Thus, policymakers and practitioners must recognize that ELLs have diversely multiplicative needs different from the hegemonic education system.

### **About the Authors**

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### Appendix 1: Educational Practices and Strategies for ELLs and their Impacts

| Themes                                     | Strategies/ Practices   | Studies                   |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| Relationships and Connections              | Collaborative language teaching   | Ciechanowski (2009)       |
|  |   | Gao (2012)                |
|  |   | Samson & Collins (2012)   |
|  |   | Siwatu (2011)             |
|  |   | Wong (2018)               |
| Academic Language Teaching                 | Collaborative Action Research (CAR) method                                    | Chaitanya & Ramana (2013) |
|  | Peer support  | Protacio (2012)           |
| Academic Language Teaching                 | Academic language and culture   | Adelman (2006)            |
|  |   | Núñez et al. (2016)       |
|  | ESL programs to support ELL special needs                                     | Gándara & Hopkins (2010)  |
|  | Provide explicit feedback in academic language                                | Yang & Lyster (2010)      |
|  | College preparation curriculum  | Callahan et al. (2010)    |
|  |   | Kanno & Cromley (2015)    |
|  |   | Núñez et al. (2016)       |
| Vocabulary Techniques                      | Teach academic vocabulary intensively   | Samson & Collins (2012)   |
|  | Mainstream content in ESL classes   | Peercy (2011)             |
| Vocabulary Techniques                      | Visuals (i.e., pictures, videos)  | Biglari & Farahian (2017) |
|  |   | Ciechanowski (2009)       |
|  |   | Freyne & Gross (2017)     |
|  |   | Helman & Burns (2008)     |
|  | Multifaceted, comprehensive vocabulary instructional program (MCVIP) approach | Manyak (2010)             |
|  | Provide various opportunities for ELLs to read high-frequency words           | Helman & Burns (2008)     |
| Motivation and Engagement                  | Supportive learning environments  | Ciechanowski (2009)       |
|  |   | Freyne & Gross (2017)     |
|  | Interest Based Instructional Materials (IBIM)                                 | Iddings et al. (2009)     |
|  | Self-selected reading topics  | Protacio (2012)           |
|  | Visual aids for beginning level ELLs  | Manurung & Mashuri (2017) |
|  | Appropriate CALL approach   | Protacio (2012)           |
|  |   | Manyak (2010)             |
| Collaborative task-based approach          | Agbatogun (2014)  |                           |
| Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) | Flipped learning (FL) module  | Ciechanowski (2009)       |
|  |   | Chaitanya & Ramana (2013) |
|  | Promote learner autonomy  | Limia et al. (2017)       |
|  | Multimodal teaching approaches  | Agbatogun (2014)          |
|  |   | Ciechanowski (2009)       |
|  |   | Ajayi (2009)              |
|  | Integrate subject-matter content knowledge into multimodal tasks              | Freyne & Gross (2017)     |
| Choi & Yi (2016)                           |   |                           |
| Hafner (2014)                              |   |                           |
|  | Yi et al. (2017)  |                           |

**Appendix 2: Sociocultural Perspectives for ELLs and their Impacts**

| <b>Themes</b>                  | <b>Strategies/ Practices</b>                                    | <b>Studies</b>                 |
|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Family Norms and Values        | Culturally responsive teaching                                  | Aguirre & Zavala (2013)        |
|                                |   | Finley (2014)                  |
|                                |   | Martins-Shannon & White (2012) |
|                                |   | Samson & Collins (2012)        |
|                                |   | Siwatu (2011)                  |
| Parent-Teacher Relationships   | Contact parents about academics                                 | Finley (2014)                  |
|                                |   | Martins-Shannon & White (2012) |
|                                |   | Siwatu (2011)                  |
|                                | Promote parent partners programs                                | Finley (2014)                  |
|                                | Funds of knowledge (FoK)  | Moll & Gonzalez (2004)         |
|                                | Family resources and support                                    | Civil (2007)                   |
|                                |   | Turner et al. (2012)           |
| Martins-Shannon & White (2012) |   |                                |
| Teacher-Student Relationships  | Develop caring relationships and friendly learning environments | Al-Amir (2010)                 |
|                                |   | Finley (2014)                  |
|                                |   | Johnson & Owen (2013)          |
|                                |   | Siwatu (2011)                  |
|                                | Incorporate ELLs' first language into the learning process      | Johnson & Owen (2013)          |
|                                |   | Siwatu (2011)                  |

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