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PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH LEARNER SUPPORT PROVIDED BY K-12 LEADERS TO  
EDUCATORS IN MISSISSIPPI

A Dissertation  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the School of Education  
The University of Mississippi

by

LADONNA THOMAS

May 2022

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## ABSTRACT

The demographic of public schools in America is continuously changing. According to the United States Department of Education (USDE), the English learner population increased in over 25 states from the 2009-2010 school year to the 2014-2015 school year (USDE, 2017). In 2014-15, there were more than 4,800,000 English learners enrolled in schools, accounting for 10% of the total student population (USDE, 2017). With this shifting demographic, educators must be prepared to meet the needs of EL students.

The purpose of this study is to examine educators and instructional leaders' perceptions of EL instructional support and to highlight the need for EL professional development opportunities in Mississippi. Participants were invited to participate in the study through Mississippi's teacher associations—Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE) and Mississippi Professional Educators (MPE)—and its school leader organization, Mississippi Association of School Administrators (MASA). A quantitative approach was utilized to analyze the data gathered to address the researcher's proposed questions:

1. What are participants' perceptions of EL support and preservice training?
2. Does a statistically significant difference exist between instructional leaders' perceptions of EL support provided and educators' perceptions of the level of EL support received?
3. Does a statistically significant difference exist between educators' EL preservice training and educators' perception of EL support received from instructional leaders?

The findings suggest (1) teachers believe there is much room for improvement regarding EL support while leaders believe they are providing sufficient EL support overall; (2) statistically significant differences between the perceptions of EL support of teacher participants and leader participants were evident at the item-level, and (3) there was a statistically significant difference between educators' EL preservice training and educators' perceptions of EL support received from instructional leaders.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Many teachers voice concerns regarding the initial training provided by their education preparation programs (EPPs). Some educators believe the prescribed curriculum lacked pertinent information to prepare them to enter the classroom. Other teachers believe their EPPs could have included more real-world learning opportunities via observation and practicum, but arguments for professional preparation improvement could be made for most baccalaureate programs due to the limited time for degree completion. Because of these time constraints, many careers require on-the-job training and provide continuing education opportunities to build the capacity of professionals in their respective fields. The field of education is no different.

Standard 6 of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) outlines the responsibilities of effective leaders in regards to developing the professional capacity of school personnel (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Per PSEL Standard 6, educational leaders must ensure educators are equipped to facilitate learning, so leaders must be prepared to adequately support educators and build teachers' professional capacity. Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2019) suggested the development and implementation of strategies focusing on teacher preparation at the federal, state, and local levels. School and district-level leadership could develop and implement strategies by considering EPPs' curriculum and use it as the foundation for their professional development programs in efforts to



bridge gaps between theory and practice. Considering the coursework and requirements of each EPP's initial training would allow district and school-level instructional leaders to create more individualized support plans for teachers.

Curriculum directors and specialists, head principals, assistant principals, and academic coaches are responsible for the development and implementation of teachers' professional development programs (Whitenack, 2015). In smaller districts, however, superintendents may have this obligation. It is imperative for these leaders at the district and school levels to collaborate to meet the needs of teachers and students. In addition to considering preservice training from EPPs to devise professional growth and support plans for teachers, educational leaders should also consider teacher efficacy. Teachers often feel less confident with special populations, and an increasingly challenging area for educators is meeting the needs of the English learner (EL) population. EL students must learn the English language while mastering rigorous academic standards. Many teachers feel ill-equipped to support ELs' language development and academic journeys and rely on instructional leaders to provide professional growth opportunities in this area.

The purpose of this study is to examine educators and instructional leaders' perceptions of EL instructional support and to highlight the need for EL professional development opportunities. Following the guidance of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, the Mississippi Department of Education (2018) defined English learners as individuals who:

- are three to twenty-one years of age;
- are enrolled or are preparing to enroll in a K-12 school;
- were not born in the United States or have a native language other than English;

- are Native Americans or Alaskan natives, or are native residents of the outlying areas; and
- come from environments where a language other than English has made a significant impact on their English proficiency; or
- are migrants whose native language is not English and come from environments where a language other than English is dominant; and
- have difficulties in the four domains of the English language that are sufficient to deny them the ability to meet proficiency on state-mandated assessments, to be successful in English-only classrooms, and to have opportunities to fully participate in environments which English is the dominant language.

### **Significance of the Problem**

The demographic of public schools in America is continuously changing. According to the United States Department of Education (USDE), the English learner population increased in over 25 states from the 2009-2010 school year to the 2014-2015 school year (USDE, 2017). In 2014-15, there were more than 4,800,000 English learners enrolled in schools, accounting for 10% of the total student population (USDE, 2017). With this shifting demographic, educators must be prepared to meet the needs of EL students.

Since the inception of the gap analysis in the 1990s, the performance gap between native English speakers and non-native English speakers has persisted over the past 25 years. As cited by Whitenack (2015), native speakers have consistently outscored ELs by 24 points on the fourth-grade mathematics National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and by 25 points since 2011. Unfortunately, little EL-specific training is required in Mississippi's educator preparation programs (Alcorn State University, n.d., Belhaven University, n.d., Delta State

University, n.d., Jackson State University, n.d., Mississippi College, n.d., Mississippi Department of Education, 2020, Mississippi State University, n.d., Mississippi University for Women, n.d., Mississippi Valley State University, n.d., Rust College, n.d. Tougaloo College, n.d., University of Mississippi, n.d., University of Southern Mississippi, n.d., & William Carey University, n.d.), so few educators enter the field prepared to meet the needs of all of their students. The lack of EL training in preparation programs tasks educational leaders with the responsibility of supporting teachers with professional development opportunities—such as book studies, peer observations, peer groups, EL specialists, conferences, train-the-trainer workshops, and consultants—to expand educators’ knowledge for teaching and growing EL students.

### **Importance of the Study**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 highlights the importance of providing high quality instruction to all students and further emphasizes this point by mandating states and local education agencies (LEAs) provide equitable learning opportunities to disadvantaged populations. The EL population is a disadvantaged population with civil and educational protections. To ensure states and LEAs adhere to the afforded protections and provide equitable learning opportunities to ELs, ESSA requires states to factor EL student achievement into state accountability models. In Mississippi, EL progress accounts for five percent of a school and district’s accountability grade, if the n-count of 10 is met. In 2019, approximately 54% of districts in Mississippi met the n-count (MDE, 2019). Considering the current trends of EL student enrollment, the number of districts in Mississippi meeting the n-count will continue to rise. While EL progress is measured utilizing the state’s adopted English language proficiency test, EL achievement factors into every indicator of the accountability model—across content

areas, graduation and drop out rates, and the low-performing quartile; therefore, building teacher capacity in regard to serving the EL population is beneficial for educational leaders.

The purpose of this study is to examine educators and instructional leaders' perceptions of EL instructional support and to highlight the need for EL professional development opportunities. The researcher aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are participants' perceptions of EL support and preservice training?
2. Does a statistically significant difference exist between instructional leaders' perceptions of the level of EL support provided and educators' perceptions of the level of EL support received?
3. Does a statistically significant difference exist between educators' EL preservice training and educators' perception of EL support received from instructional leaders?

Anecdotal data suggests teachers believe they are ill-prepared and do not receive adequate support to effectively teach ELs in the state of Mississippi (D. Fletcher, personal communication, February 5, 2021). This line of belief further suggests educators do not feel as if instructional leaders consider teachers in the professional development decision-making process, which leads to unenthusiastic participation in professional development opportunities (M. Howell, personal communication, September 30, 2020). Analyzing the relationship between the two schools of thought is imperative to the development of quality professional growth opportunities regarding the EL population. Instructional leaders should make informed decisions when planning professional development, and educators' perspectives should be heavily considered.

## **Conclusion**

EL enrollment is on an upward trajectory across the country, and most states, including Mississippi, have seen a tremendous increase in the EL population. To ensure states and LEAs provide ELs equitable access to high quality instruction, ESSA has mandated states factor EL progress into accountability models—impacting every indicator as well as having an EL-specific indicator. Mississippi’s EPPs provide little to no EL training, so instructional leaders shoulder the responsibility of building the professional capacity of educators in regard to ELs.

In this study, teachers and leaders’ perceptions of EL support received and provided will be explicated through the interactionist lens exploring possible relationships. The next section examines the literature regarding quality educator preparation programs, Mississippi’s EPPs, professional development for teaching ELs, Mississippi’s accountability model, and quality professional development evaluation. The third chapter outlines the assessment methods to be utilized in this study. The participants, survey instrument, and procedures to be used are explained in detail. The fourth chapter states the results of the quantitative analyses employed to address the researcher’s principal questions. The final chapter discusses the results and provides implications for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Educator Preparation**

The development of quality professional educators is of interest to researchers, administrators, and stakeholders at the national and local levels. Darling-Hammond (2006) examined seven of the nation's leading teacher education programs to gain a better understanding of quality teacher education programs. These programs were selected as a result of an extensive review process of EPPs across the country. The educator preparation programs (EPPs) included in the study were Alverno College, Bank Street College of Education, Trinity University, University of California at Berkley, University of Southern Maine, University of Virginia, and Wheelock College. The programmatic aspects of each EPP vary; however, Darling-Hammond found common themes embedded within the core of them all.

Darling-Hammond (2006) described the EPPs approaches to educator preparation as learning-centered and learner-centered. The EPPs provide intentional, in-depth learning experiences for their pre-service teachers preparing them to be responsive educators who are empowered to meet the needs of individual learners from diverse backgrounds in today's classrooms. The programs require extensive field experience which is paired with coursework to provide aspiring teachers with meaningful, authentic experiences to connect research, theory, and practice in all aspects of teaching. The study found graduates of these programs were better prepared to teach and felt more confident as novice educators (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Darling-Hammond (2006) expressed a growing demand for responsive educators due to the increasingly diverse population and needs of learners in K-12 classrooms. Each of the seven programs requires teacher candidates to complete at least one course for EL preparation. While taking the course, candidates engage in field experiences with the EL population and complete assignments connecting their coursework to their experiences by taking deep dives into the school lives of students for better understanding. Graduates of these programs expressed their feelings of preparedness to teach and appropriately meet the needs of ELs in comparison to peers who did not attend their EPPs and reported many of their peers felt overwhelmed and inadequately prepared to work with the EL population (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

### **Teacher Preparedness for ELs**

Research regarding EL-specific pre-service teacher training is limited; however, a commonality among conducted studies is there is a need for more EL training from EPPs to teach diverse student populations. Sugmito, Carter, and Stoehr (2017) conducted a narrative study to analyze how preservice teachers conceptualize ELs and ELs' relationships with mainstream teachers and how these experiences shape preservice teachers' orientations toward ELs during practicum. The researchers found their participants observed orientations and/or pedagogical practices of mainstream teachers that were potentially harmful to ELs. Participants noted overt frustrations displayed by teachers with ELs and EL families (Sugmito et al., 2017). The researchers went on to say some participants' experiences left them feeling uncertain of their abilities to work with ELs, which could negatively affect their developing orientation toward this population.

Gan and Lee (2016) conducted a qualitative analysis of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) preservice teachers' learning experiences in

their practicum. Participants were asked to engage in reflective practice as a component of their learning-to-teach process. According to Zeichner and Liston (1996; cited in Gan & Lee 2016) there are five levels at which reflection can take place in teaching:

1. Rapid reflection: teacher engages in immediate, ongoing, and automatic action.
2. Repair reflection: teacher makes decisions to alter behavior based on students' cues.
3. Review reflection: teacher thinks about, discusses, or writes about some element of their practice.
4. Research reflection: teacher engages in systematic and sustained thinking over time by collecting data and reading research.
5. Retheorizing and reformulating reflection: teacher critically examines personal practice and theories in consideration of academic theories.

Participants engaged in reflective practice at each level through university assignments and journal exercises. Gan and Lee's (2016) findings suggest engaging in meaningful reflective practice to promote and sustain a culture of reflection is important in the development of ESL and EFL preservice teachers' capacity to construct and articulate knowledge.

Commins and Miramontes (2006) discussed how EPPs typically prepare future educators for average students—White, middle class, native-English speaking students. This demographic is not an accurate representation of the composition of the student body in public schools in the United States. To address the ever-changing, increasingly diverse demographic of public schools in America, Commins and Miramontes proposed 10 recommendations for EPPs to incorporate into their programs to address linguistic diversity in teacher training. The authors' recommendations are as follows:

1. Examine beliefs regarding an academically literate person.



2. Focus on equity and creating a climate of belonging for all students.
3. Organize instruction to build on the relationship between students' learning in the first and second languages, and value what students bring from home.
4. Become familiar with learners' prior language and literacy experiences.
5. Become familiar with the opportunities and constraints of different groupings based on language proficiency.
6. Make a firm commitment to standards-based instruction focused on and driven by the needs of students.
7. Analyze instructional activities to account for language proficiency.
8. Account for differences in literacy development in first and second languages.
9. Use the physical environment to help create meaning-based instruction.
10. Use strategies increasing comprehension through opportunities for interaction.

Commins and Miramontes suggested addressing these 10 areas during educator preparation could have a positive impact on student outcomes and establishes a student-centered learning approach to the teaching and learning processes.

Lucas and Villegas (2013) acknowledged it takes years to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully educate culturally and linguistically diverse teachers but asserted this learning process should begin during teacher preparation. According to the authors, linguistically responsive teachers demonstrate expertise in seven areas: sociolinguistic consciousness, value for linguistic diversity, inclination to advocate for ELs, identification of classroom language demands of particular disciplines, learning about ELs' linguistic and academic backgrounds, understanding and applying principles of second language learning, and scaffolding instruction. In consideration of the aforementioned areas, Lucas and Villegas

proposed a preservice curriculum for developing linguistically responsive teachers and preparing aspiring educators for language-related issues within the educational and cultural context.

### **EPPs in Mississippi**

Mississippi has 15 colleges and universities. Fourteen of these institutions of higher learning (IHL) offer undergraduate, graduate, and alternate route programs for teacher certification. Teacher certification programs are available at Alcorn State University, Belhaven University, Blue Mountain College, Delta State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi College, Mississippi State University, Mississippi University for Women, Mississippi Valley State University, Rust College, Tougaloo College, University of Mississippi, University of Southern Mississippi, and William Carey University. The inclusion of coursework and/or intentional experience with the EL population varies, as do the requirements of each EPP. The minimum criteria for educator licensure will be examined to highlight the level of EL preservice training received by teachers who attended EPPs in Mississippi. Advanced degree program requirements in curriculum and instruction will not be included because these programs are not required for teacher licensure.

**Alcorn State University.** Alcorn State University offers an undergraduate degree program for elementary education and a graduate degree program for alternative elementary and secondary teacher certification. Aspiring baccalaureate elementary teacher candidates must complete 120 credit hours of coursework, including direct teaching, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 44 credit hours of core coursework, 61 credit hours of professional education and specialized courses, three credit hours of clinical experiences, and 12 credit hours of directed teaching (Alcorn State University, n.d.). Within its undergraduate curriculum, Alcorn requires one course minimally addressing linguistic diversity as a component of the course, ED

200 Social Studies and Multicultural Education. The course prepares students for issues such as democracy and racism, builds skills for value clarification, and examines diverse cultures and linguistic variations (Alcorn State University, n.d.).

Alcorn's Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program was designed for students who earned an undergraduate degree in a field other than education but desire to become an educator. To earn the graduate level degree, candidates must complete 33 credit hours of coursework, including internship hours. Prior to entering the classroom for their internship, students must complete six credit hours of coursework in classroom management and assessments in schools. Upon completing the prerequisite coursework, candidates complete six credit hours for the internship and 12 credit hours of core education courses toward full licensure. Elementary candidates must complete nine credit hours of foundational literacy courses, and secondary candidates must complete nine credit hours of methods, curriculum, and content area coursework (Alcorn State University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

**Belhaven University.** Belhaven University offers an undergraduate degree program in elementary education and a graduate degree program for alternative elementary and secondary teacher certification. Pre-service teachers must complete 129 to 132 credit hours of coursework, including clinical practice, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 41 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 72 to 75 credit hours of education and specialized courses, and 16 credit hours of clinical experience (Belhaven University, n.d.). Within its undergraduate curriculum, Belhaven does not require any coursework addressing teaching English learners.

Belhaven's MAT program was designed for students who earned an undergraduate degree in a field other than education but desire to become an educator. To earn the graduate level degree, candidates must complete 33 credit hours of coursework, including internship hours. Six credit hours of classroom management and assessment courses are prerequisites for the internship. Students complete six internship credit hours upon successful completion of the prerequisite coursework. Candidates complete 21 additional credit hours in education and content area coursework to earn the MAT (Belhaven University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

**Blue Mountain College.** Blue Mountain College offers an undergraduate degree program in elementary and secondary education. Aspiring elementary teacher candidates must complete 120 to 168 credit hours of coursework, including internship hours, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 63 to 69 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 42 credit hours of education courses, 12 credit hours of interning, and 36 to 44 credit hours in two areas of concentration for students who seek K-6 certification (Blue Mountain College, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare elementary candidates specifically for English learners.

Blue Mountain's secondary degree program certifies candidates in seven areas: biology, English, mathematics, music, physical education, social science, and Spanish. Biology candidates must complete 136 to 141 credit hours of coursework for degree completion, including 12 credit hours of interning. The curriculum is comprised of 53 to 56 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 33 credit hours of coursework in the content area, and 21 credit hours of education courses. English candidates must complete 123 to 129 credit hours of coursework for degree completion, including 12 credit hours of interning. The curriculum is

comprised of 45 to 47 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 45 to 47 credit hours of coursework in the content area, and 21 credit hours of education courses. Mathematics candidates must complete 121 to 125 credit hours of coursework for degree completion, including 12 credit hours of interning. The curriculum is comprised of 51 to 53 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 37 credit hours of coursework in the content area, and 21 credit hours of education courses. Music candidates must complete 129 to 135 credit hours of coursework for degree completion, including 12 credit hours of interning. The curriculum is comprised of 51 to 55 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 46 credit hours of coursework in the content area, and 24 credit hours of education courses. Physical education candidates must complete 120 to 123 credit hours of coursework for degree completion, including 12 credit hours of interning. The curriculum is comprised of 48 to 52 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 42 credit hours of coursework in the content area, and 15 credit hours of education courses. Social science candidates must complete 123 to 129 credit hours of coursework for degree completion, including 12 credit hours of interning. The curriculum is comprised of 53 to 56 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 33 credit hours of coursework in the content area, and 21 credit hours of education courses. Lastly, Spanish candidates must complete 120 to 126 credit hours of coursework for degree completion, including 12 credit hours of interning. The curriculum is comprised of 57 to 61 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 30 credit hours of coursework in the content area, and 21 credit hours of education courses (Blue Mountain College, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare secondary candidates specifically for English learners.

**Delta State University.** Delta State University offers an undergraduate degree program in elementary education and a graduate degree program for alternative elementary and secondary

teacher certification. Aspiring baccalaureate candidates must complete at least 120 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The undergraduate degree program is comprised of a minimum of 44 credit core subject hours, 18 credit hours of coursework in two areas of concentration, an interdisciplinary plan of study, and 60 credit hours of education and specialty courses—including 12 credit hours of interning (Delta State University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

Delta State's MAT program was designed for students who earned an undergraduate degree in a field other than education but desire to become an educator. MAT candidates must complete 33 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. Twelve credit hours of coursework—covering classroom management, assessment, working with exceptional children, and instructional methods—are required as a prerequisite to the internship. Elementary MAT candidates must complete an additional 21 credit hours of coursework in education for degree completion. Secondary MAT candidates must complete an additional 18 credit hours of coursework in education for degree completion (Delta State University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

**Jackson State University.** Jackson State University offers an undergraduate degree program in elementary education and a graduate degree program for alternative elementary and secondary teacher certification. Aspiring elementary teacher candidates must complete 122 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of a minimum of 44 to 50 credit hours of core coursework, 60 to 66 credit hours of content and education courses, and 12 credit hours of interning (Jackson State University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

Jackson State's MAT program was designed for students who earned an undergraduate degree in a field other than education but desire to become an educator. MAT candidates must complete 36 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. Six credit hours of coursework in classroom management and assessment are required as a prerequisite to the internship. Elementary candidates must complete 12 credit hours of education coursework and 12 credit hours of reading courses. Secondary candidates must complete 12 credit hours of education coursework, six credit hours of reading courses, and six credit hours of content area coursework (Jackson State University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

**Mississippi College.** Mississippi College offers undergraduate degree programs in elementary and secondary education as well as a graduate degree program for alternative elementary and secondary teacher certification. Prospective baccalaureate elementary teacher candidates must complete 131 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 52 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 21 credit hours of interdisciplinary courses, 24 credit hours of content area coursework, 22 credit hours of professional education courses, and 12 credit hours of directed teaching (Mississippi College, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

Mississippi College's secondary degree program certifies candidates in five areas: biology, chemistry, English, mathematics, and social studies. Biology candidates must complete 136 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 36 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 60 credit hours of biology and specialized content courses, 12 credit hours of additional science coursework, 16 credit hours of

education courses, and 12 credit hours of directed teaching. Chemistry candidates must complete 130 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 42 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 60 credit hours of content area courses, 16 credit hours of education courses, and 12 credit hours of directed teaching. English candidates must complete 137 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 61 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, 12 credit hours of foreign language courses, 36 credit hours of content area coursework, 16 credit hours of education courses, and 12 credit hours of directed teaching. Mathematics candidates must complete 130 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 52 hours of core and Biblical coursework, 15 credit hours of general elective courses, 35 credit hours of content area coursework, 16 credit hours of education courses, and 12 credit hours of directed teaching. Social studies candidates must complete 130 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 46 credit hours of core and Biblical coursework, eight credit hours of general elective courses, 45 credit hours of content area coursework, 19 credit hours of education courses, and 12 credit hours of directed teaching (Mississippi College, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

Mississippi College's Master of Education in Teaching Arts program was designed for students who earned an undergraduate degree in a field other than education but desire to become an educator. The elementary and secondary programs require 33 credit hours and 30 credit hours of coursework for degree completion, respectively. Elementary teacher candidates must complete 12 credit hours of education courses and nine credit hours of reading courses.



Secondary teacher candidates must complete 18 credit hours of education coursework. There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

**Mississippi State University.** Mississippi State University offers undergraduate degree programs in elementary, secondary, and special education as well as a graduate degree program for alternative secondary and special education teacher certification. Aspiring elementary teacher candidates must complete 123 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 45 credit hours of core coursework, 66 credit hours of education and concentration courses, and 12 credit hours of interning (Mississippi State University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

MSU's secondary degree program certifies candidates in six areas: English, mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, and social studies. English candidates must complete 122 to 123 credit hours of coursework for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 36 credit hours of core coursework, 43 to 44 credit hours of content area courses, 31 credit hours of education coursework, and 12 credit hours of interning. Mathematics candidates must complete 124 credit hours of coursework for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 51 credit hours of core coursework, 30 credit hours of content area courses, 31 credit hours of education coursework, and 12 credit hours of interning. Biology candidates must complete 124 credit hours of coursework for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 36 credit hours of core coursework, 48 credit hours of content area courses, 28 credit hours of education coursework, and 12 credit hours of interning. Chemistry candidates must complete 124 credit hours of coursework for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 36 credit hours of core coursework, 48 credit hours of content area courses, 28 credit hours of education coursework,

and 12 credit hours of interning. Physics candidates must complete 124 credit hours of coursework for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 36 credit hours of core coursework, 48 credit hours of content area courses, 28 credit hours of education coursework, and 12 credit hours of interning. Social studies candidates must complete 124 credit hours of coursework for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 36 credit hours of core coursework, 48 credit hours of content area courses, 28 credit hours of education coursework, and 12 credit hours of interning. Special education candidates must complete 123 credit hours of coursework. The curriculum is comprised of 36 credit hours of core coursework, 75 credit hours in education courses, and 12 credit hours of interning (Mississippi State University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

MSU's MAT program was designed for students who earned an undergraduate degree in a field other than education but desire to become an educator. Candidates can earn a MAT in secondary or special education. Secondary candidates must complete 36 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. Special education candidates must complete 33 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion (Mississippi State University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

**Mississippi University for Women.** Mississippi University for Women offers an undergraduate degree program in elementary and a graduate degree program for alternative secondary teacher certification. Prospective baccalaureate elementary candidates must complete 127 to 133 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 64 to 66 credit hours of core coursework, 51 to 55 credit hours of education and concentration courses, and 12 credit hours of interning (Mississippi University for

Women, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

Mississippi University for Women's MAT program was designed for students who earned an undergraduate degree in a field other than education but desire to become a secondary educator. Candidates can earn a MAT in art education, biology, business education, chemistry, English, French, German, home economics, marketing, mathematics, music education, physical education, physics, social studies, Spanish, speech communication, and technology education. These pre-service teachers must complete 30 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion (Mississippi University for Women, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

**Mississippi Valley State University.** Mississippi Valley State University offers an undergraduate degree program in elementary education and a graduate degree program for alternative elementary and secondary teacher certification. Aspiring baccalaureate teacher candidates must complete a minimum of 120 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 58 credit hours of core coursework, a minimum of 50 hours of education and concentration courses, and 12 credit hours of interning (Mississippi Valley State University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

Mississippi Valley State University's MAT program was designed for students who earned an undergraduate degree in a field other than education but desire to become a teacher. MAT candidates must complete 33 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion (Mississippi Valley State University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

**Rust College.** Rust College offers undergraduate degree programs in elementary and secondary education. Aspiring elementary teacher candidates must complete 144 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 64 credit hours of core coursework, 68 credit hours of education and concentration courses, and 12 credit hours of interning (Rust College, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

Aspiring secondary teacher candidates can pursue business, English, biology, mathematics, or social science education. Business education candidates must complete 130 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 64 credit hours of core coursework, 54 credit hours of content and education courses, and 12 credit hours of interning. English education candidates must complete 129 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 36 credit hours of core coursework, 81 credit hours of content and education courses, and 12 credit hours of interning. Biology education candidates must complete 124 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 48 credit hours of core coursework, 64 credit hours of content and education courses, and 12 credit hours of interning. Mathematics education candidates must complete 125 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 48 credit hours of core coursework, 65 credit hours of content and education courses, and 12 credit hours of interning. Social science education candidates must complete 145 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 36 credit hours of core coursework, 97 credit hours of content and education courses, and 12 credit

hours of interning (Rust College, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

**Tougaloo College.** Tougaloo College offers undergraduate degree programs in elementary, special, and secondary education and a graduate degree program for alternative elementary and secondary teacher certification. Prospective undergraduate elementary pre-service candidates must complete 122 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 44 credit hours of core coursework, 66 credit hours of education and concentration courses, and 12 credit hours of interning. Aspiring special education pre-service candidates must complete 120 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 44 credit hours of core coursework, 64 credit hours of education and content area courses, and 12 credit hours of interning. (Tougaloo College, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

Tougaloo's secondary degree program certifies candidates in nine areas: art, biology, chemistry, English, history, mathematics, mathematics and computer science, music, and physics. Candidates must complete at least 120 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of a minimum of 44 credit hours of core coursework, 30 to 51 credit hours of content area courses, 12 credit hours of education coursework, and 12 credit hours of interning (Tougaloo College, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

Tougaloo's MAT program was designed for students who earned an undergraduate degree in a field other than education but desire to become a teacher. Elementary MAT candidates must complete 33 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree

completion. Secondary MAT candidates must complete 36 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion (Tougaloo College, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

**University of Mississippi.** The University of Mississippi offers undergraduate degree programs in elementary and secondary education and a graduate degree program for alternative secondary teacher certification. Aspiring baccalaureate elementary teacher candidates must complete at least 124 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 42 credit hours of core coursework, 73 credit hours of education and concentration courses, and nine credit hours of interning (University of Mississippi, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

The University of Mississippi's secondary program certifies candidates in seven areas: health and physical education, English, social studies, mathematics, biology, chemistry, and physics. Health and physical education candidates must complete 123 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 42 credit hours of core coursework, 72 credit hours of education and content area courses, and nine credit hours of interning. English, social studies, mathematics, biology, chemistry, and physics candidates must complete 122 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 45 credit hours of core coursework, 68 credit hours of education and content area courses, and nine semester hours of interning (University of Mississippi, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

The University of Mississippi's MAT program was designed for students who earned an undergraduate degree in a field other than education but desire to become a teacher. Candidates

must complete 36 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. Candidates must take a course that examines diversity among adolescents (University of Mississippi, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

**University of Southern Mississippi.** The University of Southern Mississippi offers undergraduate degree programs in elementary and special education and a graduate degree program for alternative secondary teacher certification. Prospective elementary teacher candidates must complete 124 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 44 credit hours of core coursework, 68 hours of education and concentration courses, and 12 credit hours of interning. Special education teacher candidates must complete 122 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 35 credit hours of core coursework, 75 credit hours of education and content courses, and 12 credit hours of interning (University of Southern Mississippi, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

The University of Southern Mississippi's MAT program was designed for students who earned an undergraduate degree in a field other than education but desire to become a teacher. Aspiring candidates must complete 33 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. Candidates must take a course that addresses management and organization of diverse classrooms (University of Southern Mississippi, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

**William Carey University.** William Carey University offers an undergraduate degree program in elementary education and a graduate degree program for alternative elementary,

secondary, and special education teacher certification. William Carey also partners with Millsaps College to offer its students access to an undergraduate teacher education program. Aspiring baccalaureate teacher candidates must complete 121 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. The curriculum is comprised of 55 credit hours of core coursework, 60 credit hours of education and concentration courses, and a minimum of six credit hours of interning (William Carey University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.

William Carey's MAT program was designed for students who earned an undergraduate degree in a field other than education but desire to become a teacher. Elementary and special education candidates must complete 33 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion. Secondary candidates must complete 30 credit hours of coursework, including interning, for degree completion (William Carey University, n.d.). There is no course requirement to prepare candidates specifically for English learners. The EL training requirements of Mississippi's EPPs are summarized in Table 1.

**Alternative Certification Programs.** In addition to degree programs, there are alternative pathways to educator certification in Mississippi—Teach for America (TFA), Mississippi Alternate Path to Quality Teachers (MAPQT), and Teach Mississippi Institute (TMI). None of the alternative certification programs have course requirements to prepare candidates specifically for English learners.



**Table 1****EL-Specific Training Provided by EPPs in Mississippi**

<u>IHL</u>	<u>EPP Level</u>	<u>EL-Training Yes/None</u>	<u>Hours (Prof)</u>
Alcorn State University	Undergrad/Grad	Y/N	120 (61)
Belhaven University	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	129 (72)
Blue Mountain College	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	120 (42)
Delta State University	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	120 (60)
Jackson State University	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	122 (60)
Mississippi College	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	131 (46)
Mississippi State University	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	123 (66)
Mississippi University for Women	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	127 (64)
Mississippi Valley State University	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	120 (50)
Rust College	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	144 (68)
Tougaloo College	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	122 (66)
University of Mississippi	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	124 (73)
University of Southern Mississippi	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	124 (68)
William Carey University	Undergrad/Grad	N/N	121 (60)
Alternate Route Programs	TFA/MAPQT/TMI	N/N/N	N/A

Note: The required number of professional hours is found in parentheses for each IHL.

## **EL Teacher Requirements in Mississippi**

The Mississippi Department of Education currently does not require the ESL endorsement for individuals providing language support to ELs. Many districts utilize paraprofessionals to provide support to the EL population; however, school boards across the state are adopting policies increasing their districts' requirements because the EL population is now factored into district and school accountability per the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA, 2015). Districts are not only requiring licensed teachers but are also requiring teachers have the ESL endorsement.

There are three pathways for teachers to attain an endorsement to teach ELs in the state of Mississippi. Educators may obtain the ESL endorsement by passing the ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) Praxis assessment, by successfully completing a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) certification program from an approved university program, or by earning a graduate-level degree in the field of TESOL. For those who decide to take the Praxis, the teacher, or teacher candidate, must obtain a minimum score of 149 to get the ESL endorsement. Those who wish to complete a TESOL certification program must complete 12 to 18 credit hours of coursework in linguistics and multicultural understanding. Teachers, or teacher candidates, have the option of attending Mississippi College, Mississippi State University, Mississippi University for Women, the University of Mississippi, or the University of Southern Mississippi to attain credentials. Teachers who have done extensive study in the field of linguistics and language acquisition by obtaining a master or doctoral degree can obtain the ESL endorsement.

## **Accountability**

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) with additional accountability measures requiring states to assess students' literacy and numeracy skills annually in grades three through eight and once in high school. NCLB's imposed assessments exposed achievement gaps among the country's marginalized populations, which shifted the focus to providing a quality education for all students (USDE, 2015). The ESEA was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. ESSA focuses on providing equitable educational opportunities to all students and includes requirements states must meet for traditionally underserved populations. ESSA upholds NCLB's focus on accountability but includes provisions granting flexibility to states regarding some of NCLB's strict requirements. States are required to develop rigorous and comprehensive plans outlining detailed strategies for closing achievement gaps, increasing equity, improving the quality of instruction, and increasing outcomes for all students (USDE, 2015). States must also develop accountability models aligned to ESSA and approved by the USDE in order to remain in compliance with the federal law.

Mississippi's USDE-approved accountability model is two-fold—the 700-point model and the 1,000-point model. The 700-point model was designed for the state's elementary and middle schools. This model has eight components: reading proficiency, reading growth of all students, reading growth of the bottom quartile, math proficiency, math growth of all students, math growth of the bottom quartile, science proficiency, and EL progress toward proficiency. Table 2 summarizes the 700-point model's components and point system.

**Table 2**

**Mississippi's 700-point Model**

<u>Component</u>	<u>Total Points</u>
Reading Proficiency (Grades 3-8)	95
Reading Growth (All Students; Grades 4-8 & 3 repeaters)	95
Reading Growth (Bottom 25; Grades 4-8 & 3 repeaters)	95
Math Proficiency (Grades 3-8)	95
Math Growth (All Students; Grades 4-8 & 3 repeaters)	95
Math Growth (Bottom 25; Grades 4-8 & 3 repeaters)	95
Science (Grades 5 & 8)	95
EL Growth	35
Total Points	700

The 1,000-point model was designed for the state's high schools and districts. This model has 12 components: reading proficiency, reading growth of all students, reading growth of the bottom quartile, math proficiency, math growth of all students, math growth of the bottom quartile, science proficiency, U.S. history proficiency, graduation rate, college and career readiness, acceleration, and EL progress to proficiency. Table 3 summarizes the 1,000-point model's components and point system.

**Table 3**

**Mississippi's 1,000-point Model**

<u>Component</u>	<u>Total Points</u>
Reading Proficiency (Grade 10)	95
Reading Growth (All Students; Grade 10)	95
Reading Growth (Bottom 25; Grade 10)	95
Math Proficiency	95
Math Growth (All Students)	95
Math Growth (Bottom 25)	95
Science Proficiency	47.5
U.S. History Proficiency	47.5
Graduation Rate (4-year cohort)	190
Acceleration (Performance & Participation)	47.5
College & Career Readiness (ACT Math & Reading/English)	47.5
EL Growth	50
Total Points	1,000

Mississippi's EL population factors into every category and directly impacts multiple areas within the state's accountability model. EL students are required to take an English language proficiency test (ELPT) annually to monitor their progress toward English proficiency. Due to the language barrier, many ELs are in the bottom quartile for reading and math. These are three areas of direct impact. No other subgroup affects schools and districts more than ELs. Hence, school and district leaders should be especially concerned with supporting and growing this population.

## **Professional Development**

Albert Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in his or her own competence. In a 2019 study, Jeon applied Bandura's theory of self-efficacy to careers and explored the connection between career self-efficacy and career preparation behavior. Jeon (2019) found inadequate preparation negatively affected professionals' self-efficacy. This finding suggests professionals who believe they are improperly prepared for their fields are more likely to feel incompetent, which is applicable to educators. In education, career efficacy is referred to as teacher efficacy.

Pas, Bradshaw, and Hershfeldt (2012) examined the influence of teacher and school-level factors on the development of teacher efficacy. Rooted in Bandura's theory, Pas, Bradshaw, and Hershfeldt defined teacher efficacy as teachers' beliefs in their ability to create an adequate learning environment and to deliver academic instruction. The researchers found teacher preparedness and perceptions of teacher affiliation and leadership were significantly associated with developing teacher efficacy (Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012). These findings emphasize the importance of providing professional development to increase teacher preparedness, and, therefore, increase teacher efficacy.

Pettit (2011) reviewed the existing literature regarding teachers' attitudes about ELs and highlighted the need for increased professional development in this area due to the lack of training in preservice programs and teachers' ill-informed beliefs. Clair (1995) discussed the importance of in-service professional development to prepare mainstream classroom teachers to work with ELs. This targeted professional development should provide educators with ongoing opportunities to explore their beliefs toward their increasingly diverse student population; to pose questions regarding this population and how to better serve them; and to gain new knowledge,

practices, and attitudes toward ELs (Claire, 1995). To divert teachers from the typical call for quick fix strategies and solutions, Claire suggested the implementation of teacher study groups allowing teachers to engage in reflective practice and discussions by collaborating with peers. Claire asserted these study groups could serve as a catalyst for professional empowerment and social transformation within schools.

Garcia, Arias, Murri, and Serna (2010) articulated the importance of increasing teachers' knowledge of ELs through submersion in diverse ethnolinguistic communities. The researchers expressed the need for educators to respect and understand the knowledge ELs bring into the learning environment. Through direct contact and collaboration with linguistically diverse communities, teachers construct culturally responsive pedagogy (Garcia et al., 2010). These authentic experiences can develop teachers into strengths-based thinkers with a growth mindset rather than deficit-based thinkers with questionable practices.

Many believe educators who apply good teaching practices are effective educators for ELs; however, de Jong and Harper (2005) asserted implementing teaching practices good for native speakers is insufficient for ELs because these practices fail to address the linguistic demands embedded in assigned tasks. Teachers often overlook the linguistic foundation required to successfully complete seemingly simple tasks. For example, incorporation of turn and talk tasks within lessons seem to be great for ELs because cooperative learning and opportunities to interact with language are focal points of the activity; however, the underlying assumption of a turn and talk activity is students possess the necessary oral competencies and vocabulary to engage in dialogue pertaining to the prescribed topic. Teachers must be trained to think of the language demands and linguistic complexity in every facet of their teaching. Researchers de Jong and Harper proposed three dimensions of knowledge—process, medium, and goals—necessary

to effectively teach ELs. Educators must understand the process of language acquisition and acculturation, be cognizant of the impact language and culture have on the teaching and learning processes, and consider the importance of embedding linguistic and cultural diversity within curriculum and instruction (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Professional development opportunities must be intentionally planned and executed to build on these competencies.

Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008) identified six principles which serve as the linguistic foundation for teaching ELs. Educators who possess these principles are better equipped to begin their work with ELs. Teachers should understand:

1. conversational language proficiency differs from academic language proficiency and the former develops more quickly than the latter;
2. ELs must have access to comprehensible input just beyond their level of competence and must have opportunities to engage with language in meaningful ways;
3. social interaction is crucial in language acquisition and development;
4. skills in the native language can support language acquisition and development;
5. the classroom environment is pivotal to student success; and
6. essential linguistic forms should be taught explicitly and with purpose (Lucas et al., 2008).

Guskey (2000) analyzed the process of evaluating professional development in education. He outlined five levels at which professional development should be evaluated: Level 1: Participants' Reactions, Level 2: Participants' Learning, Level 3: Organization Support and Change, Level 4: Participants' Use of New Knowledge and Skills, and Level 5: Student Learning Outcomes. In Level 1, data is gathered regarding participants' experiences and perceptions. In Level 2, data is gathered regarding the knowledge and skills participants acquire from



professional development experiences. In Level 3, data is gathered regarding improvements in the organization's capacity to problem solve and make positive changes. In Level 4, data is gathered regarding participants' implementation of newly acquired knowledge and skills. Finally, in Level 5, data is gathered regarding the professional development experience's effects on student achievement—the underlying purpose of professional development efforts. The simplest and most common level of evaluation is Level 1; however, subsequent levels should be considered to determine the effectiveness of professional development efforts (Guskey, 2000).

Because superintendents, curriculum directors and specialists, head principals, assistant principals, and academic coaches are responsible for professional development programs, these leaders could utilize Guskey's model to determine the effectiveness of their current EL professional development programs and to make necessary adjustments to adequately support teachers. By evaluating teachers' perceptions, this study could serve as a starting point—Level 1 in Guskey's model—for instructional leaders to devise, implement, evaluate, and maintain quality EL professional development plans.

## **Conclusion**

Highly regarded EPPs across the country, as deemed by Darling-Hammond (2006), provide intentional, in-depth learning opportunities to pre-service teachers to prepare aspiring educators to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds; however, EPPs in the state of Mississippi require little to no EL-specific training to teacher candidates. Research suggests pre-service EL training is necessary for aspiring teachers to be successful in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Consequently, the need to develop quality EL professional development arises for K-12 leaders. The next chapter will provide the framework for this study.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The demographic of public schools across America is changing, and the student population is more culturally and linguistically diverse than ever. Trends suggest the linguistically diverse population will continue to grow in the K-12 setting (USDE, 2017); therefore, educators should be prepared to meet the needs of this growing population who must learn the English language as well as meet rigorous academic standards. ESSA highlights the importance of ensuring all students have equitable access to a high-quality education and has mandated states include EL subgroups and English language proficiency test achievement within their accountability models (USDE, 2015). These federal EL mandates invoked a heightened awareness of the EL population across schools and districts in Mississippi. Many teachers have been aware of the uptick of ELs in their classrooms since the late 1990s (B. Bess, personal communication, April 19, 2021). Now, factoring into accountability, administrators at the school and district levels are aware. Due to EPPs in Mississippi lacking sufficient EL-specific training for content-area teachers, educational leaders are tasked with the responsibility of providing knowledge and support to teachers to meet the needs of the EL population. This responsibility evokes the question: How can K-12 educational leaders elevate from a level of awareness of EL population growth in Mississippi to a level of preparedness for this population? Educational leaders can prepare by creating EL-specific professional development plans for their schools and

districts. EL professional development plans should be based on needs and goals and should be actionable and efficient to ensure successful implementation and maintenance.

The purpose of this study is to provide insight to educational leaders on the need to develop and implement quality professional development programs to build teacher capacity and, therefore, improve EL student achievement. The researcher aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are participants' perceptions of EL support and preservice training?
2. Does a statistically significant difference exist between instructional leaders' perceptions of the level of EL support provided and educators' perceptions of the level of EL support received?
3. Does a statistically significant difference exist between educators' EL preservice training and educators' perception of EL support received from instructional leaders?

To address research question one, a quantitative research approach is used to analyze participants' perceptions of EL support and preservice training. The researcher analyzed the descriptive statistics of the collected data. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there were 37,600 teachers and 1,000 principals employed by Mississippi's public schools in 2011-12 (USDE, 2012). The researcher understood she would not obtain responses from every member of each population, so convenience sampling was utilized to gather data. The researcher desired a return rate as high as possible in order to obtain an acceptable level for generalizability back to the population.

To address research question two, a quantitative research approach is used to determine if there are statistically significant differences between instructional leaders' perceptions of the level of EL support provided and educators' perceptions of the level of EL support received. For

statistical calculation purposes, an a priori analysis was conducted to determine the desired total sample size to run a one-way ANOVA using Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, and Lang's (2009) G\*Power calculator, which is 88 per group totaling 176 participants. The researcher desired a return rate as high as possible in order to obtain an acceptable level for generalizability back to the population.

To address research question three, a quantitative research approach is used to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between educators' EL preservice training and educators' perceptions of EL support received from instructional leaders. For statistical calculation purposes, an a priori analysis was conducted to determine the desired total sample size to run an independent t-test using Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, and Lang's (2009) G\*Power calculator, which is 105. The researcher desired a return rate as high as possible in order to obtain an acceptable level for generalizability back to the population.

### **Data Collection**

**Participants.** The target audience of participants for this study are K-12 educators and instructional leaders—superintendents, curriculum directors and specialists, head principals, assistant principals, and academic coaches—in the state of Mississippi. Participants were invited to participate in the study through Mississippi's teacher associations—Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE) and Mississippi Professional Educators (MPE)—and its school leader organization, Mississippi Association of School Administrators (MASA). Participants were categorized into groups—administrator, non-EL trained teacher, and EL trained teacher—based on their responses. In consideration of the use of human subjects, the researcher obtained approval from the university's institution review board (IRB) prior to instrument distribution and

data collection. The researcher completed CITI training as required by the University of Mississippi.

**Instrument.** The questionnaire is composed of two major sections: General Information and Preparedness and Support. General Information is comprised of four subsections—educator demographics, class organization, educational background, and certification—totaling 20 questions. Educator demographic items gained information regarding participants’ positions within their schools in addition to years of work experience. Teachers and instructional leaders answered applicable items. Class organization items gained information regarding grade levels taught and teaching assignments. Educational background items gained information regarding participants’ educator preparation programs and level of degree(s). Certification items gained information regarding participants’ teaching credentials. Participants identifying themselves as teachers responded to class organization, educational background, and certification questions. Administrators did not respond to these items. All questions are multiple-choice. These items were taken from the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey (USDE, 2007).

The Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) was an instrument used as a part of the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (BTLS), a study which examined the career development of beginning teachers over the course of five years. NCES has never published validity and reliability data for the BTLS. The data obtained from this portion of the instrument was analyzed qualitatively and used to categorize responses into three groups—instructional leaders, EL trained teachers, and non-EL trained teachers.

The second portion of the survey, Preparedness and Support, is comprised of 31 items. These items were taken from Darling-Hammond’s Perceptions of Preparedness Survey (2006), a survey used to examine teacher education programs across the United States. This portion of the

instrument required respondents to answer using a four-point Likert scale utilizing response types: not well, slightly well, well, and very well. Darling-Hammond (2006) explained the survey was validated “through a series of factor analyses employing the principal component method of extraction with varimax rotation” (p. 352) and produced an alpha coefficient of 0.73.

**Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions.** A limitation of this study is the time of instrument deployment. The instrument was initially deployed at the beginning of the school year, so participation rates were negatively impacted. Low participation rates impacted the researcher’s return rate goal, which makes generalizing the findings difficult. A delimitation of this study is the researcher’s decision to utilize Mississippi’s professional educator associations to distribute the survey. These organizations are not comprised of 100% of Mississippi’s teachers and administrators, which limited the number of potential participants. The researcher assumes respondents answered items honestly.

**Materials.** Utilizing Qualtrics, an experience management software, the researcher composed the instrument to be completed by participants in this study. The instrument is comprised of items from two published surveys, the SASS and the Perceptions of Preparedness Survey. The researcher utilized specific items from the SASS due to the comprehensive nature of its general information and demographic items; however, items directly seeking identifying information were omitted due to the researcher’s desire for participants’ anonymity. Other omitted SASS items measure school climate, general professional development, and working conditions, which are not within the confines of this study. For these reasons, the researcher elected not to use the survey in its entirety. The selected items from the Perceptions of Preparedness Survey explicitly focus on pedagogy, diverse perspectives, and working with

special populations. Omitted items measure technology use, classroom management, interpersonal conflict, and self-awareness, which are not within the confines of this study.

**Procedure.** The leaders of Mississippi’s teacher and school administrator organizations were contacted to gain access to their memberships as participants for the study and agreed to distribute the instrument to their respective members. Due to membership contact confidentiality, the researcher shared the link to the instrument with the organizations’ leaders. The leaders distributed the link to their respective memberships. Due to the timing of distribution, the instrument was scheduled to be deployed three times. Redeployments only targeted non-respondents. Participants completed the survey independently. Upon participants’ completion of the survey, the results were collected and assessed by the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of this study is to examine educators and instructional leaders’ perceptions of EL instructional support and to highlight the need for EL professional development opportunities. The researcher aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are participants’ perceptions of EL support and preservice training?
2. Does a statistically significant difference exist between instructional leaders’ perceptions of the level of EL support provided and educators’ perceptions of the level of EL support received?
3. Does a statistically significant difference exist between educators’ EL preservice training and educators’ perception of EL support received from instructional leaders?

This analysis essentially identified the three major populations to be examined among participants—EL trained teachers, non-EL trained teachers, and K-12 leaders. For the purpose of this study, these entities will be treated as independent groups. A correlational examination will

be conducted to determine if there are relationships and differences among the three groups regarding levels of preparedness to teach ELs and levels of EL support received.

To address question one, the researcher utilizes descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics are employed to display, describe, or summarize data. This type of analysis allows researchers to explicate the data to examine potential patterns (Laerd Statistics, n.d.). In this study, the researcher analyzes participants' perceptions of EL support and EL preservice training to gather information regarding potential patterns, commonalities, and/or differences in perceptions.

To address question two, the researcher employs a one-way ANOVA. A one-way ANOVA is used to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between the means of two or more independent groups (Laerd Statistics, n.d.). In this study, the researcher examines the differences between instructional leaders' perceptions of EL support provided and educators' perceptions of EL support received. Data obtained from the Preparedness and Support portion of the survey was converted to continuous data on a scale of one to four—not well being a one and very well being a four—to run the analysis. An alpha level of 0.05 was utilized to determine statistical significance.

To address question three, the researcher employed an independent t-test. An independent t-test is used to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between two groups (Laerd Statistics, n.d.). In this study, the dependent variable is educators' perceptions of EL support received from instructional leaders, and the independent variable is educators' EL preservice training—coded as no preservice training or preservice training.



## **Conclusion**

The researcher seeks to examine the relationships and differences between EL trained teachers, non-EL trained teachers, and instructional leaders' perceptions of EL support received and provided. With approval from the IRB, educators throughout Mississippi were invited to participate in the study through the state's educator professional organizations—MAE, MPE, and MASA. Responses are analyzed to gather information regarding potential patterns, commonalities, and/or differences in perceptions. A one-way ANOVA is employed to determine if there are differences between the variables, and an independent t-test is utilized to determine if there are differences between preservice training and perceptions of support. The results of the analyses are presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to examine educators and instructional leaders' perceptions of English learner instructional support and to highlight the need for EL professional development opportunities. In this study, the researcher proposes three research questions:

1. What are participants' perceptions of EL support and preservice training?
2. Does a statistically significant difference exist between instructional leaders' perceptions of EL support provided and educators' perceptions of the level of EL support received?
3. Is there a relationship between educators' perceptions of the level of preparedness to grow ELs from preservice training and educators' perceptions of the level of EL support received from instructional leaders?

#### **Data Collection and Participants**

Teachers and instructional leaders throughout the state of Mississippi were invited to participate in this study through three of the state's educator organizations—the Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE), the Mississippi Professional Educators (MPE), and the Mississippi Association of School Administrators (MASA). An invitation with study and instrument information was shared via email with each organization's president. The presidents were asked to share the invitation with their respective memberships. The researcher scheduled three deployments in August 2021. The initial deployment date was August 3, 2021, and four

responses were received. All respondents identified as teachers. The second deployment, on August 10, 2021, yielded ten additional responses—nine identified as teachers and one as an administrator. Two teachers' responses were received as a result of the third deployment on August 17, 2021. At the conclusion of the researcher's scheduled deployment window, a total of 16 responses had been received—15 teachers and one administrator. Due to a low participation rate, the instrument was deployed a fourth time in September 2021. This additional deployment resulted in four additional teacher responses. With only one participant identifying as an administrator, the researcher targeted the instructional leader audience specifically and deployed the instrument a fifth time within her district. The final deployment yielded 26 additional responses from administrators. A total of 46 responses were collected—19 teachers and 27 administrators.

Participants identifying as teachers were asked about their years of experience, educational background, and areas of certification. Participants' years of experience ranged from one year to over 25 years. Per the licensure requirements of the MDE, all participants have earned a bachelor's degree, and 14 of the 19 respondents received their preservice training by earning a bachelor's degree in education. A total of five participants earned a bachelor's degree in a field other than education and earned their teaching credentials through an alternative certification program. Participants hold certifications in the following areas: special education, music, English/language arts, reading, English as a Second Language (ESL), Spanish, the sciences, history, geography, library science, and computer/technical education. All participants are licensed to teach in Mississippi's elementary and/or secondary schools.

Background information—educational history, years of experience, and areas of certification—of administrators was not gathered, as it is not relevant to the aim of the

researcher's study. However, the researcher believes the number of participants from her district is relevant and will be discussed in the next chapter. An overwhelming majority of participants identifying as administrators, 26 of 27 respondents, work in the same district as the researcher.

### **Preparedness and Support**

The Preparedness and Support section of the survey was designed to collect information regarding participants' perceptions of support provided and received and aims to address the researchers' principal questions. This section of the survey is comprised of 31 items in response to the following questions for teachers and instructional leaders respectively:

- How well do you think your school leadership has prepared you to do the following?
- How well do you think you have prepared your teachers to do the following?

Participants responded using a four-point Likert-type scale utilizing the responses not well, slightly well, well, and very well. The items and a summary of participants' responses can be found in Appendices A and B.

### **What are participants' perceptions of EL support and preservice training?**

As outlined previously, teacher participants were asked several questions related to how well their instructional leaders have prepared them to serve all students as well as the EL population specifically or how well they—instructional leaders—have prepared their teachers. The descriptive statistics for teachers' perceptions of EL support received from instructional leaders are provided in Table 4. The descriptive statistics for instructional leaders' perceptions of EL support provided are listed in Table 5.

Only 13 of 19 participating teachers responded to the item regarding the location of their respective EPPs. Of the 13, nine participants received teacher training from an EPP in MS. Approximately 37% of participants who identified as teachers have received some training to

serve ELs. Of the 19 teacher participants, seven have taken undergraduate or graduate courses that focused on ESL teaching methods or ESL teaching strategies: one participant took one to two courses; three participants took three to four courses; and three participants took 10 or more courses. Of the seven participants who have taken ESL coursework, six participants' coursework resulted in a TESOL specialization—those with four or more courses.

**Table 4**

**Teachers' Perceptions of EL Support Received**

Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Variation	Variance	Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Variation	Variance
1	1.00	4.00	2.32	0.92	0.85	17	1.00	4.00	2.21	0.89	0.80
2	1.00	3.00	2.37	0.74	0.55	18	1.00	4.00	2.11	0.91	0.83
3	1.00	4.00	2.37	0.74	0.55	19	1.00	4.00	1.79	0.89	0.80
4	1.00	4.00	2.47	0.88	0.78	20	1.00	4.00	2.42	0.82	0.66
5	1.00	3.00	2.11	0.72	0.52	21	1.00	4.00	2.11	0.79	0.62
6	1.00	3.00	2.11	0.79	0.62	22	1.00	4.00	2.05	0.94	0.89
7	1.00	4.00	2.53	0.82	0.67	23	1.00	4.00	2.26	0.91	0.83
8	1.00	4.00	2.16	0.81	0.66	24	1.00	4.00	2.42	0.88	0.77
9	1.00	4.00	2.16	0.87	0.76	25	1.00	4.00	1.89	0.85	0.73
10	1.00	3.00	2.05	0.76	0.58	26	1.00	4.00	2.21	0.95	0.90
11	1.00	4.00	2.11	0.97	0.94	27	1.00	4.00	2.11	0.97	0.94
12	1.00	4.00	2.21	1.00	1.01	28	1.00	4.00	1.84	0.87	0.76
13	1.00	4.00	2.11	0.85	0.73	29	1.00	4.00	2.47	0.88	0.78
14	1.00	4.00	2.11	1.02	1.03	30	1.00	4.00	2.11	1.02	1.04
15	1.00	4.00	2.37	1.09	1.18	31	1.00	4.00	2.58	0.82	0.66
16	1.00	4.00	2.05	0.94	0.89						

**Table 5**

**Leaders' Perceptions of EL Support Provided**

Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Variation	Variance	Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Variation	Variance
1	2.00	4.00	2.85	0.65	0.42	17	1.00	4.00	2.30	0.90	0.80
2	2.00	4.00	2.81	0.67	0.45	18	1.00	4.00	2.26	0.84	0.71
3	2.00	4.00	2.89	0.63	0.40	19	1.00	4.00	2.41	0.68	0.46
4	1.00	4.00	2.74	0.75	0.56	20	1.00	4.00	2.59	0.78	0.61
5	1.00	4.00	2.52	0.92	0.84	21	1.00	4.00	2.70	0.76	0.58
6	2.00	4.00	2.74	0.70	0.49	22	1.00	4.00	2.52	0.83	0.69
7	2.00	4.00	2.81	0.67	0.45	23	2.00	4.00	2.93	0.66	0.44
8	1.00	4.00	2.37	0.82	0.68	24	1.00	4.00	2.22	0.92	0.84
9	1.00	4.00	2.26	0.89	0.78	25	1.00	4.00	1.67	0.90	0.81
10	1.00	4.00	2.26	0.89	0.78	26	1.00	4.00	2.81	0.77	0.60
11	1.00	4.00	2.11	0.87	0.77	27	1.00	4.00	2.37	0.78	0.60
12	1.00	4.00	2.22	0.79	0.62	28	1.00	4.00	2.04	0.88	0.78
13	2.00	4.00	2.78	0.68	0.47	29	2.00	4.00	2.85	0.65	0.42
14	1.00	4.00	2.07	0.81	0.66	30	1.00	4.00	2.74	0.70	0.49
15	1.00	4.00	2.56	0.68	0.47	31	2.00	4.00	3.07	0.54	0.29
16	1.00	4.00	2.07	0.81	0.66						

**Does a statistically significant difference exist between instructional leaders’ perceptions of EL support provided and educators’ perceptions of the level of EL support received?**

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to explore differences between instructional leaders’ perceptions of EL support provided and educators’ perceptions of the level of EL support received. Using SPSS, the researcher combined responses to items 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 26, 28, and 29 from the Preparedness and Support section of the survey because these items explicitly address perceptions regarding the direct instruction of ELs. Descriptive statistics for these 11 items are in Table 6. Groups were normally distributed. Variances were homogeneous ( $F(1, 44) = 2, p = .164$ ). Statistically significant differences were not evident among the groups ( $F(1,44) = 2.054, p = .159$ ). A small effect size was noted,  $\eta^2 = 0.045$ , indicative of a weak degree of practical significance.

**Table 6**

**Descriptive Statistics**

<u>Group</u>	<u>Sample</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Instructional Leader	27	27.741	7.857
Teacher	19	24.000	9.826

Based on the results at the scale level of the combined items, the researcher conducted an exploratory analysis to examine if significant differences were evident between the teacher and instructional leader groups at the item level. Descriptive statistics are outlined in Table 7. In Table 7, instructional leaders were labeled as group one, and teachers were labeled as group two. Groups were not normally distributed. Results of each one-way ANOVA are provided in Table 8. Statistically significant differences were evident among the groups for four of the 11 items—



items 13, 19, 23, and 26. Large effect sizes were noted for each, indicative of a strong degree of practical significance.

**Table 7*****Item Level Descriptive Statistics***

<u>Item</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
12	1	27	2.222	0.801
	2	19	2.211	1.032
13	1	27	2.778	0.698
	2	19	2.105	0.875
15	1	27	2.556	0.698
	2	19	2.368	1.116
17	1	27	2.296	0.912
	2	19	2.211	0.918
18	1	27	2.259	0.859
	2	19	2.105	0.937
19	1	27	2.407	0.694
	2	19	1.790	0.918
20	1	27	2.593	0.797
	2	19	2.421	0.838
23	1	27	2.926	0.675
	2	19	2.263	0.933
26	1	27	2.815	0.786
	2	19	2.211	0.976
28	1	27	2.037	0.898
	2	19	1.842	0.898
29	1	27	2.852	0.662
	2	19	2.474	0.905

**Table 8**

**Item Level ANOVA Results**

<u>Item</u>	<u>F (1,44)</u>	<u>p</u>	<u><math>\eta^2</math></u>
12	0.002	0.966	0.001
13	8.389	0.006**	0.160
15	0.490	0.488	0.011
17	0.098	0.756	0.002
18	0.333	0.567	0.008
19	6.770	0.013*	0.133
20	0.495	0.485	0.011
23	7.828	0.008**	0.151
26	5.392	0.025*	0.109
28	0.525	0.472	0.012
29	2.684	0.108	0.057

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

**Does a statistically significant difference exist between educators' EL preservice training and educators' perceptions of EL support received from instructional leaders?**

An independent t-test was conducted to explore differences between educators' EL preservice training and educators' perceptions of EL support received from instructional leaders. The researcher identified educators without EL preservice training, the independent variable, from the General Information portion of the instrument. Participants who indicated they had taken zero EL preparatory courses during preservice training were assigned a value of one.

Participants who indicated they had taken one or more EL preparatory courses were assigned a value of two. The researcher used the combined perceptual data from items 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 26, 28, and 29 from the Preparedness and Support section of the survey as the dependent variable. An alpha level of 0.05 was utilized. Descriptive statistics are in Table 9. All groups were normally distributed. Variances were homogeneous ( $F(1, 17) = -6.333, p > 0.05$ ). Hence, equal variances were assumed. A statistically significant difference was evident between educators' EL preservice training and educators' perceptions of EL support received from instructional leaders ( $t(17) = -5.938, p < 0.001$ ). A large effect size was noted ( $d = 5.767$ ) indicative a strong degree of practical significance.

**Table 9: Descriptive Statistics for Independent *t*-test of EL Preservice Training and EL Perceptions of Support**

**Descriptive Statistics**

<u>Preservice Training</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
No Training	12	18	6.194
Some Training	7	34.286	4.889

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The demographics of public-school classrooms across America are shifting to a more culturally and linguistically diverse student population, and this is evident in the composition of Mississippi's student population. As a result of the growing diversity, legislation and guidance have been adopted at the federal, state, and local levels to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students. Educators and instructional leaders must be prepared to support these students and to be in compliance with regulations. The purpose of this study is to examine educators and instructional leaders' perceptions of English learner instructional support and to highlight the need for EL professional development opportunities. A quantitative approach was utilized to analyze the data gathered to address the researcher's proposed questions:

1. What are participants' perceptions of EL support and preservice training?
2. Does a statistically significant difference exist between instructional leaders' perceptions of EL support provided and educators' perceptions of the level of EL support received?
3. Does a statistically significant difference exist between educators' EL preservice training and educators' perception of EL support received from instructional leaders?

#### **What are participants' perceptions of EL support and preservice training?**

To analyze participants' perceptions of EL support and preservice training, the researcher examined descriptive statistics as well as the raw data from the Preparedness and Support portion of the survey. The Preparedness and Support section of the survey was designed to collect

information regarding participants' perceptions of support received and provided. The descriptive statistics were shared in the previous chapter. Here, the researcher will discuss the raw data—how participants responded to the items using not well, slightly well, well, and very well. When examining the raw data, the researcher considered 67% of the total responses as the threshold for an overwhelming majority—13 responses for teachers and 18 for instructional leaders. A visual summary of this data is provided in Appendices C and D.

**Teachers' Perspectives.** An overwhelming majority of teacher participants responded not well and slightly well to nine of 31 items—specifically items 10, 11, 13, 19, 21, 22, 25, 27, and 28. Item 10 asked participants how well their school leadership has prepared them to identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties. Of the 19 teacher participants, 26% responded not well and 42% responded slightly well. Item 11 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to teach in ways that support new English learners. Participants identifying as teachers responded as follows: 31% not well and 37% slightly well. Item 13 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to provide a rationale for their teaching decisions. Teacher participants' responses were 26% not well and 42% slightly well. Item 19 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to teach students from a multicultural perspective. Of the 19 teacher participants, 47% responded not well and 32% responded slightly well. Item 21 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to help all students learn to think critically. Teacher participants' responses were 21% not well and 53% slightly well. Item 22 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to encourage students to see, question, and interpret ideas from diverse perspectives. Participants identifying as teachers responded as follows: 32% not well and 42% slightly well. Item 25 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to work with EL parents and families to better understand students and support ELs' learning. Of

the 19 teacher participants, 37% responded not well and 42% responded slightly well. Item 27 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to give productive feedback to ELs to guide student learning. Teacher participants' responses were 32% not well and 37% slightly well. Item 28 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to help ELs self-assess learning. Participants identifying as teachers responded as follows: 42% not well and 37% slightly well. These responses suggest teachers believe they are not receiving sufficient support in the areas of multicultural perspectives, diversity, development of higher-order thinking skills of ELs, supporting ELs to become independent learners, and relationships with ELs and their families.

An overwhelming majority of teacher participants responded slightly well and well to 15 of 31 items—specifically items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 17, 20, 23, 24, 29, and 31. Item 1 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to teach the concepts, knowledge, and skills of their discipline. Of the 19 teacher participants, 21% responded slightly well and 47% responded well. Item 2 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to understand how different students are learning. Teacher participants' responses were 32% slightly well and 52% well. Item 3 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to set challenging and appropriate learning expectations for students. Participants identifying as teachers responded as follows: 47% slightly well and 37% well. Item 4 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to help students achieve high academic standards. Of the 19 teacher participants, 47% responded slightly well and 26% responded well. Item 5 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to develop curriculum that builds on students' experiences, interests, and abilities. Teacher participants' responses were 47% slightly well and 32% well. Item 6 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to evaluate curriculum materials for usefulness and appropriateness. Of the 19 teacher participants, 37% responded slightly well and 37% responded

well. Item 7 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to use instructional strategies that promote active student learning. Participants identifying as teachers responded as follows: 37% slightly well and 42% well. Item 8 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to relate classroom learning to the real world. Teacher participants' responses were 47% slightly well and 26% well. Item 9 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to understand how students' social emotional, physical, and cognitive development influence learning. Of the 19 teacher participants, 53% responded slightly well and 16% responded well. Item 17 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to engage ELs in cooperative work as well as independent learning. Participants identifying as teachers responded as follows: 32% slightly well and 37% well. Item 20 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to use questions to stimulate different kinds of student learning. Of the 19 teacher participants, 32% responded slightly well and 47% responded well. Item 23 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to use knowledge of learning, subject matter, curriculum, and student development to plan instruction. Teacher participants' responses were 42% slightly well and 26% well. Item 24 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to understand how factors in the students' environment outside of school may influence their lives and learning. Of the 19 teacher participants, 37% responded slightly well and 37% responded well. Item 29 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to evaluate the effects of their actions and modify plans accordingly. Participants identifying as teachers responded as follows: 32% slightly well and 42% well. Item 31 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to maintain discipline and an orderly, purposeful learning environment. Teacher participants' responses were 47% slightly well and 32% well.



There was no overwhelming majority for well and very well responses on any items for teacher participants. Responses to items 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 26, and 30 were mixed, and four of the seven items directly address the instruction of ELs. Item 12 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to choose teaching strategies for different instructional purposes and to meet ELs' needs. Participants identifying as teachers responded as follows: 32% not well, 26% slightly well, 32% well, and 10% very well. Item 14 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to help ELs become self-motivated and self-directed. Of the 19 teacher participants, 37% responded not well, 26% slightly well, 26% well, and 11% very well. Item 15 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to develop a classroom environment that promotes social development and group responsibility. Teacher participants' responses were 31% not well, 16% slightly well, 37% well, and 16% very well. Item 16 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to develop ELs' questioning and discussion skills. Participants identifying as teachers responded as follows: 37% not well, 26% slightly well, 32% well, and 5% very well. Item 18 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to use effective verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to guide ELs' learning and behavior. Of the 19 teacher participants, approximately 32% responded not well, 32% slightly well, 32% well, and less than 6% very well. Item 26 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to use a variety of assessments to determine students' strengths, needs, and programs. Teacher participants' responses were 32% not well, 21% slightly well, 42% well, and 5% very well. Item 30 asked how well school leadership has prepared them to conduct inquiry or research to inform their decisions. Participants identifying as teachers responded as follows: 37% not well, 26% slightly well, 26% well, and 11% very well. This suggests teacher participants believe there is room for

improvement in the level of support instructional leaders provide to teachers and more support is needed to educate English learners.

**Instructional Leaders' Perspectives.** An overwhelming majority of instructional leader participants responded not well and slightly well to three of 31 items—specifically items 16, 25, and 28, all of which are EL-specific. In response to item 16, 26% of instructional leader participants responded not well and 44% responded slightly well. In response to item 25, 59% of leader participants responded not well and 19% responded slightly well. In response to item 28, 30% of leader participants responded not well and 44% responded slightly well. This suggests leaders know they could provide more support to teachers in the areas of helping ELs become independent learners and working with EL families.

An overwhelming majority of leaders responded well and very well to nine items—items 1, 2, 3, 7, 23, 26, 29, 30, and 31. In response to item 1, 56% of leader participants responded well and 15% very well. In response to item 2, 52% of leaders responded well and 15% very well. In response to item 3, 59% of leader participants responded well and 15% very well. In response to item 7, 52% of instructional leaders responded well and 15% very well. In response to item 23, 56% of leader participants responded well and 19% responded very well. In response to item 26, 48% of instructional leaders responded well and 19% responded very well. In response to item 29, 56% of leader participants responded well and 15% very well. In response to item 30, 56% of leaders responded well and 11% responded very well. In response to item 31, 70% of instructional leaders responded well and 19% responded very well. This suggests leaders believe they are doing an exceptionally good job of supporting teachers in these areas.

The vast majority of leaders responded slightly well and well to the remaining 19 items—items 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, and 27. In response to item 4,

33% of instructional leaders responded slightly well and 48% responded well. In response to item 5, 33% of leader participants responded slightly well and 37% responded well. In response to item 6, 41% of leaders responded slightly well and 44% responded well. In response to item 8, 30% of leaders responded slightly well and 48% responded well. In response to item 9, 26% of instructional leaders responded slightly well and 44% responded well. In response to item 10, 26% of leader participants responded slightly well and 44% responded well. In response to item 11, 33% of leaders responded slightly well and approximately 34% responded well. In response to item 12, 44% of instructional leaders responded slightly well and 33% responded well. In response to item 13, 37% of leaders responded slightly well and 48% responded well. In response to item 14, 44% of leader participants responded slightly well and 26% responded well. In response to item 15, 33% of leaders responded slightly well and 56% responded well. In response to item 17, 33% of instructional leaders responded slightly well and 37% responded well. In response to item 18, 33% of leader participants responded slightly well and 41% responded well. In response to item 19, 48% of instructional leaders responded slightly well and 41% responded well. In response to item 20, 37% of leaders responded slightly well and 44% responded well. In response to item 21, 37% of leader participants responded slightly well and 44% responded well. In response to item 22, 37% of instructional leaders responded slightly well and 41% responded well. In response to item 24, approximately 33% of leaders responded slightly well and approximately 33% responded well. In response to item 27, 48% of leader participants responded slightly well and 33% responded well. This suggests leaders believe they provide satisfactory EL support to teachers overall, which seems contradictory to the perspectives of teacher participants.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, 26 of 27 instructional leader participants work in the researcher's school district. This school district employs EL curriculum and instructional specialists—the only district in the state of Mississippi with these roles. The specialists have graduate-level degrees in linguistics and teaching English as a second language (TESL). This district also has a board policy requiring all EL teachers to have the ESL endorsement. Hence, the perceptions of leader participants in contrast to teacher participants in this study is understandable due to the qualifications, education, and certifications of the personnel within their buildings and district.

**Does a statistically significant difference exist between instructional leaders' perceptions of EL support provided and educators' perceptions of the level of EL support received?**

The ANOVA revealed there is no statistically significant difference between instructional leaders and educators' perceptions of EL support when items are combined; however, significant differences are evident between the groups for items 13, 19, 23, and 26. Item 13 asked about support with providing a rationale for teaching decisions. Item 19 asked about support with teaching from a multicultural vantage point. Item 23 asked about support with use of knowledge of learning, subject matter, curriculum, and student development to plan instruction. Item 26 asked about support with using a variety of assessments to determine students' strengths, needs, and programs. The verbiage of these items is not EL-specific; however, participants responded to the instrument from the perspective of educating English learners. Therefore, the significant differences between groups are substantiated. As outlined in the previous section, there are several items to which participants responded not well. Individual responses from both groups indicate there is room for improvement with providing EL support.

## **Does a statistically significant difference exist between educators' EL preservice training and educators' perceptions of EL support received from instructional leaders?**

Teacher participants' responses indicate there is a relationship between the perceptions of teachers who received preservice EL training and the perceptions of teachers who received no EL preservice training. Jeon (2019) explored the relationship between self-efficacy and career preparation behavior using Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and found inadequate preparation negatively impacted professionals' self-efficacy, or teacher efficacy in this study. The responses from this study support Jeon's findings. Teachers who received EL training commonly responded well and very well to EL-specific items. Teachers without EL training trended in the opposite direction—with not well and slightly well responses. These findings suggest those teachers who have received some EL training believe they receive sufficient EL support from their instructional leaders, while those who did not receive preservice EL training feel as if there is room for growth in this aspect. The exceptionally strong effect size ( $d = 5.767$ ) is limited due to the study's small sample size ( $n = 19$ ).

### **Conclusion**

Teacher participants in this study may believe the EL support provided by their leadership is insufficient because in-service training opportunities usually lack the depth of coursework and typically focus on instructional practices that were developed to support native speakers. Teachers without preservice EL training lack the foundational knowledge of second language acquisition and do not fully understand the roles of language and culture in the teaching and learning processes. If teachers do not gain understanding in these areas, they could perceive attempts of EL support as inadequate because their foundational knowledge needs are not being met.

Lucas and Villegas (2013) asserted it takes years to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully educate culturally and linguistically diverse students and recommended EL training begin in preservice programs. Darling-Hammond (2006) recommended EPPs provide intentional, in-depth learning experiences for their pre-service teachers to prepare them to be responsive educators who are empowered to meet the needs of individual learners from diverse backgrounds. The findings of this study support the literature: EPPs in Mississippi should consider adding EL-specific coursework to their requirements. EL preservice training positively affects teachers' attitudes and perceptions and increases their knowledge, which directly impacts students.

ESSA requires states to develop rigorous and comprehensive plans outlining detailed strategies for closing achievement gaps, increasing equity, improving the quality of instruction, and increasing outcomes for all students (USDE, 2015). Mississippi's accountability plan addresses student achievement and growth in reading, math, science, history, language proficiency, graduation, acceleration, and college and career readiness. As detailed in Chapter 2, the EL population factors into each of the categories of Mississippi's accountability model. No other subgroup affects schools and districts more than ELs. Hence, school and district leaders should be especially concerned with supporting and growing this population and should develop and implement professional development plans to increase teacher efficacy in this area. Pas, Bradshaw, and Hershfeldt (2012) defined teacher efficacy as teachers' beliefs in their ability to create an adequate learning environment and to deliver academic instruction. In their study, they found teacher preparedness and perceptions of teacher affiliation and leadership were significantly associated with developing teacher efficacy. The findings of this study support Pas, Bradshaw, and Hershfeldt's research. Teachers with EL training believe they receive adequate

EL support from their leaders: these educators have high teacher efficacy. To increase teacher efficacy of non-EL trained teachers, leaders should provide targeted EL professional development with ongoing opportunities to explore personal beliefs toward the increasingly diverse student population; to pose questions regarding this population and how to better serve them; and to gain new knowledge, practices, and attitudes toward ELs (Claire, 1995). Increasing educators' teacher efficacy will directly impact students.

The findings from this study suggest (1) teachers believe there is much room for improvement regarding EL support—while leaders believe they are providing sufficient EL support overall; (2) statistically significant differences between the perceptions of EL support of teacher participants and leader participants were evident at the item-level, and (3) there is a statistically significant difference between educators' EL preservice training and educators' perceptions of EL support received from instructional leaders. These findings support the literature regarding the effects of EL preservice training on teacher knowledge, preparedness, and efficacy and the need for EL professional development.

### **Limitations of Interpretation**

There are limitations to the interpretation of the researcher's findings. The overarching limitation is the impact of COVID-19 on the educational system. Educators at every level of the K-12 system have been stretched well beyond the expectations and responsibilities of their roles prior to March 2020, and most have been operating in survival mode for the past two academic years (2020-21 and 2021-22). Teachers have taught in-person, virtually, and/or in hybrid settings, sometimes simultaneously. Building-level administrators have added janitorial duties, bus routes, and substitute teaching to the list of responsibilities. Superintendents and other district-level personnel have served as cafeteria workers and substitute teachers. Educators at

every level are mentally and physically exhausted and have no desire to complete additional tasks outside of those required. COVID-19 directly impacted the participation rate of this study.

The researcher targeted teachers and instructional leaders throughout the state of Mississippi by utilizing the state's largest educator organizations; however, the participation rate was much lower than expected. The low participation rate hinders the generalizability of the results. Because of the nearly non-existent participation of instructional leaders initially, the researcher had to target leaders within her district. This impacts the findings because 96% of leader participants work in a district where EL supports are more abundant than most districts in the state of Mississippi, as this district employs curriculum and instructional specialists whose focus is to provide EL-specific support to all instructional staff. The researcher's district also requires all of its EL teachers to have the ESL endorsement. No other district in the state of Mississippi has this level of EL support, which directly hinders the generalizability of the results.

Another limitation is the type of data collected—perceptual data. While perceptual data is valid and acceptable, it can be positively or negatively affected depending on affective factors and varied experiences of respondents.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Anecdotal data suggests teachers believe they are ill-prepared and do not receive adequate support to effectively teach ELs in Mississippi; however, research in the area of EL-specific support is limited. This study could be extended to gain insight from teachers and leaders in a post-pandemic educational system, or the instrument could be deployed annually to examine changes. Future researchers are encouraged to delve deeply into how preservice programs could add EL-specific coursework to degree requirements. Future researchers are also encouraged to examine the types of EL in-service training school districts provide to support



instructional personnel as well as observe the instructional practices in classrooms with EL students. Due to the dearth of research in this area in the state of Mississippi, there is much room for continued study.

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## Appendix

## APPENDIX A

### Instructional Leaders' Responses

Item	Not Well	Slightly Well	Well	Very Well	Total
Teach the concepts, knowledge, and skills of your discipline(s) in ways that enable all students to learn	0	8	15	4	27
Understand how different students are learning	0	9	14	4	27
Set challenging and appropriate expectations of learning and performance for all students	0	7	16	4	27
Help all students achieve high academic standards	1	9	13	4	27
Develop curriculum that builds on students' experiences, interests, and abilities	4	9	10	4	27
Evaluate curriculum materials for their usefulness and appropriateness for all students	0	11	12	4	27
Use instructional strategies that promote active student learning	0	9	14	4	27
Relate classroom learning to the real world	5	8	13	1	27
Understand how students' social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development influence learning	7	7	12	1	27
Identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties	7	7	12	1	27
Teach in ways that support new English learners	8	9	9	1	27
Choose teaching strategies for different instructional purposes and to meet EL students' needs	5	12	9	1	27
Provide a rationale for your teaching decisions to students, parents, and colleagues	0	10	13	4	27
Help EL students become self-motivated and self-directed	7	12	7	1	27
Develop a classroom environment that promotes social development and group responsibility	2	9	15	1	27
Develop EL students' questioning and discussion skills	7	12	7	1	27
Engage EL students in cooperative work as well as independent learning	6	9	10	2	27
Use effective verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to guide EL student learning and behavior	6	9	11	1	27
Teach students from a multicultural vantage point	2	13	11	1	27
Use questions to stimulate different kinds of student learning	2	10	12	3	27
Help all students learn to think critically and solve problems	1	10	12	4	27
Encourage students to see, question, and interpret ideas from diverse perspectives	3	10	11	3	27
Use knowledge of learning, subject matter, curriculum, and student development to plan instruction	0	7	15	5	27
Understand how factors in the students' environment outside of school may influence their life and learning	7	9	9	2	27
Work with EL parents and families to better understand students and to support their learning	16	5	5	1	27
Use a variety of assessments (e.g., observation, portfolios, tests, performance tasks, anecdotal records) to determine student strengths, needs, and programs	1	8	13	5	27
Give productive feedback to EL students to guide their learning	3	13	9	2	27
Help EL students learn how to assess their own learning	8	12	5	2	27
Evaluate the effects of your actions and modify plans accordingly	0	8	15	4	27
Conduct inquiry or research to inform your decisions	1	8	15	3	27
Maintain discipline and an orderly, purposeful learning environment	0	3	19	5	27

## APPENDIX B

### Educators' Responses

Item	Not Well	Slightly Well	Well	Very Well	Total
Teach the concepts, knowledge, and skills of your discipline(s) in ways that enable all students to learn	5	4	9	1	19
Understand how different students are learning	3	6	10	0	19
Set challenging and appropriate expectations of learning and performance for all students	2	9	7	1	19
Help all students achieve high academic standards	2	9	5	3	19
Develop curriculum that builds on students' experiences, interests, and abilities	4	9	6	0	19
Evaluate curriculum materials for their usefulness and appropriateness for all students	5	7	7	0	19
Use instructional strategies that promote active student learning	2	7	8	2	19
Relate classroom learning to the real world	4	9	5	1	19
Understand how students' social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development influence learning	4	10	3	2	19
Identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties	5	8	6	0	19
Teach in ways that support new English learners	6	7	4	2	19
Choose teaching strategies for different instructional purposes and to meet EL students' needs	6	5	6	2	19
Provide a rationale for your teaching decisions to students, parents, and colleagues	5	8	5	1	19
Help EL students become self-motivated and self-directed	7	5	5	2	19
Develop a classroom environment that promotes social development and group responsibility	6	3	7	3	19
Develop EL students' questioning and discussion skills	7	5	6	1	19
Engage EL students in cooperative work as well as independent learning	5	6	7	1	19
Use effective verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to guide EL student learning and behavior	6	6	6	1	19
Teach students from a multicultural vantage point	9	6	3	1	19
Use questions to stimulate different kinds of student learning	3	6	9	1	19
Help all students learn to think critically and solve problems	4	10	4	1	19
Encourage students to see, question, and interpret ideas from diverse perspectives	6	8	3	2	19
Use knowledge of learning, subject matter, curriculum, and student development to plan instruction	4	8	5	2	19
Understand how factors in the students' environment outside of school may influence their life and learning	3	7	7	2	19
Work with EL parents and families to better understand students and to support their learning	7	8	3	1	19
Use a variety of assessments (e.g., observation, portfolios, tests, performance tasks, anecdotal records) to determine student strengths, needs, and programs	6	4	8	1	19
Give productive feedback to EL students to guide their learning	6	7	4	2	19
Help EL students learn how to assess their own learning	8	7	3	1	19
Evaluate the effects of your actions and modify plans accordingly	3	6	8	2	19
Conduct inquiry or research to inform your decisions	7	5	5	2	19
Maintain discipline and an orderly, purposeful learning environment	1	9	6	3	19

## APPENDIX C

Teacher Participants	
1	Teach the concepts, knowledge, and skills of your discipline(s) in ways that enable all students to learn.
2	Understand how different students are learning.
3	Set challenging and appropriate expectations of learning and performance for all students.
4	Help all students achieve high standards.
6	Evaluate curriculum materials for their usefulness and appropriateness for all students.
7	Evaluate curriculum materials for their usefulness and appropriateness for all students.
8	Evaluate curriculum materials for their usefulness and appropriateness for all students.
9	Understand how students' social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development influence learning.
10	Identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties.
11	Teach in ways that support new English learners.
12	Choose teaching strategies for different instructional purposes and to meet ELs' needs.
13	Provide a rationale for your teaching decisions to students, parents, and colleagues.
14	Help EL students become self-motivated and self-directed.
15	Develop a classroom environment that promotes social development and group responsibility.
16	Develop EL students' questioning and discussion skills.
17	Engage EL students in cooperative work as well as independent learning.
18	Use effective verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to guide EL student learning and behavior.
19	Teach students from a multicultural vantage point.
20	Use questions to stimulate different kinds of student learning.
22	Encourage students to see, question, and interpret ideas from diverse perspectives.
23	Use knowledge of learning, subject matter, curriculum, and student development to plan instruction.
24	Understand how factors in the students' environment outside of school may influence their lives and learning.
25	Work with EL parents and families to better understand students and to support their learning.
26	Work with EL parents and families to better understand students and to support their learning.
27	Give productive feedback to EL students to guide their learning.
28	Help EL students learn how to assess their own learning.
29	Evaluate the effects of your actions and modify plans accordingly.
30	Conduct inquiry or research to inform your decisions.
31	Maintain discipline and an orderly, professional environment.

Overwhelming Majority = Insufficient
Overwhelming Majority = Sufficient
Mixed Perceptions

## APPENDIX D

Leader Participants	
1	Teach the concepts, knowledge, and skills of your discipline(s) in ways that enable all students to learn.
2	Understand how different students are learning.
3	Set challenging and appropriate expectations of learning and performance for all students.
4	Help all students achieve high standards.
5	Develop curriculum that builds on students' experiences, interests, and abilities.
6	Evaluate curriculum materials for their usefulness and appropriateness for all students.
7	Evaluate curriculum materials for their usefulness and appropriateness for all students.
8	Evaluate curriculum materials for their usefulness and appropriateness for all students.
9	Understand how students' social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development influence learning.
10	Identify and address special learning needs and/or difficulties.
11	Teach in ways that support new English learners.
12	Choose teaching strategies for different instructional purposes and to meet ELs' needs.
13	Provide a rationale for your teaching decisions to students, parents, and colleagues.
14	Help EL students become self-motivated and self-directed.
15	Develop a classroom environment that promotes social development and group responsibility.
16	Develop EL students' questioning and discussion skills.
17	Engage EL students in cooperative work as well as independent learning.
18	Use effective verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to guide EL student learning and behavior.
19	Teach students from a multicultural vantage point.
20	Use questions to stimulate different kinds of student learning.
21	Help all students learn to think critically and solve problems.
22	Encourage students to see, question, and interpret ideas from diverse perspectives.
23	Use knowledge of learning, subject matter, curriculum, and student development to plan instruction.
24	Understand how factors in the students' environment outside of school may influence their lives and learning.
25	Work with EL parents and families to better understand students and to support their learning.
26	Work with EL parents and families to better understand students and to support their learning.
27	Give productive feedback to EL students to guide their learning.
28	Help EL students learn how to assess their own learning.
29	Evaluate the effects of your actions and modify plans accordingly.
30	Conduct inquiry or research to inform your decisions.
31	Maintain discipline and an orderly, professional environment.

Overwhelming Majority = Insufficient
Overwhelming Majority = Sufficient
Overwhelming Majority = Extraordinary

## VITA

LaDonna Thomas is an English learner (EL) curriculum and instruction specialist. Dr. Thomas earned her Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics and TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) from the University of Mississippi in December 2013 and her Bachelor of Science in Secondary [English] Education from Mississippi State University in August 2011. Her professional experience includes serving as a teacher and instructional specialist in public schools in Mississippi and abroad.