

Aiming for Equity: Preparing Mainstream Teachers outlook for Inclusion or Inclusive Classrooms for ELL

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Abstract: *The need to be proficient in the use of English among non-native speakers has become a global phenomenon. Today, educators are facing the challenge of addressing the needs of the growing number of students whose primary language is not English (Gibbons, 2003). While mastering other skills and content in other subject areas, there is the necessity for these learners to gain proficiency in English.*

The attitudes of non-language teachers come to the forefront as they reflect upon the language that they use in teaching. Consciously or unconsciously, their attitudes play a crucial role in language's "growth or decay, restoration or destruction" (Baker, 1988). Their attitudes, too, as part of their cultural orientation, influence heavily their younger students (Shameem, 2004). Through this research an attempt was made to explore the answers for questions like what kind of attitudes towards English should non-language teachers have in order for them to teach concepts successfully? Can these attitudes be reflected even during their student training period?

Also, through an extensive research literature review it was found that so far there has been a scarcity of effective research on the perspective of teachers regarding the inclusion of English language learners in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, that also helped in building the base for the present research study. The categories that have been explored for the study were inclusion of ELL, professional development for working with ELLs, perceptions of language and language learning. The study comprises of responses of fifty respondents who were randomly chosen from different departments of a group of college in Jaipur city. From the results and findings drawn from the study of the subjects, it was found that there existed variety of opinions among the subject teachers, from a neutral to slightly positive attitude towards ELL inclusion, a neutral attitude toward professional development for working with ELLs and educator misapprehensions about the learning of second language.

Key words: *English-language learners; ELLs; Mainstream classrooms; Teacher, attitudes, English language proficiency, teacher professional development, English as a second language (ESL)*

INTRODUCTION

Although language learning is complicated, and every situation is different, a basic understanding of what works is a big help. Much of what we can think now coincides with Stephen Krashen's theories on language acquisition and other research in the field. He has pointed out that languages are acquired through meaningful input and not deliberate instruction. His insights are being confirmed by the latest research on how the brain learns, as described in an excellent book by German brain researcher, Manfred Spitzer, *Learning: The Human Brain and the School for Life*. As Spitzer says, learning takes place in the brain, not at school.

Language learning is essentially fun, or should be, if it is done naturally, in line with how the brain learns. We learned our first language quite well, without explicit instruction. Unfortunately, the teaching of second languages has been turned into a complex classroom ceremony, consisting of obtuse grammar rules, annoying drills, rote memory and tests. The result is that many people are discouraged from learning languages. Maybe they would not learn their first language if it were taught in this way.

There is an important distinction made by linguists between language acquisition and language learning. Children acquire language through a subconscious process during which they are unaware of grammatical rules. This is similar to the way they acquire their first language. They get a feel for what is and what isn't correct. In order to acquire language, the learner needs a source of natural communication. The emphasis is on the text of the communication and not on the form. Young students who are in the process of acquiring English get plenty of "on the job" practice. They readily acquire the language to communicate with classmates.

Language learning, on the other hand, is not communicative. It is the result of direct instruction in the rules of language. And it certainly is not an age-appropriate activity for the young learners. In language learning, students have conscious

knowledge of the new language and can talk about that knowledge. They can fill in the blanks on a grammar page. Research has shown, however, that knowing grammar rules does not necessarily result in good speaking or writing. A student who has memorized the rules of the language may be able to succeed on a standardized test of English language but may not be able to speak or write correctly.

Language learning is broadly defined as developing the ability to communicate in the second / foreign language, and in this context includes:

- Language learning for specialists :This includes programmes which not only teach language but also a variety of subject ‘content’ related to language such as literature, culture, history and politics at BA or MA level. This also covers programmes and courses involving the teaching of translating and interpreting.
- Language learning for non- specialists or service languages : This includes language teaching options which are available to all interested students, some of which may have a focus on specific topics (e.g. German for Law) or on the enhancement of selected skills (e.g. effective speaking skills). Also included are programmes in which language is a minor part and predominately relates to the learning of language skills rather than related ‘content’ studies, as outlined above (language learning for specialists). This type of language learning is often offered under an Institution Wide Language Programme (IWLP).
- Languages for instruction (including the teaching of the language/s of a host university to non- native speakers), where the target language is normally used as the language of instruction. For many institutions in the EU this will often relate to the teaching of courses through the medium of English. This is described more fully in section 2.4 Content and language integrated learning (CLIL).
- Language learning for social purposes. This includes language learning for mobility or where the local language is taught as a foreign language to incoming students. It also relates to language learning for employability, travel (holidays or living abroad) or for heritage/family reasons. In some cases language learning of this type will take place as part of continuing or adult education delivered by higher education institutions.

Some preliminary research into teachers’ views of linguistically diverse schools is available. Although subject area teachers of ELLs have rarely been the primary focus of research attention, their attitudes toward ELL inclusion have been alluded to in a number of studies (Fu, 1995; Harklau, 2000; Olsen, 1997; Schmidt, 2000; Valdes, 1998, 2001; Verplaetse, 1998; Vollmer, 2000) in linguistically diverse classrooms. The portraits of teachers in those studies, although incomplete, grant at least limited insight into teacher experiences with ELLs. Commonalities and recurring themes exist in the preliminary studies, including teachers’

- attitudes toward ELL inclusion in mainstream classes,
- views on modification of coursework, and
- feelings of (un)preparedness to work with ELLs.

Review of researches done in the field of ‘Teacher’s Attitudes toward Inclusion’

Several qualitative studies exploring the schooling experiences of ELLs have alluded to mainstream teacher attitudes toward ELL inclusion. Teachers in those studies were portrayed as holding negative, unwelcoming attitudes (Fu, 1995; Olsen, 1997; Schmidt, 2000; Valdes, 1998, 2001), as well as positive, welcoming attitudes (Harklau, 2000; Reeves, 2004; Verplaetse, 1998). In general, teachers in those studies held ambivalent or unwelcoming attitudes, although there were notable exceptions (Harklau; Ver plaetse).

In determining the welcoming or unwelcoming nature of teacher attitudes, researchers suggested a host of factors that could be influential. The factors fall into three categories:

- (a) teacher perceptions of the impact of ELL inclusion on themselves,
- (b) impact of inclusion on the learning environment, and
- (c) teacher attitudes and perceptions of ELLs.

From the review of various research studies it was found that some researches suggests that teachers may be concerned about

- (a) chronic lack of time to address ELLs’ unique classroom needs (Youngs, 1999),
- (b) perceived intensification of teacher workloads when ELLs are enrolled in mainstream classes (Gitlin, Buenda, Crosland, & Doumbia, 2003), and
- (c) feelings of professional inadequacy to work with ELLs (Verplaetse, 1998).

As per one of the studies of Youngs, they stated that in terms of the impact of inclusion on the classroom learning environment, teachers are concerned about the possibility that ELLs will slow the class progression through the curriculum. Also as per another study talks about the inequities in educational opportunities for all students (Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003; Reeves, 2004; Schmidt, 2000).

Finally, some evidence of subject-area teacher attitudes and perceptions of ELLs is present in research, including a reluctance to work with low-proficiency ELLs (Platt et al.), misconceptions about the processes of second-language acquisition (Olsen, 1997; Reeves, 2004; Walqui, 2000), and assumptions (positive and negative) about the race and ethnicity of ELLs (Harklau, 2000; Valdes, 2001; Vollmer, 2000).

All of the studies listed in the preceding paragraph were qualitative and had a small number of teacher participants; few held mainstream teachers as the primary focus of study. In their quantitative study of 143 middle school teachers, however, Youngs and Youngs (2001) focused exclusively on mainstream teacher attitudes. In a survey of participants, the researchers found that teacher attitudes were neutral to slightly positive in response to the following two questions:

- (a) "If you were told that you could expect two or three ESL students in one of your classes next year, how would you describe your reaction?" and
- (b) "How would you describe your overall reaction to working with ESL students in your classroom?" (p. 108).

Youngs and Youngs also correlated five factors to teachers' positive attitudes:

- (a) coursework in foreign language/multiculturalism,
- (b) ESL training,
- (c) personal experience with foreign cultures,
- (d) contact with a diversity of ESL students, and
- (e) female gender.

Beyond the research of Youngs and Youngs, quantitative measures of teacher attitudes are scarce.

Attitudes toward Modifications Inclusion as a model for addressing the needs of ELLs has gained popularity as the education system's emphasis globally on standards and accountability has

increased. In an inclusion model, ELLs might receive ESL courses, but the students are mainstreamed for most, if not all, of the school day. ELLs placed exclusively in courses designed for LEP students (i.e., ESL and sheltered instruction courses) might not have access to the curriculum necessary for educational success.

A documented history of exclusionary schooling in which ELLs were placed in peripheral programs and had limited access to rigorous content added leverage to the push for inclusive education (Nieto, 2002; Olsen, 1997; Valdes, 2001). If the inclusion model is to be effective in granting ELLs equitable access to the curriculum, however, instruction must be altered for a multilingual audience.

Techniques considered effective for English-proficient students might not render content comprehensible for students learning English (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000). For example, class rooms that follow a traditional knowledge-transmission model of instruction represent an exclusionary learning climate for ELLs, particularly for those with low levels of English proficiency. The inadequacies of unmodified instruction or instruction designed solely for an English-proficient audience have been noted by several researchers (Echevarria et al.; Gibbons, 2002). To allow ELLs access to the curriculum, educators must adapt traditional approaches to instruction or, at a minimum, supplement their methods. Advice for teachers regarding how they can adjust content and instruction is increasingly accessible for those who pursue it. There has been a marked surge in the number of books, journal articles, and professional development initiatives that offer teaching strategies to ELL educators. Yet, teacher views on the scope and types of modifications that they are willing to make have remained largely unexamined. Some teacher struggles to identify and implement appropriate, effective instruction for mainstreamed ELLs are apparent in recent research. For example, Gina, a high school teacher (see Reeves, 2002) was conflicted about making coursework modifications for an ELL in her 10th grade U.S. history class. "They [ELLs] have to know the information for the end of course test. And you can't really abbreviate the amount of factual [information]" (p. 90). As Gina's comment suggests, concerns about educational equity regarding coursework modifications also might be a factor in teachers' views on effective and

appropriate modifications for ELLs (Reeves, 2004; Youngs, 1999).

Attitudes toward Professional Development Given the increase in the ELL population and the lack of training that the teachers have received for working with ELLs, professional development in this area also has become a high priority for many school districts. Little research, however, has explored teacher attitudes toward that type of professional development. Clair (1995) provided a rare glimpse into three teachers' views. When given the opportunity to attend in-service workshops on methods of working with ELLs, all three of Clair's participants (Grades 4, 5, and 10 teachers) declined. One of Clair's participants believed that the workshops presented methods and materials that were inappropriate for her classroom, such as a workshop that encouraged the use of puppetry.

In the nutshell from all the research studies explored during the study pointed towards diverse concerns of the teachers in terms of mainstreaming English language learners. According to the research included in the reviews, a relationship does exist between the beliefs teachers hold toward ELLs and their classroom practice. The beliefs of mainstream teachers about ELLs can be predicted based on certain factors and can be changed under the right circumstances. Mainstream teachers who are found to be products of the "poverty of language learning" in teacher education need to adopt a new set of beliefs for successful inclusion of ELLs that is also the base for present research.

Also in India there is not much work done in this area and this concerned field of study needs more exploration in diverse dimensions of language learning, hence through this research study an attempt is made to put forward another aspect explored through a dedicated and well structured research.

Justification of the study

Based on the extensive review of research literature in the concerned field of study it was found that there is an urgency to give English language learners the support they need because they would be able to take their education more seriously. As stated by Pettit (2011) in a study, due to many teachers having low expectations for these students, they may get discouraged or not seem to care about their education. This study focusing on subject-area teachers'

attitudes toward ELL (English-Language Learner) inclusion in mainstream classrooms is justified for several reasons like:

1. **Increasing Linguistic Diversity:** With the growing number of ELLs in schools, understanding teachers' attitudes toward their inclusion is crucial for creating effective educational strategies.
2. **Teacher Preparedness:** Many subject-area teachers are not adequately trained to work with ELLs, which can impact the quality of education these students receive.
3. **Educational Equity:** Investigating teachers' attitudes helps identify potential biases and barriers to equitable education for ELLs, ensuring that all students have access to quality learning opportunities.
4. **Curriculum Adaptation:** Understanding teachers' willingness to modify coursework for ELLs can lead to the development of more inclusive and effective teaching practices.
5. **Professional Development:** The study highlights the need for professional development programs to better prepare teachers for working with linguistically diverse classrooms.

By addressing these factors, the study aims to improve educational outcomes for ELLs and promote a more inclusive learning environment.

METHODOLOGY

The research is exploratory in nature and used simple random sampling for the purposive sample selection. All subject-area teachers from four of the three different departments were invited to participate in the survey. For the first phase the pilot study was conducted during a routine faculty meeting. The faculties chosen for participation in the study came from the three different departments of an institution with the largest population of English as a Second Language (Department of Mass communication, Department of commerce and Management studies, Department of Science). Here purposive sampling was used to choose the departments with the largest ESL student populations to access the largest number of teachers who had experienced the inclusion of ESL students in their classes. The participants were selected during routine faculty meetings in March

and July. Of the surveys distributed to 75 teachers, 55 were returned. Four of the returned surveys were rejected because they were completed by non-subject-area teachers.

Responses were collected without names or other identifying data from the respondents, who completed the survey within 15 min. The participants were 75 college subject area teachers from an Institution entitled as a group of colleges located in Jaipur city.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data was analyzed descriptively. Univariate analyses of the survey data and analyses providing an “examination of the distribution of cases on only one variable at a time” (Babbie, 1990, p. 247) identified participants’ attitudes and perceptions of ELL inclusion according to the strength of their (dis)agreement with the survey items. The analyses included percentages, measures of central tendency, and standard deviations.

To perform univariate analyses, a numeric value was assigned to each response in the Likert scale i.e. 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree), and 4 (strongly agree). Analysis of the numeric data was performed with SPSS statistical software.

FINDINGS

Attitudes toward Inclusion

Teachers largely held a welcoming attitude toward the inclusion of ELLs, as measured by their responses to the statement, “I would welcome the inclusion of ESL students in my class.” On a Likert-type scale in which 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree, a mean response of 2.81 with a standard deviation of 0.62 was reported. 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, whereas 24.3% (12) disagreed or strongly disagreed. 38 (75%) teachers reported that the inclusion of ELLs created a positive educational atmosphere in their classrooms, 12 (23%) teachers disagreed, and 1 (2%) teacher did not report on ELL inclusion. The mean for that item was 2.84 (SD = 0.61).

Table 1. Subject-Area Frequencies and Percentages

S.NO	Subject Area	f	%
1	English	48	17.14
2	Mathematics	40	14.2

3	Science	33	11.78
4	Social Science	30	10.71
5	Vocational	29	10.35
6	Word languages	20	7.14
7	Business & Technology	23	8.21
8	Art & Music	11	3.9
9	Health & Physical Education	15	5.35
10	Unreported	20	7.14

Although a majority of the teachers reported that ELL inclusion created a positive education atmosphere, more than 40% (113) of respondents did not believe that all students benefited from the inclusion of ELLs in the mainstream classroom. The mean response for the item “the inclusion of ESL students in subject-area classes benefits all students” was 2.65 (SD = 0.70). Furthermore, despite the welcoming attitudes that teachers reported, strong agreement with the statement that ELLs should not be mainstreamed until the students had attained a minimum level of English proficiency was evident (M = 2.95, SD = 0.74). Two hundred nine (75%) agreed with the statement, and 64 (22.9%) disagreed. The final measure of teachers’ attitudes toward the inclusion of ELLs focused on teachers’ perception of time and the time demands placed on educators when ELLs enrolled in their courses. Nearly 70% (194) of the teachers reported that they did “not have enough time to deal with the needs of ESL students” (M = 2.83, SD = 0.70).

Attitudes toward Professional Development

A majority of respondents felt untrained to work with ELLs, yet their attitudes toward receiving more training were ambivalent. Participants generally disagreed with the statement “I have adequate training to work with ESL students.” A mean of 1.89 and a standard deviation of .74 for that item was calculated. Forty one teachers (81%) disagreed with the statement, 9 (18%) teachers agreed, and two teachers did not report on the item. A mean of 2.49 (SD = 0.74) was reported for the item “I am interested in receiving more training in working with ESL students.” Approximately half (25) of the participants were interested in receiving training in working with ESL students; 23 (45%) participants were not interested.

Attitudes toward Language and Language Learning

The respondents were questioned on their attitudes toward English and their perceptions of the utility of

ESL students' first languages at school. A strong majority "would support legislation making English the official language of the United States"; 82.5% (230) teachers agreed and only 15% (42) disagreed ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.80$). Despite strong support for making English the official language, 58.4% (163) of teachers disagreed with the item "ESL students should avoid using their native language while at school" ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 0.75$). Thirty-nine percent (109) of teachers reported that ELLs should discontinue use of their native language in school. Finally, the survey queried teacher perceptions of the length of time that ESL students needed to acquire English proficiency. Most (71.7%) teachers agreed that "ESL students should be able to acquire English within two years of enrolling in the schools" ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.60$).

DISCUSSIONS OF THE STUDY

Findings from this study were particular to its locale, yet they provided some insight into subject-area teachers' attitudes toward ELL inclusion in mainstream classrooms in the nation at large. Three main findings of specific import emerged from this study:

- 1) A discrepancy exists between teachers' general attitudes toward ELL inclusion and their attitudes toward specific aspects of ELL inclusion.
- 2) Teachers demonstrated ambivalence toward participating in professional development for working with ELLs.
- 3) Teachers are working under misconceptions about how second languages are learned.

CONCLUSION

Mainstream is a problematic term because it implies that ELLs, ESL courses, and the ESL teacher are somehow peripheral in their schools. That may not be the case as, for example, ELLs in high-incidence districts may comprise half or more of the student population. Mainstream, however, is an accurate descriptor of subject-area teachers and their courses in this school setting. ELLs comprised less than 3% of the study body, ESL courses often met in makeshift classrooms, and ESL teachers worked itinerantly, visiting a number of schools each day. In school settings throughout the United States, even schools with large numbers of ELLs, ESL courses, and ESL teachers are commonly outside the center or mainstream of school life socially, academically, and

even spatially (Berube, 2000; Gitlin, Buendia, Crosland, & Doumbia, 2003; Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003).

Much work remains for research that explores teacher attitudes toward the inclusion of ELLs in the mainstream, as well as the instructional implications of those attitudes. As the ELL population in the nation continues to grow, a pressing need exists for continued research in this area. In addition to further study of teacher attitudes and their impact on teaching and learning, researchers also must examine teacher education and professional development initiatives that will result in the successful inclusion of ELLs. Although the findings presented here suggest that teachers want to welcome ELLs into the mainstream, the data also reveal a teaching force struggling to make sense of teaching and learning in multilingual school environments. After NEP 2020 policy came into picture various dimensions in language learning have been added. NEP 2020 also states that when it comes to language learning and especially concerning to English language learning, as the focus of the present research paper also, the policy does policy highlights the importance of training teachers to effectively teach multiple languages, including English, and to adopt modern teaching methods. Hence the need is to make subject experts and teachers who are not teaching language understand the need and importance of English language teaching along with the fact that English language is the base with which they build and communicate concepts of their concerned field of study or subjects in the classroom, so right use of English and addressing the needs of ELL must be considered and judiciously dealt.

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