

Assessing Preservice SBAE Teacher Needs for Working with English Language Learners

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Introduction/Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study was to determine preservice teacher needs at Texas A&M University-Commerce for working with English language learners. English Language Learners (ELL) refers to students who do not possess English as their first language. They are linguistically, culturally, and educationally diverse, with various proficiencies of the English language. Additionally, they have the burden of needing to increase their proficiency in English while simultaneously meeting academic demands, presented in English (Roy-Campbell, 2013). The vast majority, 77.8% of ELLs identify as Hispanic or Latino with Spanish being the most commonly spoken language at home (United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2022). Ten percent of all students are ELL and between 2009 and 2015, the number of ELL students increased in more than half of the states with five states seeing increases of over 40 percent. In 2015, there were more than 4.8 million ELLs in the educational system (USDOE, 2022). As revealed in previous research, SBAE teachers share a lack of confidence in educating and developing educationally relevant relationships with ELL's (Roy-Campbell, 2013; Salem, 2021).

The theoretical framework for this study uses a merger of the human capital theory (HCT), self-efficacy theory (SET), and social cognitive theory (SCT). HCT theorizes individuals are capable increasing their various capacities through experiences (Haynes et al., 2014). Teacher preparation programs have the opportunity to develop those capacities via coursework and guided experiences (Haynes et al., 2014). Self-efficacy is a person's own perceptions concerning their ability to facilitate certain activities (Bandura, 1977). This means, a teacher's experiences influence their perceptions of their own ability to teach (Eck et al., 2019). Social cognitive theory suggests an individual's acquisition of knowledge is related to the observation of others (Bandura, 2005). Consequently, teacher experiences can be improved even through an indirect positive experience (Bandura, 1977).

Methods

This study served as the pilot for a future larger study with a similar purpose and also served to describe preservice teachers needs in our own program. To accomplish this purpose, all students enrolled in junior and senior level agricultural education courses at Texas A&M University-Commerce were asked to take an online survey administered through Qualtrics. Of those students, there were ($n = 13$) responses. The instrument had 11 demographic questions. Participants also rated their perceived importance and competence for 25 skills under the construct of teaching and learning with ELLs and for 16 skills under the construct of working with ELLs. Skills related to each of these constructs were identified through a previous qualitative study on the topic as well as a review of literature (Salem et al., 2022). Content validity of the questionnaire was established by a panel of experts in agriculture teacher education with experience in working with ELLs. To establish reliability of the instrument, those responding from the first administration were asked to take the questionnaire again two weeks later. Test-retest reliability was calculated from seven usable responses for a stability coefficient of $r = .81$. This reliability analysis is appropriate for reporting results for single items

(Warmbrod, 2014). Data were analyzed in Microsoft Excel where a mean weighted discrepancy score (MWDS) was calculated, as described by Borich (1980) for each skill based on difference in perceived importance and competence. MWDS was then used to rank the need for each ELL skill.

Findings

Demographic items indicated there were 10 female and three male preservice teachers. Ethnicities ranged from White/Caucasian ($n = 9$), multi/biracial ($n = 2$), Hispanic/Latino ($n = 1$), and Native American ($n = 1$). Concerning specific preservice teacher needs for working with ELLs, the top and bottom two ranking needs for skills in each of the two constructs are presented in Table 1 along with average reported importance and competence.

Table 1
Ranking of Preservice Teacher Needs for Working with English Language Learners (N = 13)

Skill	Importance	Competence	MWDS
	Mean	Mean	
Skills for Teaching and Learning with ELLs			
General Strategies for Teaching ELLs	4.38	2.15	9.93
Developing Materials to Aid ELLs' Comprehension	4.46	2.15	9.07
Identifying Cultural Identities to Facilitate Learning	4.38	2.23	3.61
Identifying Linguistic Identities to Facilitate Learning	4.31	2.15	3.22
Skills for Working with ELLs			
Communicating with Parents of ELL Students	4.46	1.92	10.31
Recruiting Students who Speak Non-English Language	4.46	2.15	9.73
Communicating with ELL Students	4.54	2.00	4.59
Determining Language Spoken in the Home of ELLs	4.38	2.23	4.49

Note. Scale: Importance 1 = *Not Important* to 5 = *Very Important*; Competence 1 = *Not Competent* to 5 = *Very Competent*.

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

This study identified the lack of SBAE preservice teacher self-efficacy and the need for SBAE teacher preparation programs to provide a more practical set of knowledge, skills, and experiences to pre-service agricultural education students in the areas of providing meaningful education to ELL's. The study demonstrates a need for teacher preparation programs to provide training and experience in the areas of teaching ELL students and in developing materials to aid in ELL instruction. The study also revealed a need for teacher preparation programs to assist in the develop of the competencies needed to identify cultural and linguistic identities to facilitate ELL learning, training in the areas of communicating with ELL students and their parents, recruiting ELL students, and in determining what language is spoken at the home of ELL's.

We recommend similar studies be replicated regionally to determine if other groups of pre-service teachers experience similar issues. SBAE teacher preparation programs should include more practical learning environments, methodologies, and skillset development opportunities in the areas of ELL education.

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