Running Head: A Study of Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions toward Their Professional Education Training Regarding English Language Learners

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Abstract
Together with global demand for English proficiency, the United States, with its rapidly growing diverse student population, must prepare teachers to meet the unique needs of these students. This study investigated pre-service teachers’ perceptions toward English Language Learners (ELL). This study aimed at exploring whether any relationship exists between Bilingual Generalist major and Generalist Early Childhood major pre-service teachers’ perceptions toward ELL and ELL related courses taken in the teacher preparation program. Further, the study examined whether a difference exists between the two groups in their overall perceptions toward their training for ELL. A theory-based survey was administered to 129 participants at a teacher preparation program in South Texas; subsequently, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 12 participants. The quantitative data was analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics; the qualitative data was analyzed with theory-based themes. The findings were thus triangulated. The study found that the commitment that teacher preparation programs have toward further improvement is never doubted, yet the scope of training in diversity issues can continue to be broader and deeper.

Introduction
The U.S. Census Bureau’s 2003 report on language use accounted for 380 categories of single languages or language families used by the country’s population aged 5 and over. Among these 380 languages, the top ten languages, other than English and Spanish are: Chinese, French, German, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Italian, Korean, Russian, Polish, and Arabic. Moreover, only 55%, or 25.6 million of the people who speak languages other than English at home think they can speak English “very well.” The reality of such linguistic diversity in the U.S. further projects itself in the classroom. Statistics show that between 1979 and 2006, the number of school children age 5 to 17 who spoke a language other than English increased from 3.8 million to 10.8 million, or from 9% to 20% (Planty et al., 2008). Furthermore, between 1979 and 2006, the number of school aged children age 5 to 17 who spoke English with difficulty also doubled, from 3% to 6% (Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Provasnik, Kena, Dinkes et al., 2008). Overall, in 2006, about 20% of school age children aged 5 to 17 spoke a language other than English at home and approximately 5% of this population had difficulty speaking English (Planty et al., 2008).

However, while the student population keeps growing and becoming more linguistically and culturally diverse, the diversity of teacher population seems to be uneven. The teaching force
that can meet the needs of a linguistically and culturally diverse student population remains dis- 
proportional and homogeneous (Burriss & Burriss, 2004; National Collaborative on Diversity in 
the Teaching Force, 2004). Together with the student population diversity that continues to grow, 
and the disproportional diversity in the teaching force, a mentality favoring monoculturalism and 
monolingualism also prevails in the classroom, and in preservice teacher programs today (Sleeter, 
2001). Sleeter (2001) further suggested that preservice teachers should be equipped with more 
than just professional backgrounds; more importantly, they should have the ability to understand 
students’ diverse backgrounds (Sleeter, 2001).

**Background**

The American Association for Employment in Education (2005) found that the U.S. was 
-facing a certain degree of a nationwide teacher shortage in Bilingual Education and English as 
Second language. The report suggests that most English Language Learner (ELL) students are 
currently being taught by teachers who might or might not have ELL or ESL related training, so 
teachers’ psychological qualities, such as attitudes toward ELL students become an important fac-
that people throughout society might hold intolerant attitudes toward diversity; however, when it 
is teachers who hold negative attitudes against students’ diverse backgrounds, it is particularly 
detrimental for ELL students’ learning. Negative attitudes against students’ diversity could result in 
teachers lowering expectations for students and eventually lead to students’ self-fulfilling prophecy 
of poor academic performance (Williams, Whitehead, & Miller, 1972). Therefore, in addition to ad-
- dressing pedagogical knowledge in teacher preparation programs, teacher preparation programs 
should emphasize instruction for all students and place priority on enhancing preservice teachers’ 
attitudes, perceptions, and instruction for students with diverse backgrounds (Walker, Shafer, & 
liams, 2004).

While the ELL student population continues to grow, is the teaching population ready for 
the diverse student population? The NCES (1996) indicated that teachers in a region with larger 
percentages of ELL students were more likely to receive training regarding ELL. The same trend 
applied to core subject area teachers. In regions of smaller ELL percentage, core subject area 
teachers were less likely to receive related training, which seemed to be a passive response to the 
ELL student population. A report regarding teacher quality revealed that while around 54% of public 
school teachers taught culturally and linguistically diverse students, few of them felt prepared to 
meet the needs of these students (NCES, 1999a). Another report also indicated that only 20% of 
teachers who taught ELL students felt very well-prepared to address the needs of these students 
(NCES, 1999b). A national survey on teacher preparation programs for teachers of linguistically 
and culturally diverse students was conducted by Center on Research on Education, Diversity & 
Excellence [CREDE]. The survey result reported that, in the 144 participating programs, all English 
as Second Language and Multicultural, and most Bilingual programs mandated their candidates 
to attend courses designed for issues of linguistic and cultural diversity, such as courses related 
to Multicultural Education, English as a Second Language, English Language Development, or 
Bilingual Education (CREDE, 2001). While the survey results might seem promising, Taylor and 
Sobel (2001) argued that the knowledge that preservice teachers gain in the program might be 
overlooked in their teaching in the actual classroom, especially when dealing with students with 
diverse backgrounds.
The state of Texas, the second largest state of the United States, known for its geographical, historical, cultural, and commercial closeness with Mexico, and its diverse immigrant heritage, has been experiencing a growing ELL student population and paying attention to their needs (Blanton, 2004; Richardson, 1999). Moreover, with the globalization of the world today, besides increasing in number, the ELL student population in Texas has also become more diverse than before (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Program [NCELA], 2002). In 2002, NCELA reported that the rate of ELL growth in Texas was approximately 81% from the 1991-1992 to the 2001-2002 school year. In the 2006-2007 school year alone, Texas had 16% of ELL students among all public school students compared to 5.8% in the 1992-1993 school year (NCELA, 2002; Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2007c). With this fast rate of ELL student growth, it is expected that the Texas ELL student population will reach one million by 2010, or around 31% of the projected enrollment growth (Texas Coalition for Bilingual Education, 2005).

While the numbers in ELL student population continues to grow and diversify, the composition of teachers in Texas does not change much. A report of the TEA (2007c) pointed out that teachers in Texas are still predominantly white. In teacher preparation programs, Sleeter (2001) argued that preservice teachers who are expected to work with linguistically and culturally diverse student population remain homogeneous. They bring with them little diversity in their backgrounds and experience, which may result in a monocultural and monolingual mentality toward students in the classroom (Sleeter, 2001). On the other hand, preservice teachers of diverse backgrounds, still a rather small proportion, although not necessarily equipped with more pedagogical knowledge, are more inclined to understand students’ diversity (Sleeter, 2001). In addition, despite the fact that preservice teachers learn a lot in their semester or year long multicultural related courses, the real influence could remain small and preservice teachers’ attitudes and beliefs toward ELL students in the classroom might not change much (Clair, 1995). Given the discrepancy in background between teachers and students, Cochran-Smith (1995) suggested that one way for preservice teachers to learn to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students is to put themselves in the students’ shoes. Others also agreed that enhancing preservice teachers’ understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as effective instruction for ELL students will better their teaching (Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti, 2005; Walton, Baca, & Escamilla, 2002). Only when teachers have positive attitudes, adequate preparation, and good understanding of effective instruction for ELL students can they practice the best teaching practices (Brynes, Kiger, & Manning, 1998). Furthermore, Walker, Shafer, and liam (2004) suggested that teacher preparation programs should place more emphasis on addressing issues throughout preservice training that concern the teaching and learning of not just ELL students, but all students. Therefore, in order to contribute to the growing research pool of teacher preparation programs regarding student diversity, this study researched the attitudes and perceptions that preservice teachers hold toward ELL students, their educational training, and ELL instructional strategies.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study investigated preservice teachers’ perception toward their professional education training regarding ELL. Further, the study examined whether a difference in perceptions exists between Bilingual Generalist (BIL) major and Generalist Early Childhood (GEN) major preservice teachers regarding ELL. In order to triangulate the research, the researchers adopted a mixed research design, a Concurrent Triangulation Strategy (Creswell, 2003), to enhance the research de-
sign with quantitative and qualitative methods. The study centered on 5 research questions which included 3 quantitative and 2 qualitative research questions.

**Quantitative**
1. What are preservice teachers’ overall perceptions toward their professional education training for English language learners?
2. What relationship, if any, exists between Bilingual Generalist and Generalist Early Childhood preservice teachers’ attitudes and perceptions, and ELL related courses taken in their teacher preparation programs?
3. What difference, if any, exists between perceptions of Bilingual Generalist and Generalist Early Childhood preservice teachers toward their professional education training for English language learners?

**Qualitative**
4. Do preservice teachers feel that there is a relationship between their professional education training and their attitudes and perceptions?
5. How do preservice teachers perceive the adequacy of their professional education training as related to English language learners?

**Participants**

One hundred and twenty-nine subjects participated in the study, which included both Bilingual Education (BIL) and General Education (GEN) majors. A theory-based survey Preservice Teachers’ Attitudes Survey was administered to these subjects for quantitative data collection; subsequently, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 12 participants. The quantitative data was analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics; the qualitative data was analyzed with theory-based themes.

**Findings**

Means and Standard Deviations were used to analyze the preservice teachers’ overall perceptions toward their education training for English language learners. On the survey questionnaire, Likert-scale type items 6 to 10 were designed to investigate preservice teachers’ perceptions. According to the designed Likert scale, 1 is strongly disagree, 3 is neutral, and 5 is strongly agree. In order, means (with standard deviations in parentheses) for the items 6 through 10 were 4.71 (0.56), 4.42 (0.68), 4.63 (0.63), 4.43 (0.66), and 3.87 (0.92). In judging the mean, an item having mean larger than 3 would be leaning toward agree; conversely, an item having mean smaller than 3 would be leaning toward disagree (see Table 1). As a result, the participants all reported to agree on item 6, “My professional education courses have made me more aware of the needs for linguistic and cultural diversity in education” (M = 4.71, SD = 0.56), item 7, “My professional education course have equipped me with techniques for effectively teaching children whose languages, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds differ from my own” (M = 4.42, SD = 0.68), item 8, “When I become a teacher, I expect to teach children from different cultural backgrounds” (M = 4.63, SD = 0.63), item 9, “I would like to receive more training in evaluating the educational achievements of English language learners” (M = 4.43, SD = 0.66), and slightly agree on item 10, “I believe I am well prepared to teach English language learners” (M = 3.87, SD = 0.92).
Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Overall Perceptions toward Professional Education Training for English Language Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding preservice teachers’ perceptions toward their professional education training, for overall participants, there was a positive, statistically significant relationship between preservice teachers’ overall perceptions toward their professional education training for ELL and number of ELL/ESL related courses taken, \( r = .21, p < .05 \). Moreover, there was a positive, statistically significant relationship between item 10, “I believe I am well prepared to teach English language learners,” and number of ELL/ESL related courses taken, \( r = .36, p < .01 \).

In the BIL majors, there was a positive, statistically significant relationship between preservice teachers’ overall perceptions of their professional education training for ELL and ELL/ESL training, \( r = .21, p < .05 \). In the GEN major, there was no relationship between preservice teachers’ overall perceptions toward their professional education training for ELL and either ELL/ESL training or the number of ELL/ESL courses taken (see Table 2).

Table 2
Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient for Perceptions toward Professional Education Training for English Language Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>BIL Training n of courses</th>
<th>GEN Training n of courses</th>
<th>All Participants Training N of courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. BIL: Bilingual Generalist Early Childhood EC-4th Grade major. GEN: Generalist Early Childhood EC-4th major. Training: ELL/ESL training. N of Courses: Number of ELL/ESL courses taken. *p<.05. **p<.01.

A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to evaluate the significance between the BIL majors and GEN majors preservice teachers, in terms of their perceptions toward their professional education training for ELL. The result of the test for perceptions toward their professional education training for ELL, in general, showed that a statistically significant difference existed between the BIL majors and the GEN majors, \( z = -3.186, p < .001 \). Moreover, the result further reported statistically significant difference in item 10, “I believe I am well prepared to teach English language learners,” \( z = -5.395, p < .001 \) (see Table 3).
Table 3
Mann-Whiney U Test for Perceptions toward Professional Education Training for English Language Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>6.</th>
<th>7.</th>
<th>8.</th>
<th>9.</th>
<th>10.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney $U$</td>
<td>1429.000</td>
<td>1399.500</td>
<td>1533.500</td>
<td>1308.500</td>
<td>628.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon $W$</td>
<td>1957.000</td>
<td>1927.500</td>
<td>6286.500</td>
<td>1836.500</td>
<td>1128.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>–0.885</td>
<td>–0.929</td>
<td>–0.125</td>
<td>–1.484</td>
<td>–5.395***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.376</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>.900</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Grouping variable: Major.
***p<.001.

Youngs and Youngs (2001) suggested a multi-predictor model for teachers’ attitudes toward English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The multi-predictor model includes prior knowledge such as prior contact with ESL students, or personal contact with diverse culture, and specific learning related to specific courses, such as specific learning or training from ESL, multicultural education courses, or foreign languages. The first section of the designed survey item covered participants’ demographic information such as personal contact with ESL students and diverse culture as mentioned and will join the discussion in the later data integration phases. Therefore, the interview data were coded based on: prior knowledge (PK), specific learning related to specific courses (S) (Youngs & Youngs, 2001), and others. According to the results, the researcher identified, in order of frequency of occurrence, 28 occurrences of specific learning related to specific courses, 17 occurrences of prior knowledge, and 7 occurrences of others. In order of total occurrences, the top three were Andrea, Leticia, and Amy (see Table 4).

Table 4
Occurrence for Research Question 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>PK</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erik</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leticia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzete</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaris</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristen</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. PK: Prior knowledge. S: Specific learning related to specific courses.
In terms of the code, *prior knowledge*, one of the participants, Andrea, a BIL major, talked about her experience in learning both first language and second language when she was younger,

When I was in school, I learned Spanish first and I don’t remember how I learned English. My dad doesn’t know English. We were standing in front of a mirror, he asked “how do you say mirror in Spanish?” Mirror in Spanish is *espejo*. Then, he asked me how you say that in English. And, I said “espec,” because in Spanish, it is *espejo*. All I do was take the “o” out. That was English to me. I don’t remember what grade level I was, but that’s what I did when I was learning English.

Amy, a GEN major, on the other hand, talked about her experience learning with ELL students when she was younger,

Sometimes it [having ELL students in the classroom] might be negative. When I grew up, in my classroom, I had that. It was almost like a new system to deal with ELL. It was only like a distraction for other students, to me, when the teacher would have to pull time aside, to address the ELL, and take time out from other instruction. I felt it was more of a negative, I sometimes do feel that way. It was too much weight on teachers’ shoulders to deal with ELL.

For the code, *specific learning related to specific courses*, Carmen, a BIL major, described what she observed in a class regarding ELL students’ struggle in English.

I don’t know if it is a theory, but it is something that I have learned that they [ELL students] need to be taught in their first language in order for them to acquire the second language. I have seen it at the school where we have done field experience. They went on and implement English right away and the kids were lost because they haven’t even developed their first language. The teacher was asking them where is up and where is down, they were just looking at each other like I don’t know. Then, she spoke to them in Spanish, then they understood. They know it in Spanish, but she tries to impose it in English. They haven’t developed it yet.

Isaac, a BIL major, thought that ELL students’ first language should be the priority when they are young.

If they [ELL students] are young, I think their first language should be the priority, little as in elementary school. Their first language should be reinforced. Once they have been reinforced and they have a good idea of what language is, I think they will be able to transfer that to their second language.

Compared to *prior knowledge* and *specific learning related to specific courses*, smaller percentage of the interview data were coded as *others*. For the code, *others*, Leticia, a BIL major, thought that despite the quality of the training, she still did not agree with teacher preparation program’s curriculum.
The classes here are good and stuff like that, but I think I can’t really answer you that question because I am very against how they are teaching here. They are focusing so much in Spanish. But, you are not going to be teaching only Spanish speaking learners, like these people from Mexico, I really don’t understand this. They are focusing so much on that.

Andrea, a BIL major, found herself applying the knowledge without knowing it, “Like the strategies what they have, I have seen them myself sometimes when we go out in the field with the kids. And they are ELLs. How you try to teach them, I try to help them and I see myself doing what the book says without me actually knowing that I am doing it.”

Similar to the codes in the previous research question, the interview data were coded based on what CREDE (2002, 2003) and Menken and Antunez (2001) suggested that regarding the teacher preparation for ELL students. Therefore, the interview data were coded with: cultural awareness (CA), linguistic skills (LS), educational training (ET), psychological factors (PF) (CREDE, 2002; Menken & Antunez, 2001), and others. According to the result, the researcher identified, in order of frequency of occurrence, 35 occurrences of for educational training, 25 occurrences of linguistic skills, 14 occurrences of cultural awareness, 9 occurrences of psychological factors, and 7 occurrences of others. In order of total occurrences, the top three would be Leticia, Valerie, Carmen, Erik, and Maria (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>LS</th>
<th>ET</th>
<th>PF</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erik</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leticia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzete</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaris</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** CA: Cultural awareness. LS: Linguistic skills. ET: Educational training. PF: Psychological factors.

For the code, cultural awareness, Kristen, a GEN major, did not have the most frequency of the occurrence, but she honestly talked about lacking of experience in diversity.

Honestly, I haven’t been around other ethnicities to have that experience. So it is really hard to say and understand. It is not here or where I am from, too.
It is mainly Hispanics or a little bit of white. We haven’t had the experience to be around others or to learn with others. We really haven’t had that experience. But, I am kind of like it, because it is a challenge.

Leticia, a BIL major, argued that the teacher preparation program has been narrow in scope.

They said because most people here in this region speak Spanish, but who gives them the right that we are going to get a job or we are going to stay here. We are paying for getting an education. I can go anywhere to go teach English. I think they are being narrow-minded. I think they should teach what they preach. They are not doing that. They should let me do that in any language. Why not? Right?

For the code, linguistic factors, Lizzete, a BIL major, did not have the most frequency of occurrence, but said she would be surprised to have an ELL student whose native language is not Spanish.

What would make me unprepared would be a language that is totally different from what I know. I would like “oh, my god” that would make me unprepared since I haven’t had any personal experience with that. I am not relevant to that culture to that language. A totally new different language would be a surprise. But, it is nothing impossible. I know I can handle it. It would be the same thing as in Spanish speaking learners as in any other language.

Leticia, a BIL major, did not agree with the purpose of language training in her teacher preparation program.

I want to let them know that we are free to write what we want, but don’t tell us to write in Spanish, that is not bilingual, bilingual is not Spanish and I am not saying that bilingual is German, either. It could be any language, but don’t say “Give me a paper, I want all the lessons in Spanish.” I mean that is very negative and very narrow-minded. You see all these students, they are not all Hispanics. What about those people are coming from Korea? They are going to be left out because they want to focus on Spanish?

When it came to the code, educational training, Valerie, a GEN major, regarding her training for ELL students, said she has never had ELL students or thought about teaching them. “I don’t know. In my experience, when I have been in the classroom, I have never had ELL. I have been taught it, but I have never actually applied it or seen it.” Leticia, a BIL major, did not concur with the focus of her training for ELL students.

I don’t understand why they so focus on that [Spanish]. I asked my professor this because I am very aggravated. I think the university has to focus on this because border, but this is a university and there are so many people from different countries coming in. They are not doing that justice to other people. We are paying tuition, please give us a good education, and don’t focus on Spanish.
Regarding the code, *psychological factors*, Valerie, a GEN major, avoided but also worried about the possibility of teaching ELL students.

That’s why I chose generalist because I was afraid. I took course in Spanish, but I have never applied it. I am just not confident. In that course, [they said] you might have an ELL in the class; it scares me because I am not prepared. It is different from reading and actually going to a real world classroom. It is going to be an eye-opener. It is not like “I am not going to have them.” I know I am, but I would rather ...pray.

Carmen, a BIL major, regarding her preparedness for ELL students whose first language is not Spanish, felt confident and prepared to teach them.

You can still use the same strategies, use visuals, gestures or things that would show that student what you would try to get across, the English you are trying to teach him. I don’t think the language is the barrier. It’s the same thing. Just use the same strategy and try to work things out. You should not feel unprepared. You know the strategies, you learn how to work with ELL, what’s the difference? It’s just that they have that mentality that everybody should know Spanish and they are trying to learn English.

Finally, for those data coded as *others*, Andrea, a BIL major, found it challenging to teach ELL students whose native language is not Spanish. “I guess I should say the only ELL I have dealt with is Hispanics. So, it is either Spanish or English. I guess the challenge would be ELL is someone who is not Hispanics. That if they speak French, if they speak Chinese, or whatever language, Italian. It would be something more challenging. Isaac, a BIL major, felt like to have more overall ELL teaching experience in his training.

It is probably that I will be new at this, lack of experience. I have been in the classroom where they teach second language learners, but I have been mostly observing. I have done some teaching, but it is not something like five days out of a week, starting off the year, what am I going to do, how am I going to do it, what is my plan? I haven’t experienced that. That would make me feel not so confident.

Amy, a GEN major, thought that her teacher preparation program could have incorporated more ELL/ESL training, and the ELL deserves more qualified teachers, because as a Generalist teacher, she could not teach them effectively.

It would be more difficult for me. I think the courses that I have taken have prepared me enough to where I know what specific to look for; I know they [ELL students] need to master certain core subjects in their own languages first and then move on into the English. If I were to receive ELL in my class, I would probably feel overwhelmed only because I would expect to have perfect class which is not going to happen. But, maybe a little overwhelmed since I am going through a generalist program, I feel those students deserve a teacher that has been taught the full bilingual program. I would feel like they deserve better.
Discussion

According to the finding, preservice teachers, as a whole group, generally, 98% of the participants agreed that their professional education courses have made them more aware of the need of linguistically and culturally diverse students; 91% thought that their professional education training has prepared them to teach students whose language, cultures, and background differ from their own; 94% expected to teach children from different backgrounds; 91% would like to receive more training in evaluating ELL students’ educational achievement; and finally 72% believed they are well prepared to teach ELL students. The finding implies that the participants’ professional education training has managed to achieve what CREDE (2002, 2003) has proposed: that teachers should be prepared to address diverse aspects of all American students; they should develop awareness and understanding toward the cultural and historical aspects of the diverse student population; they need to be exposed to a variety of teaching methods in order to ensure students’ language and academic achievement; last but not the least, they must undergo constant professional development for teaching linguistically and culturally diverse students. Carmen, a BIL major, demonstrated her preparedness in teaching ELL students who speak a first language other than Spanish.

I think, yes. Because even I don’t know the other languages, I have some time to prepare too. To learn some words, this and that. As teachers, we should always be learning. If they tell you, you are going to have a student who speaks Russian. Take that step forward and try to learn a little bit. I am not going to say that you are going to know a lot from when they are telling you to when you start your semester, but just some little words that can help you teach that child. Also, the language doesn’t have anything to do, you can still use the same strategies, use visuals, gestures or things that would show that student [ELL student] what you would try to get across, the English you are trying to teach him. I don’t think the language is the barrier. Most teachers would feel what I am going to do if I only know Spanish. If you can teach a Spanish speaking student to learn English, why not a Russian speaker English? It’s the same thing. Just use the same strategy and try to work things out. You should not feel unprepared. You know the strategies, you learn how to work with ELL, what’s the difference? It’s just that they have that mentality that everybody should know Spanish and they are trying to learn English. Maybe because of the region, it is kind of difficult to get a child who speaks Russian and you are trying to get them to learn English.

Adger, Snow, and Christian (2003) argued that it is imperative for teachers to be equipped with linguistic knowledge, so that they can better their instruction for linguistically and culturally diverse students. Carmen, a BIL major, mentioned a mentality which said that in the region, everybody, teachers particularly, seem to assume ELL students’ first language to be Spanish. As Erik, a BIL major, said, “If it is in this area, it is in Spanish, I think I would feel good. I would feel prepared. I just done my field experience, I would say the whole class is ELL.” Nonetheless, despite Isaac, a BIL major, and Lizzete, a BIL major, holding positive attitudes, they remained concerned with the higher degree of difficulty when encountering ELL students speaking a language other than Spanish.
The challenge is even more. For example, you have a concept, something like feeling, a feeling of love. And you are trying to teach a child, this is what love is, it is really abstract. I would feel like how I am going to do this. In this area, love, “l’amor” then let’s continue on. The child has knowledge, they know what it is. That is the advantage if you do know the language of second language learner. But, I will be up for the challenge. You have to give a lot of comprehensible input, modeling, every single thing. That’s the way I understand to get it across and more creativity. And, this part comes from the teacher. So, my confidence in that part would be even less than just having a person that I know the language. (Isaac)

What would make me unprepared would be a language that is totally different from what I know. I know English, Spanish, and maybe a little bit of French. Maybe something like Arabic, Japanese, I would like “oh, my god” that would make me unprepared since I haven’t had any personal experience with that. But, it is nothing impossible. I know I can handle it. It would be the same thing as in Spanish speaking learners as in any other language. It would be the same steps, knowing the students, knowing the parents, knowing what they like, understanding them regardless of what language. (Lizzete)

Canales and Ruiz-Escalante (1993) stated that given the fact that the Hispanic population is the largest growing population in the United States, and Spanish speaking students are also more likely to drop out or be at risk, it is encouraged that bilingual teachers have proficiency in students’ native language and have command of the standard forms of both languages. However, the researcher found different voices regarding the professional education training. Leticia, a BIL major, and Damaris, a GEN major, found that their professional education training focused too much on Spanish speaking ELL students.

The classes here are good and stuff like that, but I think I can’t really answer you that question [preparation for ELL students] because I am very against how they are teaching here. They are focusing so much in Spanish. But, you are not going to be teaching only Spanish speaking learners, like these people from Mexico, I really don’t understand this. They are focusing so much on that. (Leticia)

The only thing that bothers me about the blocks here at this university is they focus mostly at students’ first language being Spanish, not anything else. That’s the one thing that bothers me is that a lot of people who are taking the bilingual courses, they have to write their paper in Spanish. That is wonderful. But, what if you have a child who doesn’t speak Spanish, what if you have a child who speaks Chinese or French, what are you going to do then? All of your courses are directed to Spanish, not anything else. I think a bilingual program should be about teaching a second language or another language, not just Spanish. (Damaris)

The researcher also found that, as pointed out by Canales and Ruiz-Escalante (1993), it is important for bilingual teachers to develop competency in both languages, yet Carmen, a BIL major, and Maria, a BIL major, described their observation about teachers’ language competency in ELL students’ first language.
The teacher that I was with, the pre-K teacher, I think that most teachers don’t know the, I am not going to say correct, but the appropriate Spanish. They use the words, that are like “oh my god, what was she talking about?” I keep thinking that’s not the way you say it, but the kids [ELL students] learn it, the way she saying it because they think it is the correct way. She would be speaking to them, she would just take a word here and there, then I am like “what does she want?” I was thinking because I know Spanish and I was like “what does she want?” I can’t imagine the kids thinking “what do I do?” If I don’t understand it, imagine them. I don’t want to tell her anything because I don’t want her to think “she thinks she knows.” So, I would just stay quiet. If she thinks she is doing her job correct, I’ll just let her. So, I think that’s something that they need to be careful with when it comes to bilingual certification. That the teacher has the right things, she knows what she is doing. They should teach the, in terms of Spanish, not the correct, because I know there are different dialects, even in Mexico, you are here in Raynosa and Veracruz, it is different, we know that, right? But, at least, the one that is more familiar to the kids, the standard Spanish. (Carmen)

I was one of them [ELL students]. I know what they go through and I think it is good that I know. Like a lot of people in my class, a lot of them don’t feel comfortable talking in Spanish. I am just like “how are you supposed to teach if you don’t feel comfortable talking in Spanish?” I think it is good that I am one of them because I feel comfortable talking in Spanish. I can associate with what they are going through. (Maria)

Finally, CREDE (2002, 2003) suggested that teacher preparation programs require teachers to study a second language, but a specific language was not specified. Similarly, Adger, Snow, and Christian (2003) argued, the key is to prepare and familiarize preservice teachers with knowledge of linguistics when teaching ELL students. Therefore, although CREDE (2002, 2003) did not suggest teacher preparation programs to require a specific second language, given the regional and demographic profile as pointed out by Richardson (1999), Spanish becomes the second language. Despite the fact that the general results showed that the participants tended to be agreeable and content with their professional education training for ELL, Leticia, a BIL major, thought that the teacher preparation program could broaden the training scope and use some flexibility to meet preservice teachers’ needs.

I want to let them [teacher preparation program] know that we are free to write what we want, but don’t tell us to write in Spanish, that is not bilingual. Bilingual is not Spanish and I am not saying that bilingual is German, either. It could be any language, but don’t say “give me a paper, I want all the lessons in Spanish.” I mean that is very negative and very narrow-minded. You see all these students, they are not all Hispanics. What about those people [ELL students] who are coming from Korea? They are going to be left out because they want to focus on Spanish?

Next, after discussing the result as a whole group, the researcher examined the preservice teachers’ perceptions toward their professional education training for ELL students according
to their majors, BIL and GEN. The researcher found that BIL and GEN major participants indeed had different views toward their overall training for ELL students. Wasonga (2005) found that taking courses relating to students with diverse background could influence preservice teachers’ attitudes as well as level of preparedness. On average, BIL major participants have taken 5 ELL/ESL related courses; on the contrary, GEN major participants have taken 1 ELL/ESL related course. The findings of the study also suggested a positive relationship existed between number of ELL/ESL courses taken and preparedness for ELL students. Consequently, given this discrepancy, it is understandable that participants with different majors perceived their overall preparedness for ELL students differently. The general finding reflected itself when the researcher examined how participants with different majors viewed the individual survey items. In spite of Maria, a BIL major, and Pamela, a GEN major, having positive attitudes toward ELL students, because of their major, they demonstrated different opinions about their preparedness for ELL students.

I think I’ve received teachers here have given me possibly every piece of information that I can get. We read so many books. We had so many discussions over getting prepared over so many exams. I remember most of the stuffs and I have the books and everything. Also, I am willing to help them out. I am willing to learn what I need to learn for the students. I am willing to look outside my comfort zone to help them out. I guess it the will to want to teach them and the motivation to want them to learn. (Maria)

I am up for it [teaching ELL students]. I just, like I feel if I were a bilingual major, I would probably have more classes that would gear toward teaching them, getting that extra experience. As for right now, since we are generalists, they give us that one acquisition class, and that’s all we get. So we don’t understand the cognitive ability or how we are supposed to teach it and how they are supposed to learn. Some of our professors said, “if it comes down to it, you get the bottle of water, you said ‘water’ ‘water’ and have them touch it, have them feel it. So they have something concrete to go with the word, instead of just the word, which to them ‘water’ could mean otherwise.” I could probably do that, because I am more hands-on, like artistic. That’s how I learn too, show me what it is, I can probably do it, and understand what it is. I think I could, as long as I am not overwhelmed, like with an entire class of ELL. I think that would just throw me out, for I really have to hit the books so that I could get up to speed on their cognitive ability. What am I supposed to be doing with what age group and how to help them become the best? (Pamela)

Conclusion

The researcher noted that, as a whole group, generally, the more ELL/ESL related courses taken, the more likely preservice teachers feel prepared for ELL students; the participants agreed that their professional education courses have made them more aware of the need of linguistically and culturally diverse students; their professional education training has prepared them to teach students whose language, cultures, and background differ from their own; they expect to teach children from different backgrounds; they would like to receive more training in evaluating ELL students’ educational achievement; finally, they slightly agree that they are well prepared to teach ELL students. However, examining the differences according to participants’ majors, the researcher found that BIL and GEN major participants indeed had different views toward their overall training for ELL students.
Those who can, teach (Fueyo & Bechtol, 1999); those who teach, teach for diversity. For 5 to 17 school age children, 1 out of 5 children spoke a different language at home; 1 out of 20 children had difficulty speaking English (Planty, al., 2008). On the other hands, numbers of teachers who are prepared for linguistically and culturally diverse students remain inadequate (The American Association for Employment in Education, 2005) and training in diversity issues is still insufficient. Considering these issues, more than likely, all teachers are going to have students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Isaac, a BIL major, clearly stated,

We as Americans here, I think there is this sense that English is the only language and that’s the way to go. But, but when it comes down to the classroom, [people] seem to forget about the fact that this country is made of immigrants. I think it is good that people from other countries are in our classroom. Because we are part of this world, right?

This changing in demographics has prompted teacher preparation programs to prepare the future teaching force to meet the needs of the diverse student population. The current study, with its focus on preservice teachers’ perceptions toward their professional education regarding ELL students, hopefully can contribute to the teacher education research. It is also hoped that by providing all preservice teachers with an all-around preparation, the future teaching force can indeed, as CREDE (2002, 2003) believes, be ready to address the needs of all students.
References


