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ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVEL  
EFFECT ON TESTING

by

MARTHA ALONSO

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

May 2017

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I could not have completed this dissertation without the help of many people. First, I would like to thank God for giving me the strength, patience, and perseverance to accomplish my goal. There were times when I felt like giving up and he gave me the strength I need to continue on my journey. My parents have supported me since day one; they have been my cheerleaders and believed in me when I didn't even believe in myself. They have taught me that hard work is what gets goals accomplished. My sisters and brother-in-law have always motivated me and have pushed me to never give up. Even though my grandparents are no longer here with me, they will forever be in my heart. Their memory was my strength when I felt overwhelmed.

My career and education have been my priority throughout these years. My students were the reason I chose this topic. After working with them, I began to learn the importance they have in my life and in society. Every day they have inspired me to become a better teacher.

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVEL  
EFFECT ON TESTING

Martha Alonso

University of the Incarnate Word, 2017

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* served as a refueling agent for education reform. It added the mandate of Title I, which focuses on aid for disadvantaged students. NCLB mandates that states set high academic standards with quantifiable goals. This challenge has been highlighted for states because subpopulations, such as English Language Learners and students with special needs, have become focus groups in trying to bridge the achievement gap. The purpose of this correlation research study was to determine the correlation between the students' English Language Proficiency level and their performance on the STAAR reading assessment.

There was a strong positive correlation between the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading and the student's reading STAAR scores. ELL students with a higher English language proficiency level tend to score higher on the reading STAAR assessment.

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## Chapter 1—English Language Learners and Testing

### Introduction to the Problem

January 8, 2002, became a landmark day in education, when President George Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. This new educational push was actually a reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Act*, but would now include Title I (Menken, 2010) and the watchful eye of the federal government. The new Standards-Based Education reform does include a variety of mandated requirements for the states, but it does allow for each state to create and adjust its individualized assessment system. The challenge has become the instruction and assessment of the Title 1 part of the act, which clearly states that high standards and measurable goals must be evident in the program for all disadvantaged students.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has developed a new accountability system for campuses and districts. The Texas Legislature passed House Bill 3 in 2009, which created an “entirely new assessment and accountability systems focused on the achievement of postsecondary readiness for all Texas public school students” (TEA, 2014a). The new accountability framework consists of four Performance Indexes: Index One-Student Achievement, Index Two-Student Progress, Index Three-Closing Performance Gap, and Index Four-Postsecondary Readiness. In Index One, “Student Achievement provides an overview of student performance based on satisfactory student achievement across all subjects for all students” (TEA, 2014a). In Index Two, “Student Progress focuses on actual student growth independent of overall achievement levels for each race/ethnicity student group, students with disabilities, and English language learners” (TEA, 2014a). In Index Three, “Closing Performance Gap emphasizes advanced academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students and the two lowest performing race/ ethnicity student groups” (TEA, 2014a). In Index Four,

Postsecondary Readiness emphasizes the importance of earning a high school diploma that provides students with the foundation necessary for success in college, the workforce, job training programs, or the military; and the role of elementary and middle schools in preparing students for high school. (TEA, 2014a)

Districts and campuses are rated based on the achievement of a target for each performance index. The accountability system designates a performance level of acceptable or unacceptable to campuses and districts. The five ratings in the accountability system are: met standard, met alternative standard, improvement required, not rated, and not rated: data integrity issues. Districts and campuses that have met standard indicate they met the target on all indexes. Met standard rating “applies to campuses that serve grades prekindergarten (PK) through 12” (TEA, 2014a). Met Alternative Standard is “assigned to charter operators and alternative education campuses (AECs) that are evaluated by alternative education accountability (AEA) provisions and meet modified targets on all performance indexes for which they have performance data in 2014” (TEA, 2014a). The Improvement Required rating is “assigned to districts, campuses, charter operators, and AECs that miss the target on one or more performance indexes” (TEA, 2014a). Districts and campuses could receive a Not Rated rating for various reasons, such as they only serve students enrolled in Early Education or they have no data in the accountability subset. Not Rated: Data Integrity Issues indicates “data accuracy and/or integrity have compromised performance results, making it impossible to assign a rating” (TEA, 2014a).

The Accountability Performance Index Targets determine the district and campus rating. The index targets vary for each index and “are set by school type: elementary, middle school, or high school/ K-12” (TEA, 2014a). There are absolute targets set for Index One and Index Four; however, “the targets for Index Two and Index Three are set at about the 5th percentile based on 2014 performance and are identified prior to the release of 2014 ratings” (TEA, 2014a).

Recently, the U.S. Department of Education and the Texas Education Agency have started to focus on schools' "Adequate Yearly Progress" with a specialized emphasis on subpopulations, such as English Language Learners (ELL) and students with disabilities. With this newly ignited effort of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the ELL population has become a target group for states trying to meet the federal government requirements and stay competitive in the business of education where parents are now more aware of school progress. Education leaders are now more aware of the significant academic gap in ELL students and are developing strategies to close the gap.

### **Problem Statement**

There are linguistic accommodations developed for ELLs to use when they are taking the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exams. These linguistic accommodations were developed to meet the needs of the ELLs based on their instructional needs. Teachers determine the instructional needs of ELLs based on the English language proficiency. Regardless of the linguistic accommodations, ELLs are not being successful in their content area assessments. English Language Learners are required to take the STAAR exams in different content areas, regardless of their English language proficiency. Many ELL students are not being successful on their assessments based on their English language proficiency. However, "an overwhelming majority of assessment tools are in English only, presenting a potential threat to the usefulness of assessments when ELLs lack of English prevents them from understanding test items" (Lenski Davis, Ehlers-Zavala, Daniel, & Sun-Irminger, 2006, p.24).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The TEA developed the four English Language Proficiency levels. The four levels of English Language Proficiency are beginner, intermediate, advanced, and advanced high. There

are several STAAR exams administered in each grade level. The student's grade level determines which subject the students will be tested in. Students are tested in math, reading, writing, science, and social studies between the third and eighth grade. The outcome of these assessments determines whether students are prepared for the following grade level.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between English Language Proficiency level (ELPL) of middle school ELL students enrolled in a Texas public school and the results of the reading portion STAAR examination.

This study focused on English Language Learners who are enrolled in a public middle school in Texas. English Language Learners are identified as students who are not proficient in the English language. In Texas, the ELL population consists of new immigrant students and students who are unable to meet the exit criteria. The majority of the secondary LEP student population is US-born students who are unable to meet the exit criteria (Yang, Urrabazo, & Murray, 2001).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theories used in this research study are the Monitor Theory and Cummins Iceberg Model of Language Development. The Monitor Theory was developed by Steven Krashen, and has been used to study "how we assess learner's underlying mental representation" (Vanpatten & Benati, 2010, p. 47). This theory indicates that second language learners "can develop two separate and autonomous linguistic systems" (Vanpatten & Benati, 2010, p. 45).

[Krashen] argued that there are two mental processes operating in second-language acquisition: conscious learning and subconscious acquisition. Conscious learning focuses on grammatical rules, enabling the learner to memorize rules and to identify instances of rule violation. Subconscious acquisition is a very different process, and facilitates the acquisition of rules at a subconscious level. (Nunan, 1999, p. 43)

This theory continues to be important in research because “test and assessment tasks are supposed to provide information about what exists in the mental representation- that is, the acquired system” (Vanpatten & Benati, 2010, p. 18).

From the Monitor Theory, Steven Krashen and Tracy Terrell have identified six general stages of second language acquisition. These stages can differ based on their culture and educational experience. The first stage students will go through is preproduction. The preproduction is also known as the silent period. During this stage, a “student is taking in the target language, but not speaking it” (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2012, para. 2). The second stage students will go through is early production. During the early production stage, a “student begins to try speaking using short phrases, but the focus is still on listening and absorbing the new language” (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2012, para. 2). The third stage of language development is speech emergent. During the speech emergent stage, a student’s “words and sentences are longer, but the student still relies heavily on context clues and familiar topics” (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2012, para. 2). Since words and sentences are longer, a student’s vocabulary increases and the amount of errors begin to decrease. The fourth stage of language development is beginning fluency. This stage differs from the first three stages because a student’s speech is fluent with insignificant errors during social situations. However, “new contexts and academic language are challenging due to gaps in vocabulary” (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2012, para. 2). The fifth stage of language development is intermediate fluency. Like the beginning fluency stage, a student’s speech is fluent during social situations. In intermediate fluency stage, “speech is approaching fluency, but some gaps in vocabulary knowledge still exist” (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2012, para. 2). During this stage, the student has the ability to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in their second language. The last stage of language development is advanced fluency. During the

advanced fluency stage, the “student communicates fluently in all contexts and can maneuver successfully in new contexts and when exposed to new academic information” (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2012, para. 2).

Jim Cummins’ research regarding second language development is similar to Krashen’s theory. Cummins’ research focuses on the academic language proficiency. According to Zwiers (2008), “Jim Cummins used the terms basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)” (pp. 19-20). Zwiers defined these terms this way:

Social language (BICS) tends to be less complex and less abstract, and is accompanied by helpful extralinguistic clues, such as pictures, real objects, facial expressions, and gestures. Social language is used to build relationships and get things done in less formal settings, such as the home, parties, sporting events, shopping, and so on. Academic language (CALP) tends to be complex and abstract, lacking extralinguistic support. A conversation with a friend about a recent sports event would involve much social language, whereas listening to a lecture on globalization would be more academic. (p. 20)

Cummins indicates the first and second language academic skills are interdependent. He believes that it becomes easier to learn additional languages if there is a base for the development of both the first and second language. Cummins also indicates that in the course of learning one language a child acquires a set of skills and knowledge that can be drawn upon when working in another language. He called this the common underlying proficiency (Shoebottom, 2011).

As applied to this research study, these theories support that the independent variable as the English Language Proficiency level influence the dependent variable, the students’ performance on the reading STAAR assessment. Based on these theories, these are the variables because the student’s English Language Proficiency level can influence how a student performs on a reading assessment in English.

Since English Language Learners are learning English as their second language, this theory would be applicable to them. According to Ferlazzo and Sypniewski,

most researchers believe it takes from five to seven years to reach advanced fluency if a student has strong first language and literacy skills, and that it can take between seven to ten years for students with less language proficiency in their first language. (para. 3)

However, schools and school districts are discovering that some of the ELLs have attended school in the United States since the age of five. Some of these English Language Learners become proficient in English and exit the ESL program within the five to seven years. Other ELLs continue in the ESL program because they cannot become proficient in English academically.

According to Yang et al. (2001), in the Dallas Public Schools “nearly half of its secondary LEP population has been in the program for seven or more years and most of them are US-born (para. 2). Menken and Kleyn (2009) indicated Spanish classes would be helpful for long term LEP students to develop the students’ native language literacy skills. This would also address the students’ gaps in their education. The needs of recent immigrants and long term ELL students are different.

### **Research Questions**

This research study was guided by seven research questions. The research questions that guided this study are:

- Does the English Language Proficiency level in reading relate to student’s performance on the reading STAAR assessment?
- To what extent do the years in the United States affect the English Language Proficiency level in reading?

- To what extent do the years in the United States affect the STAAR reading performance?
- Does the student's language spoken at home correlate to the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment?
- Does the student's language spoken at home correlate to the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading?
- Does the student's attendance at a Title I school correlate to the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment?
- Does the student's attendance at a Title I school correlate to the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading?

### **Significance of the Study**

The education of ELLs is evolving. This issue impacts our global society in many ways. The English Language Learners contribute to society in the United States. They play a major role within society. It is important for ELLs to have a positive impact on society. Their English language development is an important factor on the impact they have. It is critical that ELLs are being prepared in school with the skills they will need for their future, such as college or their career. Parents of ELLs also play a role on developing their English language. Many times parents of ELLs want to be aware of their child's academic progress and English language development. According to Varela, "parents should be invited to learn about the methodologies being used to help their children succeed" (Varela, 2008, p. 60). It is important to be aware of any setbacks or pitfalls, and parents should guide their children through those areas.

This research will assist parents of ELLs making decisions about their child's education. It is important for parents to be aware of the tool that is measuring their child's success in

academics. It will bring knowledge to the parents of ELLs about the role English language development has on their academic career. Cassity and Harris (2000) state,

recognize the importance of involving every child's parent in education, and then implement effective strategies to foster strong school-home relationships, which will establish the kind of strong learning community that supports the development of all children- including LEP students- in school and at home. (p. 58)

Educators will benefit from this research study as well. The outcomes of this research will help Superintendents, Curriculum and Instruction leaders, Bilingual and ESL departments, Campus Principals, Assistant Principals, Academic Deans, Department Chair Coordinators, and Teachers make well-informed decisions. They will also have the knowledge to advocate for ELL students. Educators in Higher Education, such as professors in the School of Education, will also gain knowledge about ELLs and will be able to provide future teachers with the appropriate knowledge and tools to be successful in their career with regard to ELLs. Educators can utilize this information to determine the impact of English language development on assessments.

This research will also impact ELL students directly. According to Yang, Urrabazo, and Murray (2001), ELLs build frustration of failure in reaching the unreasonably strict exit criteria, and many continue as LEP students, then reach a point where they are tired of being labeled "LEP" and lose interest in school. ELLs have a higher tendency of dropping out of school when they begin to lose interest in school. Currently, many school districts are having high drop out rates and are looking for ways to keep students in school. One of the growing populations in education are LEP students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2004), there were close to four million students who were classified as LEP students, which is an increase of 30% from a decade ago. Since this is a population that continues to grow, it is important to be able to identify these students in the classroom and provided targeted instruction

(Dong, 2004). Many school districts are faced with limited resources and are having difficulty allocating resources for the growing population.

Since LEP students spend most of the day with core subject teachers, it is important to develop and train core subject teachers with the skills necessary to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students. It is also important for teachers to be aware of the four major areas of preparation (Dong, 2004, pp. 203-204):

1. Build empathy toward second language learners' language difficulties and cultural differences
2. Increase understanding of the process of second language acquisition
3. Adapt the curriculum and instruction to the students' cultural and language needs
4. Integrate discipline specific language and literacy skills into area of instruction.

Ajayi (2008) mentions that educators must be updated and aware of the increase in diversity in their students' social-cultural background experiences with the changing nature of the school populations.

It has become evident to educators across Texas that English Language Learners are a unique population that commands the attention, which has been given to the students with special needs population across the world. "ELs [English Learners] are a heterogeneous group and are not defined consistently across states or within the literature, which yields different views about how to classify EL students and measure their progress" (Gutierrez & Vanderwood, 2013, p. 4). This has become a new area of focus for schools across America.

This topic is regarded as high importance to lawmakers and leaders of the community. It is important to determine the necessities to produce responsible, educated citizens. Education is very important for all citizens, and it contributes in a positive way to a community. This affects not only our local community, but the global community as well.

Overall, this area of research impacts secondary English Language Learners, their parents, educators in K-12 and higher education, and leaders of the community, organizations, and businesses.

### **Scope of the Study**

This research study focused on English Language Learners who are enrolled in middle school in a Texas public school.

In Texas, English Language Learners are identified when a parent or guardian enrolls the child in a public school. When a child is enrolled in a Texas public school, the parent or guardian completes a Home Language Survey (HLS). If the survey indicates the child speaks a language other than English, the school or school district administers a language assessment to determine the child's English Language Proficiency level. This assessment determines whether a child is proficient in the English language, or if the child is not proficient in the English language and needs to be placed in a Bilingual or ESL program. The students who are placed in an ESL program remain in the program until they are proficient in English. Students are assessed annually to determine their English Language Proficiency level and if they meet the criteria to exit the Bilingual or ESL program.

Within the ESL program, there are different types of ELL students. The program has ELL students who arrived to the United States within the last few years and other students who have been in the bilingual or ESL program since the child was enrolled at the age of five. These students are also known as long-term ELLs. According to Menken and Kleyn (2009):

Long-term English language learners are often orally bilingual and sound like native English speakers. However, they typically have limited literacy skills in their native language, and their academic literacy skills in English are not as well-developed as their oral skills are.

Long-term English language learners have different needs from those of newly arrived English language learners, yet language programming at the secondary level is

typically intended for new arrivals. In addition, most educators are unfamiliar with the specialized needs of this population, a problem compounded by poor data about these students in their school records. (para. 4)

A limitation of this research study is the focus on three grade levels. English Language Learners are in every grade level. Due to the various assessments and learning objectives, it would not be possible to determine a relationship if the instrument is not the same.

The researcher will use the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) to determine the students' English Language Proficiency level. The researcher will also use the STAAR assessment to determine their performance on reading comprehension skills. Both of these assessments were not created by the researcher; however, they have been tested for validity and reliability.

### **Summary**

With the changes in accountability in the United States education system, there has now been a focus on English Language Learners. There is a continuous effort to provide information that will assist with the education of English Language Learners. As indicated in the law "No Child Left Behind", it is important to determine the ways to help English Language Learners develop the English language, as well as, be successful in their academic performance. The State and Federal governments are holding schools and school districts accountable for the performance of all of their students including English Language Learners.

This research focused- on the performance of middle school English Language Learners on the reading STAAR assessment. The student's English Language Proficiency level and performance on the reading STAAR will be examined to determine their relationship. There are many factors that affect the academic performance of ELLs. Some of those factors are: the student's culture, academic knowledge in their native language, ELLs' teacher preparation, the

instruction provided to ELLs, and assessments used to measure academic performance. The outcome of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding English Language Learners.

## Chapter 2—Literature Review

In recent years, the demographic, linguistic, and cultural landscape of the United States has drastically shifted because of increased immigration (Garcia, Jensen, & Scribner, 2009). Education is one critical forum that has been extremely impacted by the growing number of immigrant children entering U.S. public schools.

Historically, a teacher's background can impact a child's education. According to Steely and Lukacs (2015), "there is a long history of cultural and linguistic misunderstandings that have created barriers to communication and collaboration between Cultural and Linguistic Diversity families and U.S. schools (p. 21). The 2002 implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, has also helped in bridging the need of understand and accepting the masses of immigrants entering the United States.

Since the No Child Left Behind Act, there has been substantial research in the English Language Learner (ELL) population. Ironically researchers are finding that the gathered information is ground breaking because there is a lack of comparative data and therefore more research is required for comparison purposes. A sense of urgency in this ELL group can correlate to the growing number of ELL students now enrolled in public schools. "According to data reviewed by National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition during 2008-2009 school year, more than 5.3 million or 10.8% of students enrolled in the nation's public schools were classified as limited English proficient" (Gutierrez & Vanderwood, 2013, p. 3). The state of Texas is one of the states with the highest percentage of English Language Learners. The National Center for Education Statistics indicates that Texas has 10% or more of the public school students were ELLs in the 2011-2012 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). There has been an increase of English Language Learners in Texas since 2011.

In 2002, there were 625,946 ELLs enrolled in a public school in Texas, and by 2011, there was an increase of 96,097 more ELLs enrolled in a public school in Texas. The percentage of students participating in programs for ELLs has remained the same since 2002. This signifies the student population is increasing and the ELL population is increasing at the same rate (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

The requirements of NCLB are similar to the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, which required that schools provide language support services to ELLs, to ensure that students could receive academic support while simultaneously acquiring English.

### **Instruction for English Language Learners**

Once new teachers have acquired cultural knowledge, it is important to engage it with the school curriculum. Teachers can create connections between the students' home culture and school culture; however, they must help student culture interweave into the school curriculum. Teachers of LEP students must know how to teach the English language and develop literacy skills, not only their content.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) students are placed in English mainstream classes for their core subject areas: math, science, social studies, and English Language Arts. Because of the language barrier these students have, they are sometimes not successful in their education. Tellez (2004) gives a description of LEP students and the school environment:

They are told that success in school will ensure their participation in the wider economic and social life, but many find school to be a boring, even humiliating place. They are told that school is their only hope of "making it," but their immediate experience tells them otherwise. Their classroom needs repair, the books are old, and the teacher knows nothing of the lives of the students. After years of the same brutal routine, such promises for the future are hollow encouragement. For many students, the most adaptive response to such conditions is simply to drop out of school. (p. 43)

Teachers, who teach LEP students, whether it is reading, math, science, or social studies, must know how to teach English. Core subject teachers must also be able to work collaboratively with language education specialists, teach English as a second language, create a classroom where students can dialogue when inquiring about the content, and use culture to develop a curriculum tailored to LEP students' needs. It is important for teachers to receive the adequate training to teach LEP students because if they lack specific training in language education, they will likely be unproductive or unsuccessful with the students' education (Tellez, 2004).

Currently, the National data confirmed that there is a large gap between the reading performance of language-minority and the English-only children. There is also a large gap in the span of vocabulary between LEP students and the English-only students (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005). The limited vocabulary of LEP students hinders their success in the classroom; therefore, it is important for core subject teachers, along with language education specialists, to close the gaps of reading and vocabulary.

August (2005) defines knowledge of vocabulary as "knowing many things about the word, for example, its literal meaning, its various connotations, the sorts of syntactic constructions into which it enters, the morphological options it offers and a rich array of semantic associates such as a synonyms and antonyms" (p. 51). To build LEP students' vocabulary, one important process to consider is the transfer of cognate knowledge. Transfer is defined as "the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired. Cognates are vocabulary items in two different languages that are similar both orthographically and semantically" (p. 52). This is an important process for language acquisition because it can facilitate English reading comprehension. Even though the words that are cognates are familiar to students in their native

language, the relationship to the English language can be diverse and limited. However, once LEP students are aware of the cognate relationship, the second-language reading increases (August et al., 2005).

Other strategies to develop interventions for LEP students are “providing definitional and contextual information about each word’s meaning; actively involving students in word learning through talking about comparing, analyzing, and using the target words; providing multiple exposures to meaningful information about each word; and teaching word analysis” (August et al., 2005, p. 54).

In addition to using those strategies for vocabulary development, it is important to take advantage of the student’s first language and ensure that LEP students know the meaning of basic words. If LEP students do not know the meaning of basic words, it will be difficult for them to build their vocabulary. Basic words are words that rarely require school instruction; however, there is a guided instruction for these words: concreteness, cognate status, depth of word meaning, and utility. Concreteness refers to the ability to be shown or demonstrated. Other words that often appear in text in content areas or words that are important for understanding a passage can be considered high utility words. Those words should also be taught because if students do not comprehend the words they will not be able to comprehend the passage (August et al., 2005).

Harper and Pelletier's (2010) study found the following:

Research has shown that although ELL children achieve similar or even higher scores than their English as a first Language peers in some areas of literacy, such as phonological awareness and word reading, they perform significantly lower in other areas of language and literacy, such as syntactical knowledge, reading comprehension and oral language. (p. 124)

In their effort to stay current and competitive, Texas has adopted and implemented the "Texas Literacy Initiative" with a focus on vocabulary development and its effect on state assessments (Texas State Literacy Plan Development Committee, 2013). The individualization of creating and/or developing state assessments has led to students' content knowledge to be assessed in different ways. For example, school districts in Texas develop their own Curriculum Based Assessments (CBA) to determine the students' progress in each core content area (Reading, Math, Science, Social Studies). At the end of the year, the Texas Education Agency assesses all the students with the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The school's evaluation is based on all students' progress on this assessment. The general test score data is then desegregated into the subpopulations and that progress is reported separately. In many cases one student can count three times-eighth grader, ELL and special education.

Another instructional method that LEP students can benefit from in the core subjects is review and practice. There are different ways to review and practice both in the classroom and at home. In the classroom, teachers can have teacher-directed language development activities that LEP students can benefit from. Read-aloud can be used to build oral language proficiency as well as reinforce word meaning. Before having students do read aloud in the classroom, it is important to first pre-teach vocabulary words to build concept knowledge. Class discussions during text reading can also be used to reinforce word meaning. It is important to involve parents at home to review and practice to build on their language development. Parents can build word

knowledge in their first language through interview questions and word lists that are sent home. Teachers and parents can work together to help students be successful with their language development (August et al., 2005).

There are challenges in designing effective vocabulary instruction; however, it is important to focus on words children will face frequently in text and oral language. Teachers can do this by using technology, scripted books to reinforce word meanings, games for students to practice using picture cards, games that provide incentives for student to listen for new words, and word walls.

There are a variety of instructional tools many schools adopt to close the academic gap between ELLs and other students in the general education program. One approach some schools take is using the Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SIOP) model. This model is “a research-based model of sheltered instruction, provides teaching ideas for each of the model’s eight components, and suggests ways to differentiate instruction in multi-level classrooms” (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2013). This model focuses on what needs to be taught by providing a framework on how to teach content. The eight components that compose the SIOP model are: lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, and review and assessment. Each component focuses on different strategies that can be used to address the academic needs of ELLs. These strategies are planned throughout the lesson and the delivery of the lesson. Many school districts have implemented this model because it is effective if teachers use it with fidelity. School districts cover the cost of training and professional development for teachers to attend and become familiar with it. This model can be implemented across content areas. Since this model is

research based, it has interwoven many of other approaches such as ESOL and sheltered instruction.

It is important for the teacher to be culturally aware of the students' background, for example, teachers should be aware that "in some cultures students may be unaccustomed to displaying their knowledge in public" (Berg, Petron, & Greybeck, 2012, p. 39). To help students understand the expectations of students in U.S. classrooms, it makes a significant difference if ELLs are provided with lessons in the classrooms regarding participation and behavioral expectations in the classroom.

### **Assessing English Language Learners**

The importance of ELL students has been established and their assessment scores have tripled in value to all states. The question is "How do educators accommodate the ELL education process and raise assessment scores?" The state of Texas requires educators to follow the Texas Education Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) as the guide to student progress from grade level to grade level (TEA, 2013b). Evidence of the TEKS is non-negotiable for teacher lessons. Texas has also developed English language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) for the monitoring of ELL student progress.

According to the Texas Academic Performance Report, in 2013, 37% of ELLs in the sixth grade met the standard on the reading STAAR assessment. In seventh grade, 43% ELL students in Texas met the standard, and 47% eighth grade ELL students met the standard (TEA, 2013a). Less than half of the ELL students in each grade level met the standard in the reading STAAR assessment in Texas in 2013. Students in the eighth grade who are not successful on the first administration of the STAAR assessment are offered an opportunity to participate in the Student Success Initiative. They are also given two additional opportunities to take the

assessment if they are not successful. During the Student Success Initiative, students are given accelerated instruction in order to meet their academic needs. In 2013, 17% of the all the students who were not successful on the first attempt participated in the Student Success Initiative. Of the 17% of the students who were not successful, 53% of those students were ELL students (TEA, 2013a).

There has been a variance on the comparison between content area assessments and a language proficiency assessment. However, a research study conducted by Young recognizes “that how well a student has performed on an ELPS assessment will likely have an impact on his or her performance on content tests” (Young, 2009, p.123). If this finding is substantial, then there is a discrepancy as to why the ELPS have not become a non-negotiable for teacher lessons. The district and campus administrative accountability is lacking in this area. Therefore, it is evident that ELL progress is still below the growth curve.

Each ELL student is rated on four different modes: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These four modes impact a student’s performance on assessments. As Solano-Flores and Li (2009) stated, “each ELL has unique levels of proficiency in their listening, speaking, reading, and writing modes” (p. 181). Therefore, it is crucial that testing accommodations should be based on an individual, not on a group. If the testing accommodations are not completed on an individual basis, the testing results provide inaccurate information of a student’s performance.

There are several factors that have impacted the students’ content area assessments. One major factor that impacts students’ performance on assessment is the vocabulary on the assessment. According to a research study conducted on mathematic assessments, “the complexity of the English used in mathematics items is theorized to have a disproportionate impact on ELL students and students with disabilities due to lower English proficiency or

general language skills” (Shaftel, Belton-Kocher, Glasnapp, & Poggio, 2006, p. 106). Since ELLs have a language barrier to begin with, it is difficult to close the language barrier and learn content specific vocabulary that will help them be successful on the assessments.

In addition to the content vocabulary impacting students’ performance, language used on assessments is also a major factor. Young (2009) indicates that the use of language is not always accessible to ELLs; he outlines the different ways this occurs on assessments:

- Unfamiliar vocabulary that is not related to the target construct.
- Cultural references or idiomatic expressions that are not equally familiar to all students.
- Syntax that may be confusing or ambiguous.
- Low- frequency, long, or morphologically complex words and long sentences.
- Sentence structure that may be confusing or difficult for student to follow.
- Syntax or vocabulary that is above the test’s grade level. (p. 124)

The use of the English language impacts how ELL students perform on assessments of different content areas.

Educators have tried to find solutions to help ELLs on the content assessments. One research study indicates, “testing accommodations have been suggested as one approach to mitigate the unwarranted effects of language on the assessment of content knowledge of ELLs” (Young et al., 2008, p. 172). They have developed different linguistic accommodations, or simplifications, which consist of “reducing the total number of words, avoiding passive voice and complex sentences, minimizing difficult vocabulary, and avoiding ambiguous or multiple meaning words” (Shaftel et al., 2006, p. 106). This accommodation has been offered to ELLs on their reading assessment to help them comprehend the reading passages.

Another linguistic accommodation that is offered to ELLs on assessments is a computerized administration, which includes “a pop-up glossary, a customized English dictionary, extra testing time, and small-group testing” (Abedi, 2009, p. 195). A computerized

administration of assessments provides monitored linguistics accommodations. A research study by Abedi (2009) found “that students performed better under all accommodation conditions except small-group testing” (p. 202). Therefore, ELL students benefit from having a pop-up glossary, a customized English dictionary, and extra testing time on their assessments.

Many will argue the validity of the students’ scores if they receive linguistic accommodations. Research studies on the performance of ELLs on standardized testing are relatively recent. Since this is a new topic of research, “most of the recommended accommodations for ELLs were originally derived from accommodations for student with disabilities, their relevance to the educational needs of ELLs is highly questionable” (Young et. al., 2008, p. 172). Researchers consider that linguistic accommodations could change the results of the assessment; however, “modifications of assessments have been shown to be effective in reducing the performance gap between ELLs and non-ELLs and producing valid assessment outcomes” (Abedi, 2009, p. 196). Not only is it important to reduce the performance gap between ELLs and non-ELLs, it is also important to consider the variables that are being measured on the test. If the assessment is measuring their knowledge on a specific content area, then their language proficiency level should not affect the measurement of their knowledge on the content area.

There has been some effort in developing English language proficiency assessments. However, there are still some concerns regarding these assessments. Abedi identifies the following issues as concerns of the development of English language proficiency assessments: English language proficiency standards, standard setting, and dimensionality, the baseline for the NLCB Title III assessment, academic English, and standardized academic achievement tests. It is important for states to develop their English language proficiency standards prior to developing

the assessment. The instruction for ELLs should include the English language proficiency standards that will be assessed. However, “many states did not have a set of defined ELP content standards prior to the implementation of NCLB” (Abedi, 2008, p. 20). It is also important to set standards because this will facilitate the creation of language proficiency levels and the descriptors for each level. Dimensionality plays an important role in “deciding whether to use subscale or total scores” (Abedi, 2008, p. 20). Prior to the development of ELP assessments, some states were using existing ELP assessments; therefore, there was a challenge linking one assessment to the other. When assessing academic English, the concern exists on whether the assessment should focus on the language of content areas or the language used to learn the content. There continues to be an issue of concern on the validity and reliability on standardized academic assessments because of the “unnecessary linguistic complexity of many achievement test items that are developed for native speakers of English” (Abedi, 2008, p. 20).

The student performance on assessments unfolds many areas of study for this population. When researchers analyze the data on student assessments, they realize there is a “growing problem, yet there is a lack of consensus about that causes the achievement gap and what solutions might close it” (Good et al., 2010, p. 322). Young (2009) indicates there is limited research on the effectiveness of testing accommodations for ELLs; for example, “there is little research to inform us as to how much extra time should be provided to ELLs on content assessments” (p. 133).

### **Additional Areas of Research**

The research currently available about ELL students is limited. Many of the studies are conducted on students in elementary school, and there is limited research in the secondary level.

It is difficult to apply research conducted on elementary students at the secondary level. There is an age and cognitive difference. The research studies regarding instructional strategies target students at the lower grade levels rather than the students at the secondary levels. The content taught at the secondary level is different from the content taught at the elementary level; therefore, it is important for secondary level teachers to have access to practical instructional strategies for the appropriate level.

In addition to the level difference, the ELL population is diverse. For example, a student who recently arrived to the United States will have different academic needs than a student who has resided in the United States for a longer period of time. There is limited research on ELL students who are considered “long term”; however, the ELL students who are long term are the students who are being monitored by NCLB. A study conducted by Yang et al. (2001) indicates that “a hidden reason related to the growth has rarely been discussed” (p. 3). This research discusses the “continuing LEP students” and how this impacts their academics and their futures. According to the researchers, this issue has “rarely been address or seriously discussed in the field” (Yang et al., 2001, p. 1). Other major findings in this research study were: inappropriate course assignment, lack of rigorous content coverage in ESL courses, unrealistic exit criteria from the ESL program, lack of consistent program implementation across school levels and schools, lack of communication between feeder schools and receiving schools, and lack of cooperation between ESL teachers, sheltered English teachers and general education English teachers. These findings are major implications for long term ELL students; however, there is limited or no research on addressing these issues.

There are some research studies that identify the characteristics of a long term ELL student; however, they offer limited information on ways to meet the needs of the students. One research study conducted regarding long term ELLs suggest the following:

- A specialized ELD (English Language Development) course designed for Long Term English Learners, emphasizing writing, academic vocabulary and engagement
- Clustered placement in heterogeneous and rigorous grade-level content classes mixed with English proficient student and taught with differentiated SDAIE strategies
- Explicit language and literacy development across the curriculum. Teachers need to know their students and engage in careful analysis of the language demands of the content they are teaching, as well as develop skills in implementing appropriate instructional strategies
- Native speakers classes
- Systems for monitoring progress and triggering support, and a master schedule designed for flexibility and movement as students progress
- A school-wide focus on study skills (Olsen, 2010, p. 32)

There are instructional practices to address the needs of the ELL students and recommendations for schools to improve the instruction of ELLs. Educators must use effective instructional practices in a consistent manner to measure the growth in ELLs language development.

## **Summary**

The education system has undergone several transformations since the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. Generally changes occur to the assessment facet of the education system. The competition of knowledge acquisition drives countries as well as states to continually raise the bar of education. In the United States this competition runs rampant among the 50 states, each trying to design the best way to deliver the utopian lesson and the best way to measure student success. Texas created a gatekeeper in TEA to level the playing field for all cities mandating they follow guiding rules in the implementation of State Assessments. These created guidelines also focused on specific accommodation for students with special needs as well as

students with language deficiencies. The urgency for new assessment measures is crucial and requires schools to provide language support services to English Language Learners.

The last decade has brought an alarming influx of immigrants to the United States. The turmoil across the world has landed many new dilemmas in the lap of the already unstable education system. For Texas, the challenge of closing the educational gap has intensified with the increased number of English Language Learners enrolled in public schools. It was estimated by the National Clearing House for English Language Acquisition that during 2008-2009 more than 5.3 million students were enrolled in public schools. This startling fact has led to a heightened evaluation of not simply just the equity of assessments being utilized, but also the quality of the teacher and teacher preparation programs. Research has indicated that the new diverse population of public schools require teachers to become proficient in a core content area as well as English as Second Language knowledge. Change to education programs has been gradual to say the least.

This is evident in Texas with the new accountability set forth for English Language Learners. It has taken Texas legislation over 40 years to amend the original Bilingual Act of 1968. The snail pace in legislative change can be attributed to the lack of research in the area of appropriate assessments for English Language Learners. It has taken Special Education hundreds of litigations to propose appropriate, equitable, and quality education for students with special needs. The lack of research or litigation in the area of ELLs leaves ELL students at the mercy of the identification of appropriate assessment and/or measurement devices for English Language Proficiency levels.

Texas developed the ELPS as guidelines for monitoring ELL student progress as a beginning in the direction of accountability. Until the ELPS become a driving force in teacher

lesson requirements, the variance of student success or lack of student success in ELPS assessment versus state core content driven assessment will continue to be evident. The fact remains ELL student success has become vital in Texas. The growing population of ELL students in public schools is skyrocketing, as is the need of quality of assessments and integrity to the LEP school programs.

### **Chapter 3—Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between ELPL of middle school ELL students enrolled in a Texas public school and the results of the reading STAAR. The research questions that guided this study are:

- Does the English Language Proficiency level in reading relate to student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment?
- To what extent do the years in the United States affect the English Language Proficiency level in reading?
- To what extent do the years in the United States affect the STAAR reading performance?
- Does the student's language spoken at home correlate to the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment?
- Does the student's language spoken at home correlate to the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading?
- Does the student's attendance at a Title I school correlate to the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment?
- Does the student's attendance at a Title I school correlate to the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading?

#### **Research Design**

The research design in this study is correlational research design. Correlational research design “use the correlation statistical test to describe and measure the degree of association (or relationship) between two or more variables or set of scores” (Creswell, 2014, p. 356). The research findings describe the trend of the English language proficiency level in relation to the

reading STAAR exam. The correlational research is cross-sectional; the data was collected at one point in time. The data was collected for Spring 2015. The purpose of the correlational research is to determine the extent in which two variables co-vary; determine the “changes in one variable are reflected in changes in the other” (Creswell, 2008, p. 356). The purpose of this correlation research study is to determine the correlation between the students’ English Language Proficiency level and their performance on the STAAR reading assessment.

The English Language Proficiency level is determined through TELPAS. The students’ reading performance is measured through the STAAR assessment. TEA receives the data from the schools. It is then inputted into a database. Therefore, there is a rapid turnaround in the data collection.

The form of data collection that was used in this research study is student data compiled by the school district. Each school district receives the scores of each assessment of each student. The following information was requested from the school district for each ELL middle school student in the District: years in the United States, English Language Proficiency in TELPAS reading, scale score on the STAAR reading assessment, language spoken at home, and school attendance. The data was requested from the school district; therefore, the data availability was convenient for the researcher to obtain. Since TEA already administers both of these assessments, there is no cost to the researcher to collect the student data. The researcher did not incur any costs for the data collection.

The two assessments that were used in this research study are TELPAS and STAAR. The TELPAS reading assessment is a computer-based proficiency test. A proficiency assessment “provides an assessment against a level of skill attainment, but includes standards for performance at varying levels of proficiency, typically a three- or four- point scale ranging from

below basic to advanced performance” (Westat, 2002). The STAAR assessment is a criterion-referenced assessment; it is “a measure of how well he or she did in comparison to a criterion or score” (Creswell J. , 2008).

### **Participants**

The population for this study was all of the middle school ELL students enrolled in a school district in Texas. The secondary students include all sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. According to the TELPAS Statewide Summary Report, there were 115,469 ELL students enrolled in a Texas public school in Spring 2013. There are 47,211 ELL students enrolled in sixth grade, 37,967 ELL students enrolled in seventh grade, and 30,291 ELL students enrolled in eighth grade (TEA, 2013a).

The researcher contacted a school district in Texas to obtain the required information for all of their ELL students enrolled in middle school. All of the ELL students enrolled in middle school within the District were included in this study. The population can provide useful information to answer the research questions.

### **Data Collection**

The research instruments used in this research study is the data the District provided on an Excel spreadsheet. The data provided by the District is: student’s STAAR reading scores, student’s English Language Proficiency level, student’s number of years in the United States, student’s language spoken at home, and student’s attendance at a Title I or non-Title I school. The reading STAAR assessments were created by the Texas Education Agency and are administered by the school district personnel. Once students have completed the STAAR assessments, the school district personnel send the exams to TEA. TEA scores the exams and compiles a report indicating whether the students met the standard or did not meet the standard.

The Texas Education Agency determines the passing standard for each assessment. The STAAR assessments are “based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), the standards designed to prepare students to succeed in college and careers and to compete globally” (TEA, 2014b). These STAAR assessments focus on fewer skills; however, they address skills in a deeper manner.

In order to achieve Satisfactory Academic Performance (or passing standard), a student must:

- Determine the meaning of unfamiliar, multiple-meaning, and grade- level academic English words using context, roots and affixes, and reference materials,
- Determine how the author’s use of stylistic elements and figurative language affects meaning
- Analyze literary texts by determining the theme, recognizing how story structure influences plot development, and explaining how voice conveys character
- Demonstrate an understanding of informational texts by identifying the author’s purpose and viewpoint, summarizing the text in ways that maintain meaning, and recognizing how different organizational patterns are used to develop the main idea
- Recognize the logical connections and thematic links between texts representing similar or different genres
- Make reasonable inferences about literary and informational texts, supporting those inferences with relevant textual evidence. (TEA, 2014b)

The Texas Education Agency also develops the Texas Education Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS). The assessment is “designed to assess the progress that limited English proficient (LEP) students make in learning the English language” (TEA, 2013b). The assessment determines the ELL students’ English language proficiency level by assessing “English language learners annually in listening, speaking, reading, and writing” (TEA, 2014c, p. 3). The TELPAS assessment contains “multiple-choice reading tests and holistically rated assessments in listening, speaking, and writing” (TEA, 2014c, p. 12). The Texas Education Agency compiles the TELPAS Confidential Campus Roster indicating the student’s English language proficiency level in each domain. TELPAS has four proficiency

ratings to indicate the progress a student makes in English language annually. The four proficiency ratings are beginning, intermediate, advanced, and advanced high.

The TELPAS reading test is designed especially for students who do not speak English as their first language. The test is made up of reading selections and test questions that span a full range of English reading ability. While the beginning level reading selections and questions include very common English words and many pictures, the advanced and advanced high reading selections and questions require a near- native understanding of English. Once students read a proficiency rating of advanced high on the test, they have little difficulty understanding what they read in class and on state assessments of academic skills. (TEA, 2014c)

The assessment window for the TELPAS assessments was March 16, 2015 through April 8, 2015. Each campus works within the assessment window to administer the TELPAS assessment to the ELL students.

The 8th grade STAAR reading assessment was administered on March 31, 2015 and the make-up session for the assessment was April 3, 2015. The 6th grade and 7th grade reading assessments were administered on April 22, 2015 and the make-up session for the assessments was April 24, 2015. The 8th grade students who do not meet the standard during the first administration are allowed two additional opportunities to retake the assessment; however, for the purpose of this study, the researcher will use the scores from the first administration.

The Texas Education Agency has also created a document outlining the purpose and importance of test security to school personnel. According to TEA, “maintaining the security and confidentiality of the Texas student assessment program is critical for ensuring valid test scores and providing standard and equal testing opportunities for all students” (TEA, 2014b). TEA also requires that all district and school personnel who are involved in state-mandated testing must be trained and sign a security oath. All testing personnel receive an annual training regarding test security and administration procedures. All testing personnel are responsible for complying with state assessment requirements. All testing personnel acknowledge they “have been trained,

understand their obligation to properly implement the program” and are aware of their responsibility to report suspected testing irregularities when they sign the *Oath of Test Security and Confidentiality*.

Testing materials are secured during every stage of all test administrations. It is important for districts to “implement the controls necessary to ensure the proper storage and accurate tracking of secure materials” (TEA, 2014b). There are additional steps school districts and schools must take in order to maintain proper security. According to TEA, the following steps must be taken:

- Verifying, upon receipt from the state’s testing contractor, that all materials boxes have been accounted for and match the proof of delivery on the shipper’s bill of lading and the district packing list contained in Box 1 (white box) of the shipment;
- Ensuring that all campuses immediately inventory all materials received from the district testing coordinator;
- Immediately notifying the state’s testing contractor of any discrepancies identified between the materials received and the district and campus packing lists included in Box 1 of the district and campus shipments;
- Placing test booklets and answer documents in secure, limited- access, locked storage when not in use;
- Collecting and destroying immediately after each test administration any state-supplied reference materials, recordings, graph paper, or scratch paper that students have written on during a test;
- Ensuring when testing has concluded that all secure materials assigned to individual campuses have been inventoried and packaged in accordance with the procedures detailed in the manuals; and
- Maintaining inventory and shipping records (bills of lading, pallet detail reports, district and campus packing lists, documents used to track the delivery of materials to and between campuses, Materials Control Forms) for at least five years in the event that a discrepancy arises or the receipt of the district’s materials cannot be confirmed. (TEA, 2014b)

Check and balances have been established for the validity and reliability of the state assessments. The factual information from the school district will consist of individual data available to the school districts, however; students’ names will not be disclosed. The type of data that will be accessed is demographic information, English Language Proficiency levels and

assessment scores for the reading State of Texas of Assessment of Academic Readiness. The researcher will be utilizing an existing instrument to collect the data needed for the study.

### **Research Procedures**

After submitting an IRB Application and obtaining approval, the researcher will execute the research. The researcher submitted the IRB Application to the School District and completed any necessary documents to obtain the required data. The researcher submitted the Application for Research and the External Research Request Review Form. When the researcher obtained approval from the school district, the researcher contacted the Testing department for the school district to obtain the requested information. The researcher requested the data needed for research for all of the middle schools in the school district.

### **Ethical Consideration**

Before this study was conducted, it was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements of the University of the Incarnate Word. The School District that provided the requested information was made aware of the purpose of the study. The School District is aware of their participation in this research study. The researcher communicated that the information provided would remain anonymous and confidential. No names were provided to the researcher, and all information provided was kept confidential by the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

All information used in this analysis was derived from the data the School District provided. The data was analyzed using various descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to determine the relationship between a student's English language proficiency level and their performance on a reading STAAR assessment. This study was set up to examine the relationship between the variables.

The data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS); this software includes descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. The statistical test that was used in this study is the Spearman Correlation Coefficient because “it requires ordinal (or interval or ratio) data for both variables” (Cronk, 2012). The independent variables are the student’s language spoken at home, the number of years in the United States, the student’s school attendance and the student’s English language proficiency level (beginning, intermediate, advanced, advanced high). The dependent variable is the student’s performance on the STAAR reading assessment and the student’s English language proficiency level in reading. The Spearman Correlation Coefficient answered the research questions used to guide this research study.

### **Summary**

This research study was guided by seven research questions that focused on different variables that impact ELL students. This correlational study examined the relationship of the variables collected from the data provided by the school district. The variables for this study were ELL students’ STAAR reading scores, students’ English language proficiency level, students’ number of years in the United States, students’ language spoken at home, and students’ attendance at a Title I or non-Title I school. The participants of this research were middle school students classified as sixth, seventh, and eighth grade who attended a public school in Texas.

## **Chapter Four—Results**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between English Language Proficiency level (ELPL) of middle school ELL students enrolled in a Texas public school and the results of the reading portion STAAR examination. The research questions that guided this study are:

- Does the English Language Proficiency level in reading relate to student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment?
- To what extent do the years in the United States affect the English Language Proficiency level in reading?
- To what extent do the years in the United States affect the STAAR reading performance?
- Does the student's language spoken at home correlate to the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment?
- Does the student's language spoken at home correlate to the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading?
- Does the student's attendance at a Title I school correlate to the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment?
- Does the student's attendance at a Title I school correlate to the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading?

### **Demographics**

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2012 there were 4.3 million students enrolled in a public school who were identified as ELLs. Figure 1 displays the percent of ELL

students in public schools in each state in the United States. The states with the highest percentage of ELLs in public schools are California, Nevada, New Mexico and Texas.

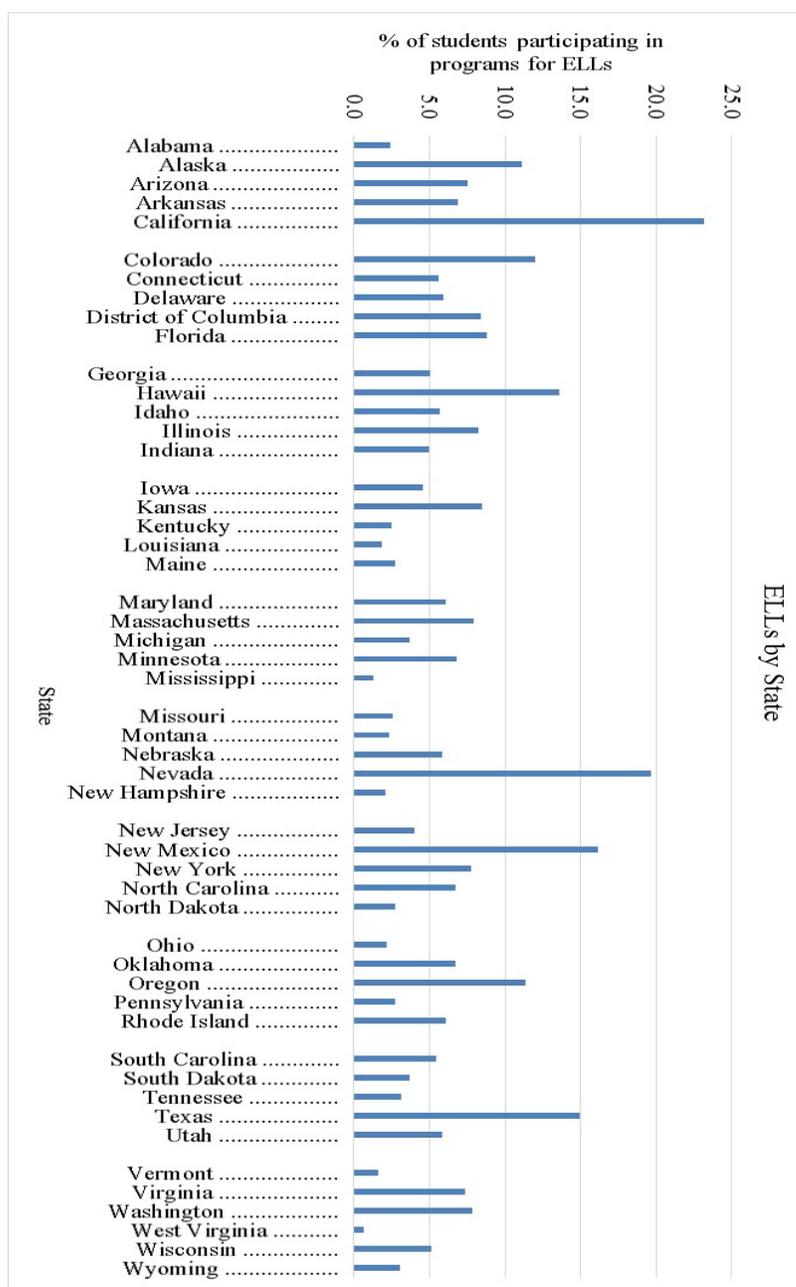


Figure 1. Percent of ELLs per State.

The participants in this study all attend one school district in Texas. The participants of this study were classified as 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students. For this school district, 1,482 were classified as ELL middle school students. There were 40% of students classified as 6th grade ELL students, 30% of students were classified as 7th grade ELL students, and 30% of students were classified as 8th grade ELL students. Table 1 displays the ELL students by grade level and by their English Language Proficiency level. The highest amounts of ELLs are either in 6th or 8th grade and are at the Advance English Language Proficiency level.

Table 1

*ELLs by Grade Level and ELPL*

Grade	<u>Beginning</u>		<u>Intermediate</u>		<u>Advance</u>		<u>Advance High</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
6	66	5.3	131	10.7	183	14.8	99	8	479	38.7
7	50	4	89	7.2	148	12	87	7	374	30.3
8	49	4	93	7.5	176	14.2	65	5.3	383	31
Total	165	13.3	313	25.4	507	41	251	20.3	1236	100

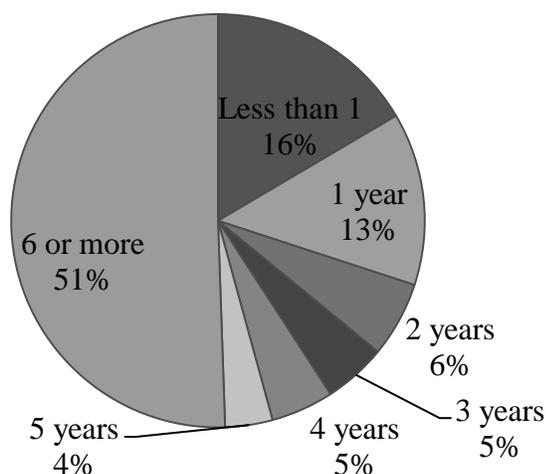
*Note.* N = 1,236 participants.

This school district has identified 7 out of 20 of their middle schools as Title I schools. Schools that are identified as Title I are provided supplemental funding to “improve education quality and help ensure all children in low-income contexts meet the state’s student performance standards” (Texas Education Agency, 2013). There are 49.4% of students who attend a Title I school, and 50.6% of students who do not attend a Title I school.

Some ELL students were born in the United States, while others were born in another country. The number of years in the United States varies by student. The district monitors the number of years each student has in the United States. Once they have reached six years in the United States, the district does not account for the additional years after six years. Figure 2

indicates the percentage of the ELLs by the number of years in the United States. The data shows about 50% of the ELL students have been in the United States for six or more years.

The ELL middle school students in this school district speak many different languages at home. Figure 3 displays the languages spoken at home. There are 38 languages reported that are spoken at home; however, 72% of middle school ELL students speak Spanish at home. There are 11% of middle school ELL students who speak Arabic at home. The other languages spoken at home have less than 10% of the ELL middle school students.



*Figure 2. Percentage of ELLs in the District.*

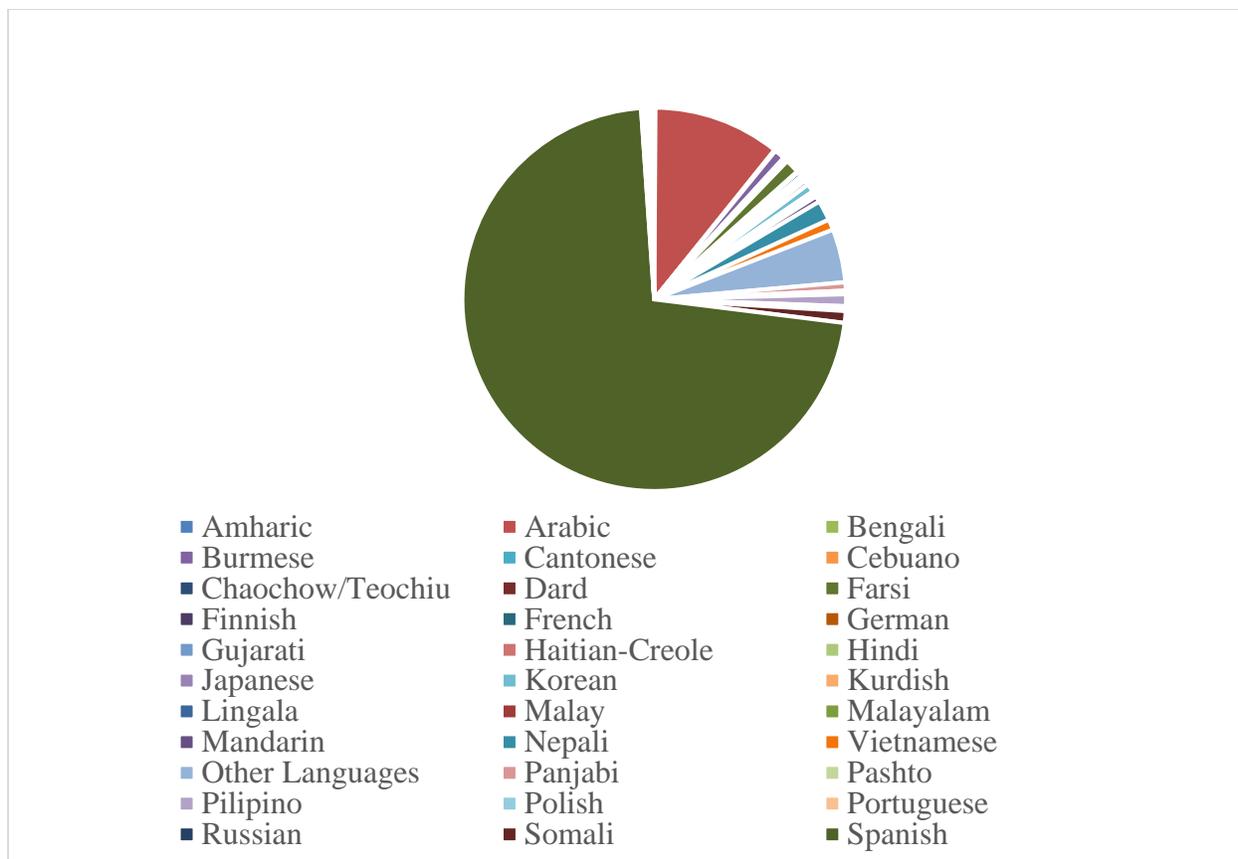


Figure 3. Languages spoken at home.

### Research Question 1

Does the English Language Proficiency level in reading relate to student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment?

A Spearman  $\rho$  correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between participants' English language Proficiency level and their score on the reading STAAR assessment. A strong positive correlation was found ( $\rho(1192) = .739, p < .01$ ), indicating a significant relationship between the two variables. ELL students with a higher English language proficiency level tend to score higher on the reading STAAR assessment. Table 2 indicates the correlation between the students' TELPAS rating and their STAAR reading scores.

Table 2

*Correlation Between TELPAS Rating and STAAR Reading Scores*

	TELPAS Rating	STAAR Reading Score
TELPAS Rating	1.000	.739**
STAAR Reading Score	.739**	1.000

*Note.* N = 1,236 participants; \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

**Research Question 2**

To what extent do the years in the United States affect the English Language Proficiency level in reading?

A test of normality was conducted to determine whether the data is normally distributed. Since there is less than 2,000 participants, the test of normality used was the Shapiro-Wilk. The significance for the Shapiro-Wilk is .000; which is less than 0.05. The researcher could not assume normality. Therefore, a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted comparing the outcome of TELPAS reading scores to the number of years spent in the United States. A significant result was found ( $H(5) = 201.135$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that the groups differ from each other. Follow-up pairwise comparisons indicated that students who have been in the United States longer score significantly higher on the TELPAS reading assessment than students who have been in the United States for a shorter period of time. Figure 4 shows a box plot of the correlation between the TELPAS reading scores and the number of years in the United States.

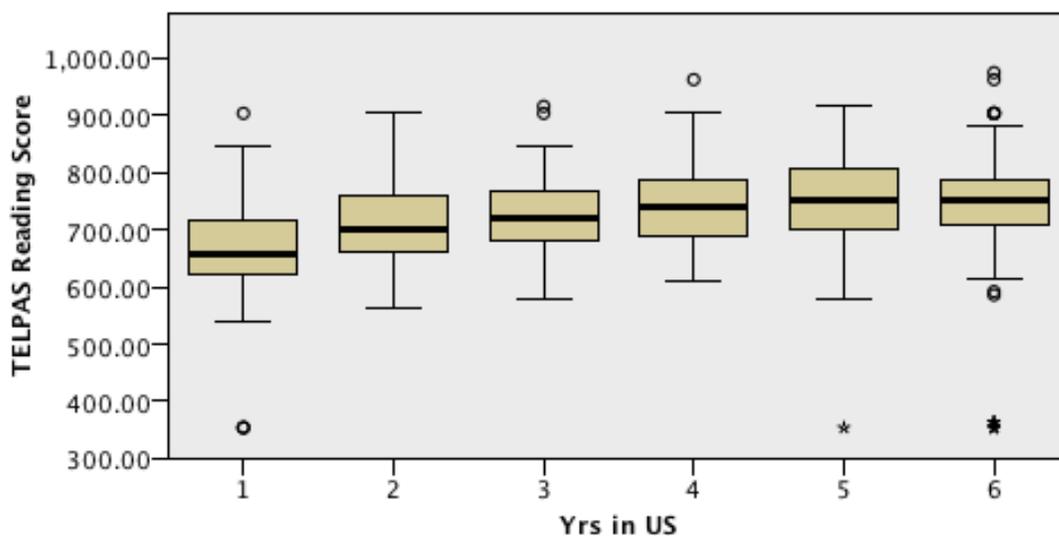


Figure 4. Correlation between TELPAS reading scores and the years in the United States.

A one-way ANOVA was computed comparing the student's years in the United States and the score of the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading. Table 3 is a one-way ANOVA between the years in the U.S. and the TELPAS reading scores. A significant difference was found among the student's years in the United States ( $F(5,1230) = 40.98, p < .05$ ). Tukey's HSD was used to determine the nature of the differences between the student's years in the United States. Students who have less than one year in the United States scored lower ( $m = 669.49, sd = 78.832$ ) than students who have been in the United States for six or more years ( $m = 747.06, sd = 75.66$ ). Students who have been in the United States for a longer period of time scored had a higher score.

Table 3

*One Way ANOVA Between Years in the U.S. and TELPAS Reading Scores*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
1	200	1.83	.973	.069	1.69	1.97	1	4
2	87	2.34	.950	.102	2.14	2.55	1	4
3	73	2.60	.996	.117	2.37	2.84	1	4
4	73	2.82	.903	.106	2.61	3.03	1	4
5	55	2.91	.908	.122	2.66	3.15	1	4
6	748	2.93	.780	.029	2.87	2.98	1	4
Total	1236	2.68	.944	.027	2.63	2.74	1	4

*Note.* N = 1,236 participants.

### Research Question 3

To what extent do the years in the United States affect the STAAR reading performance?

A test of normality was conducted to determine whether the data is normally distributed. Since there is less than 2,000 participants, the test of normality used was the Shapiro-Wilk. The significance for the Shapiro-Wilk is .000; which is less than 0.05. The researcher could not assume normality. Therefore, a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted comparing the outcome of STAAR reading scores for the number of years a student spent in the United States. A significant result was found ( $H(6) = 95.382, p < .01$ ), indicating that the groups differ from each other. Follow-up pairwise comparisons indicated that students who have been in the United States longer score significantly higher on the STAAR reading assessment than students who have been in the United States for a shorter period of time. Figure 5 shows a box plot of the correlation between the STAAR reading scores and the number of years in the United States.

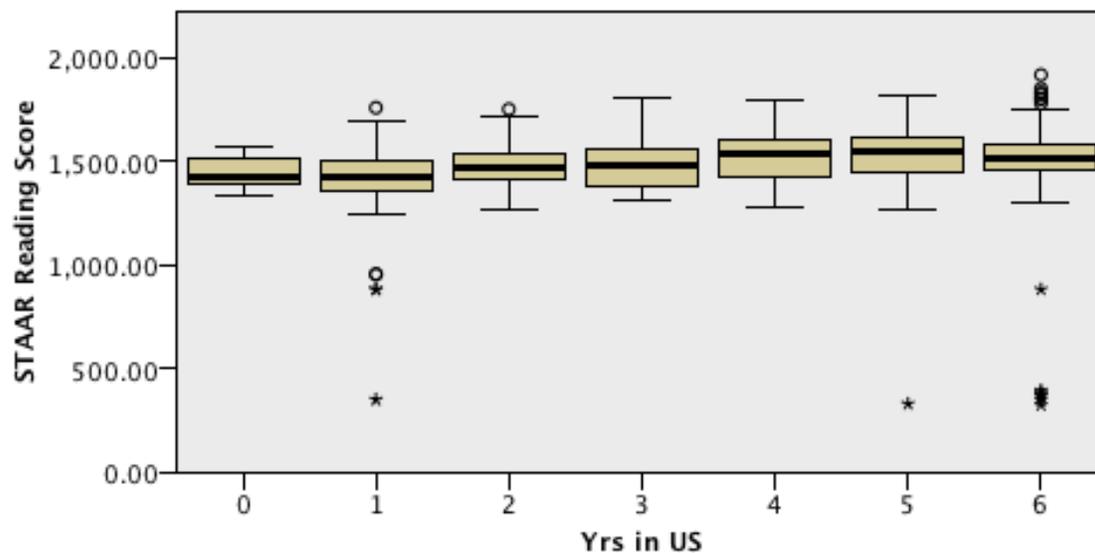


Figure 5. Correlation between STAAR reading scores and the years in the United States.

A one-way ANOVA was computed to compare the STAAR reading scores of participants who have different number of years in the United States. Table 4 has the results of the one-way ANOVA between the years in the U.S. and STAAR reading scores. A significant difference was found among in the students' number of years in the United States ( $F(6,1199) = 9.36, p < .05$ ). Tukey's HSD was used to determine the nature of the differences between the number of years in the United States. This analysis revealed that students who have not yet completed a year in the United States scored lower ( $m = 1447.42, sd = 76.93$ ) than students who have been in the United States for more than six years ( $m = 1513.72, sd = 143.87$ ).

Table 4

*One Way ANOVA Between Years in the U.S. and STAAR Reading Scores*

Years	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
0	12	1447.42	76.934	22.209	1398.54	1496.30	1331	1568
1	164	1428.52	158.680	12.391	1404.06	1452.99	352	1760
2	86	1480.95	101.860	10.984	1459.11	1502.79	1265	1753
3	73	1482.77	118.650	13.887	1455.08	1510.45	1316	1805
4	72	1515.94	115.167	13.573	1488.88	1543.01	1284	1799
5	54	1526.81	205.144	27.917	1470.82	1582.81	332	1823
6	745	1513.72	140.021	5.130	1503.65	1523.79	326	1919
Total	1206	1497.98	143.865	4.143	1489.85	1506.11	326	1919

*Note.* N = 1,236 participants.

#### **Research Question 4**

Does the student's language spoken at home correlate to the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment?

A Spearman *rho* correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between a student's language spoken at home and their reading STAAR assessment score. A positive weak correlation was found ( $r(2) = .176, p > .05$ ). The student's language spoken at home is related to the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment. Table 5 indicates the correlation between the languages spoken at home and the STAAR reading scores.

Table 5

*Correlation Between Languages Spoken at Home and STAAR Reading Scores*

	Language Spoken at Home	STAAR Reading Score
Language Spoken at Home	1.000	.176**
STAAR Reading Score	.176**	1.000

*Note.* N = 1,236 participants; \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

**Research Question 5**

Does the student's language spoken at home correlate to the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading?

A Spearman rho correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between a student's language spoken at home and the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading. A weak correlation was found ( $r(2) = .220, p < .01$ ). The student's language spoken at home is related to the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading. Table 6 indicates the correlation between the languages spoken at home and the TELPAS reading scores.

Table 6

*Correlation Between Languages Spoken at Home and TELPAS Reading Scores*

	Language Spoken at Home	TELPAS Reading Score
Language Spoken at Home	1.000	.220**
TELPAS Reading Score	.220**	1.000

*Note.* N = 1 236 participants; \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

**Research Question 6**

Does the student's attendance at a Title I school correlate to the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment?

A Spearman rho correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between a student's attendance at a Title I school and the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment. A weak correlation was found ( $r(2) = .067, p > .05$ ). The student's attendance at a

Title I school is related to the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment. Table 7 indicates the correlation between the student's attendance at a Title I school and their STAAR reading scores.

Table 7

*Correlation Between Attendance at a Title I School and STAAR Reading Scores*

	Title I School	STAAR Reading Score
Title I School	1.000	.067*
STAAR Reading Score	.067*	1.000

*Note.* N = 1,236 participants; \*\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed.

### Research Question 7

Does the student's attendance at a Title I school correlate to the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading?

A Spearman *rho* correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between a student's attendance at a Title I school and the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading. There was no correlation found ( $r(2) = .045, p > .05$ ). The student's attendance at a Title I school is not related to the student's English Language Proficiency level in reading. Table 8 indicates the results between the student's attendance at a Title I school and their TELPAS reading scores.

Table 8

*Correlation Between Attendance at a Title I School and TELPAS Reading Scores*

	Title I School	TELPAS Reading Score
Title I School	1.000	.045
TELPAS Reading Score	.045	1.000

*Note.* N = 1,236 participants, \*\*  $p > .05$ , two-tailed.

## Summary

There was a strong positive correlation between the students' English Language Proficiency level in reading and the students' reading STAAR scores. ELL students with a higher English language proficiency level tend to score higher on the reading STAAR assessment. A student's number of years in the United States affected the student's STAAR reading scores. The student's language spoken at home is related to the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment and their English Language Proficiency level in reading. The student's attendance at a Title I school is related to the student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment; however, the student's attendance at a Title I school is not related to their English Language Proficiency level in reading.

## **Chapter 5—Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between English Language Proficiency level (ELPL) of middle school ELL students enrolled in a Texas public school and the results of the reading portion STAAR examination.

### **Summary of Study**

The exuberant influx of hopeful immigrants seeking a new life radiated through education, has awakened a new evolution of the educational system. This craze challenges the United States in sensitive areas in which the educational system needs to improve. In Texas, there are learning objectives that have been developed to monitor what students are learning at each grade level. There are also state assessments students take every year that are produced by TEA. These state assessments are in the content areas of reading, writing, math, science, and social studies; and they are created per grade levels. Sixth grade students take assessments in reading and math. Seventh grade students take assessments in reading, writing, and math. Eighth grade students are assessed in reading, math, science, and social studies. State assessments are graded by anonymous companies, such as Pearson, who are selected by TEA. The students' performance on these assessments is reported back to each school district and then each campus. Assessment data is desegregated by different sub-populations, such as ELL, Special Education, 504, and dyslexia. Due to the influx of immigrants, one of the subpopulations that has grown exponentially in many Texas schools is ELLs. ELL students are overladen with the tasks of becoming proficient in English while simultaneously trying to master the Texas learning objectives for each grade level and content area.

The theories used in this research study are the Monitor Theory and the Cummins Iceberg Model of Language Development. Cummins Iceberg Model of Language Development was

based on the Monitor Theory. The Monitor Theory focuses on conscious and subconscious learning. When students are learning at a conscious level, they are trying to memorize rules and are able to identify when they violate a rule. However, at the subconscious level, students use a different process to acquire the second language. Students are able to apply different rules on their language acquisition, without thinking of the actual rule itself.

Since the ELL subpopulation is a growing population, there has been research on the instruction for ELLs and the assessments for ELLs. Instruction impacts how ELLs perform on their assessment. During instruction, students are taught the knowledge and skills they will need to be successful on their assessments. Instruction for ELLs focuses on the academic vocabulary that many students struggle with. It is important to use different strategies when teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs. When delivering instruction to ELLs, teachers should include review and practice so that students become familiar with the concepts and practice them until they feel comfortable.

Assessing ELLs relies heavily on the quality of instruction they received. When assessing ELLs in English, it is important to understand that there is a difference in content area assessment and language proficiency assessment. When students are being assessed in content area assessment, they are being assessed on the content; however, some students may struggle demonstrating this because they may not be familiar with the language being used on the assessment. This does not mean the student is not familiar with the content. Students struggle with the language on the assessments; therefore, it is difficult for them to demonstrate mastery of the content.

This research study used a correlational research design to describe the trend of the English language proficiency level in relation to the reading STAAR exam. The data collected

for this research study was for Spring 2015. The English Language Proficiency level was determined through TELPAS, which is administered in the Spring. The reading STAAR assessment was also administered in the Spring. The population for the study were all the middle school ELL students enrolled in a school district in Texas. This included sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students.

After obtaining approval on the IRB application, the data was requested from a school district in Texas. The researcher submitted the IRB application and completed the necessary documents to obtain the required data. The data was analyzed using various descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to determine the relationship between a student's English Language Proficiency level and their performance on the reading STAAR assessment. The inferential statistical techniques that were used were Spearman Correlation coefficient, Kruskal-Wallis H test, and one-way ANOVA.

### **Summary of Results**

This research study was guided by eight research questions. The participants of this research study were classified as 6th, 7th, or 8th grade students. There were 1,482 participants in this study of which 40% are 6th grade students, 30% are 7th grade students, and 30% are 8th grade students. The data indicated that approximately 50% of the ELLs have been in the United States for six or more years. Of the 38 languages that students speak at home, 72% of the ELLs speak Spanish at home.

The Spearman Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between the student's English language Proficiency level and their performance on the reading STAAR assessment. There was a strong positive correlation between the two variables.

The test of normality was performed to determine if the data was normally distributed. Since the data was not normally distributed, the researcher used the Kruskal-Wallis  $H$  test. This test was used to determine the extent of the years in the United States and its effect on the STAAR reading performance and the English Language Proficiency level in reading. Students who have been in the United States for a longer period of time score higher on the TELPAS reading assessment and on the STAAR reading assessment.

The Spearman Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the correlation between the student's language spoken at home to their English Language Proficiency level in reading. There was a weak correlation that was not significant between the two variables. The Spearman Correlation Coefficient was also used to determine the correlation between attendance at a Title I school and student's performance on the reading STAAR assessment and English Language Proficiency level in reading. There was a weak correlation that was not significant for both tests. The student's attendance at a Title I school does not correlate to their STAAR reading performance or their English Language Proficiency level in reading.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study are significant to the contribution to the body of knowledge regarding ELLs and state assessments. This study did not only focus on the reading assessment and the ELL subpopulation, but also other factors that could impact the learning of ELLs. The research questions were focused on the language ELLs speak at home and whether the school's status is Title I or not. According to this study and the participants of this study, those factors do not impact ELLs learning. The participants in this study did not show that the language they speak at home correlates to their performance on a reading assessment. The school's status of Title I or not did not correlate to the participants' performance on a reading assessment.

Therefore, these are not factors that impact the learning of ELLs. The focus of educators should not be the language they speak at home. Title 1 schools have a larger population of ELL students; however, that does not affect their performance. They receive the same services and quality of education as students who attend non-title 1 schools.

However, the participants of this study displayed a strong correlation between their English language proficiency level and their performance on a reading assessment. ELL students who had a higher English language proficiency level had a higher score on their reading assessments. This is significant for educators because this will give insight to teachers as to what to focus on. If teachers focus on the ELL student's English language proficiency level, students are able to score higher on their reading assessments. When teachers are preparing their lessons for their students, it is important to target ELLs language needs in order for students to be more successful on their state assessments. Education leaders can identify strategies to provide teachers with in order for the ELLs language needs to be met. These strategies can be a powerful tool for ELLs to be successful on state assessments.

This study has provided significant insight to educators in the United States. Even though every state has a different state assessment, learning and the quality of education is the same. Educators focus on the success of students in the classroom and their preparation for the future. Instruction is a powerful tool and the preparation of teachers is important. If teachers are not prepared to deliver meaningful instruction to students, the students will not be successful in the future. It is difficult for teachers to juggle between content and language development and it can become overwhelming.

When analyzing the education of ELLs, the Integrationist would have a better understanding of their needs. Integrationists "support breaking down all barriers between racial

groups by merging people of different cultures together in communities and in the workplace” (Williams, 2001). They view the importance of not separating ELLs into their own school, but they feel that it is important to merge them with other students. This benefits both ELLs and other general education students. ELLs benefit from integration because they are able to see how other students behave and listen to the language they are learning. General education students can benefit from having ELLs in the classroom because they can learn about other cultures. In society, there are always interactions with people from different cultures.

Integrationists also believe that “integrating the boardroom, classroom, workplace, and neighborhood, and placing people of color and whites side by side will increase tolerance and reduce prejudice” (Williams, 2001). If educators take the approach of Integrationists, students will learn at an early age how to accept people from other cultures because they will learn from them in school. Integrating different types of students in a classroom can benefit the society in the long term.

### **Implications**

This research provided great insight on ELL students and their performance on state reading assessments. This study only focused on ELL students; however, it is important to compare the scores of ELLs to their peer who are not in this subpopulation. All students, with an exception of some special education students, take the same STAAR reading assessment; therefore, it is important to indicate how ELLs perform in comparison to their peers in the general education setting.

The education system focuses on different populations among the student body for each campus. There are different populations of students and sometimes students make up more than one population. For example, one student is an ELL and has a learning disability; therefore,

receives Special Education services. This student is in two different populations; therefore, their performance affects two populations: ELLs and Special Education. This study only focused on the ELL population and did not further research the students who were in multiple populations. However, the data of these students would be beneficial because it can determine where they are being successful and the strategies being used to be successful. These strategies can be applied to their areas of improvement.

As teachers, it is important to know what populations the students are part of. For example, if the student has a learning disability in reading, this can also affect his learning in social studies, math, or science. There is reading involved in every subject; therefore, it is important to be aware of their educational needs in every area.

In elementary school, students usually have one teacher and she teaches multiple subjects; however, in middle school and high school students have a teacher for every subject. Therefore, in middle school and high school, teachers must communicate with each other about students. This can become more difficult in middle school and high school because most teachers have more than 100 students they service. Teachers organize their time to learn about each student's needs, plan their lessons purposefully, and monitor their progress.

ELL students receive different accommodations on each STAAR assessment. For the reading STAAR assessment, ELLs receive the least accommodations on this assessment. ELL students receive extra time and a dictionary as linguistic accommodations on a reading STAAR assessment. For the science, math, and social studies assessments, ELLs receive more accommodations and recent immigrants receive a different version of those assessments. ELL students who have been in the United States for three years or less receive a linguistically accommodated assessment. This assessment is offered online and it provides students with a

bilingual dictionary, extra time, clarification in English of word meaning and text read aloud. Students who have been in the United States for four or more years received a bilingual dictionary and extra times on their assessments. Each student received different linguistic accommodations, depending on what the teacher has been providing for the student during instruction. The linguistic accommodations can impact how the student performs on their assessments. This is a factor that can be used as future research. The linguistic accommodations need to be provided to students during instruction so that they can be exposed to them prior to assessments. If students are not exposed and taught how to use their resources, they will not benefit the student during assessment. It is important for teachers to teach ELLs how to use their resources and allow them to use them during class. These accommodations are not only resources for students, but also tools that can help ELLs with their language development.

It is important to assess how the English language proficiency level of ELLs affects their performance on science, math, social studies, and writing assessments with and without accommodations. This research study only focused on the reading assessment; however, their reading level also impacts their performance on the science, math, social studies, and writing assessments.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

It is important to continue to research areas within the ELL population. This study used data that was only regarding ELL students who attend a middle school in Texas. There is other research indicating this population struggles to maintain the same reading skills as other students in the General Education program. The focus of other research can be expanded to seek ways to help these students with their language deficiencies. Overall, every ELL student struggles to

maintain the same reading skills. Future research can focus on other grade levels to monitor whether the results are the same as middle school ELL students.

As mentioned earlier, reading impacts other content areas. Future research can also focus on assessments in math, science, social studies, and writing. ELLs receive linguistic accommodations in these content areas because language can become a barrier in their understanding. The results of this research can be beneficial to educators because it will identify areas of improvement for each content. In Texas, teachers are required to utilize accommodations with ELLs if they will be used on assessments. These accommodations are used during instruction as well as during other assessments. With this implementation, the results will determine which strategies need to be used consistently with each ELL. Every ELL has different language needs, and the results of the research will help determine which strategies are the most beneficial to each student.

In the literature review for this research study, the focus was on instruction and assessment of ELLs. Another area of focus for future research is the preparation teachers are receiving to educate ELLs. The instruction of ELLs focused on different strategies that ELLs benefit from when receiving instruction. It is important for teachers to be prepared with those instructional strategies for their ELL students' success.

### **Teacher Preparation for ELLs**

In order for LEP students to be successful in the classroom, teacher education must be changed to accommodate the needs of the students. Currently, only an estimated 56% of all public school teachers in the United States have at least one LEP student in their class; however, of the teachers who have at least one LEP student in their classroom, less than 20% of them are certified in ESL (Tellez, 2004). New teachers find that the study of language and language

acquisition has too many theories and the theories are not very practical; however, educators have an obligation to help new teachers understand the language challenges that LEP student face.

It is important to prepare teachers prior to the teachers entering the classrooms. Several researchers have found importance in “developing all subject area teachers’ abilities to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students” (Dong, 2004, p. 202). Research has identified four major areas of teacher preparation to meet the needs of ELLs.

Second language researchers have identified four major areas of teacher preparation: building empathy toward second language learners’ language difficulties and cultural differences, increasing understanding of the process of second language acquisition, adapting the curriculum and instruction to these students’ cultural and language needs, and integrating discipline specific language and literacy skills into area of instruction. (Dong, 2004, p. 202)

There are changes that must be made to teacher education in order to better serve ELL student. A major change that must be made in teacher education is acquiring culture. It is important for teacher education to cultivate teachers to be more understanding of the needs of ELL students. Acquiring knowledge of the students’ culture will serve the need of the ELL students. The reason for this understanding is to help teachers build a bridge for the LEP students’ cultural knowledge to the new knowledge. If a teacher does not have any knowledge of the students’ cultural, the teacher will fail at making the connection for the student (Tellez, 2004).

In a study conducted by Good, Masewicz, and Vogel, one major theme that emerged was the communication gaps between the teachers and their students. A language barrier hinders the communication between teachers and students. Parents expressed their concern with the language barrier believing “that if teachers do not speak the child’s language or understand his or her culture, learning cannot be optimized” (Good et al., 2010, p. 329). If there is a lack of

understanding it creates obstacles between schools and families. This impacts student achievement in a negative way.

There have also been arguments stating that the most efficient way to ensure that teachers are knowledgeable of students' culture is to recruit teachers who represent the culture of the students; however, this can have several implications (Tellez, 2004). The main implication of this "solution" is students must learn how to interact with people of other cultures and other ethnicity. It is also important for prepare teachers for the students they will be teaching, regardless of their culture and ethnicity. Another implication with recruiting teachers who represent the culture of the students is that "Latino" or "Hispanic" can include people from several cultures and several countries. These countries may share the same language; however, they maybe culturally different. Even within one country, there are different cultures. This can depend on the region of the country.

When obtaining knowledge of a culture, there is a contrast between interacting with the culture and studying the culture. Tellez (2004) states "teachers who wish to link home culture and school knowledge cannot study student culture; they must acquire it through natural exposure" (p. 47).

It is also important to be knowledgeable of students' home culture understand their learning styles. Language is not learned in any systematic way, but by acquiring it through exposure and existing mental structures. In order to become knowledgeable of the students' home culture, one teacher education program developed a social service requirement. This requirement consisted of new teachers volunteering in agencies that provided services to Latino children and youth. One of the agencies that new teachers participated in was to teach English to adult Spanish speakers. This agency benefited both the new teachers because they were gaining

teaching experience; and the adult Spanish speakers because the outcome of this program will help them better participate in school activities with their children (Tellez, 2004).

This program also helped new teachers acquire culture knowledge. Because the adult Spanish speakers were grateful for the service they had received, their cultural knowledge was shared rather than forced. The new teachers began to see their adult Spanish speakers as their friends, and were able to share stories about their family life as well as their family traditions. The teacher education program was “pleased that students were acquiring cultural knowledge in a way that made them feel less like outsiders to Latino life” (Tellez, 2004, p. 48). The teacher education program also found that service learning was a comfortable way for new teachers to gain cultural knowledge (Good et al., 2010).

When teachers develop a relationship with their students and understand and learn about their culture, teachers will be able to make instruction culturally responsive. Students must be able to make a connection with the instruction in order to them to comprehend what they are learning. Students should find instruction to be meaningful and relevant to their lives. One suggestion that is recommended in culturally responsive teaching is for the teacher to use multicultural or bilingual text as a supplement to the textbooks. It is important for students who struggle to feel their values and beliefs are validated (Berget al., 2012).

It is also important to increase understanding of the process of second language acquisition in teachers. In order to increase understanding and awareness of the process of second language acquisition, it is imperative to provide training or professional development to teachers on this topic. Wang, Many, and Krumeraker (2008) indicate there is a “lack of specialized ESL training among content teachers and recommended resolutions in the form of providing them with such training through professional development opportunities of various

kinds” (p. 80). Core content teachers needs to be provided with training on the understanding of the second language acquisition process and being able to apply the process to their content instruction. It is significant for the teachers to be aware of the process and implement it during their lesson plan cycle. When teaching ELL students, it is important for teachers to understand process time and the significance it has on student learning. One teacher shared the following experience:

Teachers without training or experience in working with ELL students need to slow down to allow enough time for students to process and integrate knowledge. ELL students get frustrated when they can't understand the teacher, and school is not relevant if they are not engaged in learning. (Wang et al., 2008, p. 80)

In addition to being aware of the learning process of the students sitting in the classroom, it is also important for teachers to consider the adaptation of the curriculum and instruction on the students' needs. The focus for ELL students is their language needs. Core content teachers should also be provided with training and professional development in this area. Some teachers find it difficult to determine how to integrate their curriculum to meet the language needs of ELL students. Wang, Many, and Krumeraker identify an area of concern regarding this integration. An area of concern of “researchers and teachers consider the standards by which content teachers evaluate the work of their ESL students and assign grade in order to offer support to learner's continual efforts” (Wang et al., 2008, p. 80). Among this concern, teachers can find it difficult to meet the language needs of ELLs with native English-speaking students in the classroom. Some teachers feel “the level of learning brought about such modified instruction may not be optimum for either ESL or native-speaking students in the same class” (Wang et al., 2008, p. 80).

When ELL students are in secondary schools, they are mainstreamed in their core content areas. ELL students and native English-speaking students are placed in the same classrooms. Wang, Many, and Krumeraker stated that “in order for mainstreaming to work effectively for

both ESL and native English- speaking students, a viable approach should incorporate a range of integrated measures such as training content teachers, team-teaching by ESL specialists and content teachers, differentiated instruction, bilingual materials, and bilingual groups” (Wang et al., 2008, p. 80).

### **Recommendations for Future Practice**

It is important for educators to be aware of all of their students and different ways to help each child. This research study sheds light on issues that educators are aware of. It clarifies how different issues affect ELLs when it comes to assessments. Whether they are language proficiency assessments or content based assessments, there are other issues that impact assessments. Being aware of these issues can help teachers understand the importance of different teaching strategies and the impact they have on assessments. When delivering instruction to ELLs, it is important to be aware of their English Language Proficiency level and target the academic language they will encounter during assessments. This will lead to higher scores on content based assessments. It is also important to understand that no matter how many years in the United States, ELLs continue to need support until they have become proficient in English. Students who have less time in the United States will need more support than students who have been in the United States for a longer period of time. It is important to analyze the data for each student to determine the level of support each student will need to be successful.

Education leaders should focus on teacher preparation for this subpopulation. It is important for teachers to be adequately prepared to teach ELL students. If they are not prepared, it becomes overwhelming for a teacher to teach content and language development simultaneously. Teachers need to have the right tools to develop meaningful lessons for ELLs. This means teachers should be offered training to learn these new tools and strategies to

incorporate in their lessons. When teachers learn these tools and strategies, they are able to apply them to their lessons. This may be difficult or may feel foreign to them at first, but as they continue to use them they become more natural.

Even though there are many obstacles in the education for ELLs, the education system is making progress. There have been many changes in regards to ELLs and the support continues to grow. Educators are using research to implement effective instructional practices for ELLs to be successful in the classroom and on assessments. School districts are faced with difficult circumstances; however, that does not hinder ELLs' progress. Even though ELLs enter school with deficiencies, educators ensure they are at grade level or near to grade level by the end of the year. Teachers monitor their progress and apply appropriate interventions to ensure their academic progress. Sometimes, teachers do not always have the support needed or the funding; however, they continue to work with ELLs.

This population continues to grow and become part of our society. In order for them to be successful responsible citizens of this country, they must be able to understand the language and have the knowledge they need.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

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### UIW Application for IRB Approval Part I: Application Form

This application is to be used for initial application for IRB review only. Sufficient time must be allowed for review. Incomplete applications will be returned without review. For a list of application components, see the [IRB Manual](#).

Submit this completed form as part of the application to the Office of Research Development electronically for IRB review. **Do not submit applications directly to the IRB representative**, as this form will be electronically routed to them for review after it has been checked for completion and logged into the IRB database. Signatures will be applied electronically once the application is approved.

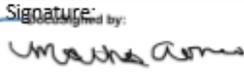
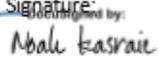
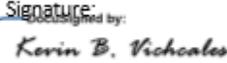
Principal Investigator				
A Principal Investigator (PI) must be designated for any human subjects research. The PI is responsible for ensuring university and federal regulatory compliance for all research activities and research personnel associated with this protocol. For the responsibilities of the PI, refer to the UIW IRB Manual.				
Name: Martha Alonso	Phone #: (210) 831 5464	E-mail: alonso@student.uiwbx.edu	Mailing Address: 311 Vine St., San Antonio, Texas, 78210	
College/School or Department: Dreeben School of Education		CITI Training Date: 10/05/2013	PIDM (UIW ID): 628697	
Is the PI a student? <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If, YES, a faculty supervisor must be designated for this research protocol. Include a signed copy of the <b>Faculty Supervisor Agreement</b> with this application.				
Faculty Supervisor				
Name: Dr. Noah Kasraie	Phone #: (210) 829-3133	E-mail: kasraie@uiwbx.edu	CPO: 293	
College/School or Department: Dreeben School of Education		CITI Training Date: 03/10/2015	PIDM (UIW ID): 820376	
Other Project Personnel				
List all other project personnel, including co-investigators, research associates, and student researchers who will be recruiting, consenting, collecting data, or working with data collected from human subjects. Use "enter"/"return" key to list personnel on separate lines.				
Name:	Role in Research:	CITI Training Date:	Email:	PIDM (if student):
Research Information				
Title of Study: English Language Learners: English Language Proficiency Level affect on Testing				
Research Category: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exempt <input type="checkbox"/> Expedited <input type="checkbox"/> Full Board				
This research will be conducted: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On the UIW campus or UIW facilities <input type="checkbox"/> Off campus (list all locations where research will be conducted):				
Number of Subjects: 743	Number of Controls: 0	Total Duration of Study Activities: 5 months		
This research will involve the following (check all that apply): <input type="checkbox"/> Inmates of penal institutions <input type="checkbox"/> Institutionalized intellectually handicapped <input type="checkbox"/> Institutionalized mentally disabled <input type="checkbox"/> Committed patients <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectually handicapped outpatient <input type="checkbox"/> Mentally disabled outpatient <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant women <input type="checkbox"/> Fetus in utero <input type="checkbox"/> Viable fetus				

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<input type="checkbox"/> Nonviable fetus
<input type="checkbox"/> Dead fetus
<input type="checkbox"/> In Vitro fertilization
<input type="checkbox"/> Minors (under 18)

Funding Disclosures
Funding source(s): <input type="checkbox"/> Internal <input type="checkbox"/> External <input type="checkbox"/> Pending <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None
List all funding sources (pending and awarded): 1T
The funding provides for (select all that apply): <input type="checkbox"/> Investigator release time or compensation <input type="checkbox"/> Research materials <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate assistants, student workers, or other project employees <input type="checkbox"/> Travel <input type="checkbox"/> Other: 1T
Financial Conflict of Interest
Does any member of the project team hold financial interest in the funding organization or any similar organization (stocks, board membership, etc)?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> If YES, describe below: 1T

**This Section for Office of Research Development Use Only**  
**Signatures will be applied electronically upon approval**

Investigator Signature(s) & Assurances		
I certify that the information above is accurate and complete. I will request prior IRB approval for any changes to the approved protocol and/or informed consent forms, and will not implement those changes until I receive IRB approval. I will report any adverse effects to the IRB immediately. I agree to comply fully with the ethical principles and regulations regarding the protection of human subjects in research.		
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>		
Name: Martha Alonso	Signature: 	Date: 6/17/2015
<b>Faculty Supervisor (if Principal Investigator is a student):</b>		
Name: Noah Kasraie	Signature: 	Date: 6/18/2015
Approval Signature(s)		
<b>IRB Representative/Reviewer:</b>		
Name: Kevin B. Vichales	Signature: 	Date: 6/18/2015
<b>IRB Chair (or Chair's Designee):</b>		
Name:	Signature:	Date:

## UIW Application for IRB Approval Part II: Research Protocol

### **Section 1: Purpose** [Help](#)

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between English Language Proficiency level (ELPL) of middle school ELL (English Language Learner) students enrolled in a Texas public school and the results of the reading State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR).

### **Section 2: Background and Significance** [Help](#)

With this newly ignited effort of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the ELL population has become a target group for states trying to meet the federal government requirements and stay competitive in the business of education where parents are now more aware of school progress. Education leaders are now more aware of the significant academic gap in reading between ELL students and students performing at grade level, and are developing strategies to close the gap.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there were close to four million students who were classified as LEP (Limited English Proficient) students, an increase of 30 percent from a decade ago. Since this is a population that continues to grow, it is important to be able to identify these students in the classroom and provided targeted instruction (Ren Dong, 2004). It has become evident to educators across Texas that English Language Learners are a unique population that commands the attention which has been given to the students with special needs population across the world. "ELs [English Learners] are a heterogeneous group and are not defined consistently across states or within the literature, which yields different views about how to classify EL students and measure their progress (Gutierrez & Vanderwood, 2013)." This has become a new area of focus for schools across America.

The findings of this research will be significant because it will help determine the correlation between English language proficiency level and reading skills. Educators will be able to target instruction for ELLs based on these findings.

### **Section 3: Location, Facility and Equipment to Be Used** [Help](#)

The researcher will request the data set from Northside ISD. Once the researcher receives the data, the researcher will use SPSS to analyze the data.

Data will be stored on a flash drive kept in the possession of the investigator.

### **Section 4: Subjects and Informed Consent** [Help](#)

The researcher will request the TELPAS Confidential Campus Roster and the STAAR Confidential Campus Roster for all of the middle schools in the Northside Independent School District. Since the TELPAS rosters do not indicate each student's demographic information, the researcher will also request a Limited English Proficient (LEP) roster, which includes the students' individual demographic information as well as the years they have been in the United States and their native language. The researcher will request an LEP roster for each middle school in the school district.

The data set requested from the Northside ISD will include 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade student data from Spring 2014. The data set will include data for 743 students in the district identified as English

Language Learners. The researcher will not approach or interact with students; the researcher will only contact district personnel for data set.

The data set that will be provided to the researcher will be a deidentified data set. It will not contain the students' names. Each student will be a row on the data set and the columns will vary depending on the report. The TELPAS Confidential Campus Roster will have years in U.S. schools, reading, holistic ratings, and comprehension and composite columns. The STAAR Confidential Campus Roster will have scale score, performance standards, progress measure, and results for each reporting category.

The researcher will match the students from roster to roster by using the Student Identification Number. Each student is issued a student ID number and the district has the reports prepared with the Student ID numbers.

#### **Section 5: Subject Compensation** [Help](#)

There will be no compensation for participation in the research study.

#### **Section 6: Duration** [Help](#)

The duration of the data analysis will be from the beginning of May 2015 until October 2015.

#### **Section 7: Research Design (Description of the Experiment, Data Collection and Analysis)** [Help](#)

The research design in this study is correlation research design. Correlational research design "use the correlation statistical test to describe and measure the degree of association (or relationship) between two or more variables or set of scores" (Creswell J. W., 2014) The research findings will describe the trend of the English language proficiency level in relation to the reading STAAR exam scores. The correlational research will be cross-sectional; the data will be collected at one point in time. The data will be collected for Spring 2014. The purpose of the survey research in this study is to make inferences about the relationship between the students' English Language Proficiency level and their performance on a reading assessment.

The researcher will request the TELPAS Confidential Campus Roster and the STAAR Confidential Campus Roster for all of the middle schools in the school district. Since the rosters do not indicate each student's demographic information, the researcher will also request an LEP roster, which includes the students' individual demographic information as well as the years they have been in the United States and their native language. The researcher will request an LEP roster for each middle school in the school district.

All information used in this analysis will be derived from the school district reports. The data will be analyzed using various descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to determine the relationship between a student's English language proficiency level and their performance on a reading STAAR assessment. The data collected will be analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS); this software includes descriptive analysis and inferential analysis.

#### **Section 8: Risk Analysis** [Help](#)

Participation in the proposed study is not anticipated to cause psychic, legal, or physical harm to subjects. There is no anticipated risk of social harm because researcher will have no interaction with subjects, only existing data.

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The data set provided by the school district will not contain student names, the data will be deidentified. The data will only be presented in aggregate, and the name of the school district will be kept confidential in publications.

**Section 9: Confidentiality** [Help](#)

The data set will only be saved on a USB and not shared with anyone. As identifiable information will not be provided to the investigator, students cannot be identified. All information will be published in aggregate, further protecting any individual identity.

**Section 10: Literature Cited** [Help](#)

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Gutierrez, G., & Vanderwood, M. (2013). A Growth Curve Analysis of Literacy Performance Among Second-Grade, Spanish-Speaking, English-Language Learners. *School Psychology Review*, 42 (1), 3-21.

National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Fast Facts*. Retrieved March 4, 2015, from National Center for Education Statistics: [www.nces.ed.gov/fastfacts](http://www.nces.ed.gov/fastfacts)