

DEVELOPING TEACHER CANDIDATES' COMPETENCES FOR ADDRESSING DIVERSE NEEDS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Can a teacher education course be used to develop teacher education candidates' (TECs) competences of pedagogy when teaching diverse learners? This study used a pre and post survey design to examine changes in the knowledge component of the competences of TECs enrolled in a course designed to meet the academic needs of English Language Learners (ELLs). The pre and post-survey results indicate TECs become better equipped pedagogically for working with ELLs. Findings also show that the improvement of candidate competences for addressing diverse needs of ELLs vary significantly, depending on the different educational levels of the TECs.

Keywords: culturally responsive strategies, English language learners, linguistic competence, communicative competence, cultural competence

INTRODUCTION

The 2010 census revealed “a dramatic increase in ethnic/racial diversity, and this trend is expected to continue” (Martin & Nakayama, 2013, p. 6). The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reports that the numbers of English Language Learners in public schools are growing rapidly: “The percentage of public school students in the United States who were ELLs was higher in fall 2017 (10.1 percent, or 5.0 million students) than in fall 2000 (8.1 percent, or 3.8 million students)” (para. 1) and “Spanish was the home language of 3.7 million ELL students in fall 2017, representing 74.8 percent of all ELL students and 7.6 percent of all public K-12 students. Arabic and Chinese were the next most common home languages” (para. 6).

As the number of students from diverse backgrounds continues to grow in American schools, their academic success or failure depends greatly upon the quality of instruction they receive in mainstream classrooms. Unfortunately, the schools are not meeting the academic needs of these students. As Echvarria et al (2013) pointed out,

While the number of students with limited proficiency in English has grown exponentially across the United States, their level of academic achievement has lagged significantly behind that of their language-majority peers. There exists growing evidence that most schools are not meeting the challenge of educating these students well. (p. 6)

Researchers and scholars in the field have drawn attention to the multiple areas where support is needed to help the academic achievement of the ELL students. In particular, the cultural and linguistic challenges many ELL students face have hindered them from academic success (Chenowith, 2014; Edmonds-Eveland, 2019; Lundien, 2009).

An area that deserves particular attention in school policies and practices concerning immigrant students is English language. Language can dictate who is going to count in the “in-

group” socially and culturally as well as who has a voice in public discourse. English language plays an important role in public places and diverse cultural communities. As Tellers and Ortiz (2008) put it,

English-language fluency and an American accent delimits who is American. Those that do not speak English with near native fluency are excluded...from sharing in communication with the mainstream but also from institutions that determine success, including primary labor markets and higher education. (p. 186)

Support that acknowledges and addresses the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs) begins with school policies that target the improved instructional practices for ELLs. According to Olneck (2004), “the responses that schools make to immigrants are shaped by social changes concomitant with immigration, broader political currents, professional educational philosophies and paradigms, and the local school ethos.” He observed that “American schools have, however reluctantly, always had to revise their practices and policies to accommodate immigrant languages, cultures, and identities, but their success in educating immigrant children has been uneven” (p. 399).

Although the K-12 curriculum does integrate some aspects of ethnic and cultural studies into the mainstream content (usually through social studies), the standards-based curriculum does not always show how knowledge is constructed, transmitted, and changed (Freeman & Crawford, 2008; Martin-Beltran & Peercy, 2012). According to MacLeod (1995), “the educational system treats students differently depending on their social origins” (p. 12). To support an atmosphere that encourages students to attend to social cues and implications, deliberate efforts must be made to support all their learning in a way that prompts them to become productive and engaged citizens (Arce, 2007; Gauley, 2017).

As many as 60% of grade level or general education teachers working with ELLs in monolingual English classroom settings are teaching without certification or formal professional training, and nearly 80% of teachers surveyed felt unprepared to teach ELLs (Menken & Antunez 2001; Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Holloway, 2003; Quintero & Hansen, 2017). Most states are only beginning to raise important questions about the preparation of mainstream teachers to work with ELLs, specify requirements to work with ELLs, and develop policies that require English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) credentials and professional development for teachers of ELLs (Samson & Collins, 2012; Jong et al., 2013).

The lack of training has important implications for teacher education programs that prepare teacher education candidates (TECs) (Byram, 2014). It is no longer a luxury for TECs to develop the knowledge and skills that equip them to meet the academic needs of English Language Learners. Recognizing and utilizing diverse students' backgrounds, acknowledging funds of knowledge, and awareness of social, cultural, and linguistic capitals provide opportunities for educators to develop a pedagogy that is culturally responsive. Gay (2010) wrote that "culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 31). She emphasized that "[p]edagogical equality that reflects culturally sensitive instructional strategies is a precondition for and a means of achieving maximal academic outcomes for culturally diverse students" (Gay, 2004, p. 33).

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to determine if competences can be developed for teacher candidates taking a course that addresses the diverse needs of English Language Learners. In

particular, the study focuses on the knowledge aspect of the competences for working with ELLs, in terms of the knowledge and comfort level of the TECs as a result of exposure to different instructional English learning strategies and models. Specifically, the study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do teacher candidates develop linguistic competence for working with English Language Learners through a college course on multicultural pedagogy?
2. In what ways do teacher candidates develop communicative competence for working with English Language Learners through a college course on multicultural pedagogy?
3. In what ways do teacher candidates develop cultural competence for working with English Language Learners through a college course on multicultural pedagogy?
4. Is there a difference between candidates with different education levels in the amount of progress they make in the various competency areas?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), the diversity of the student population has continued to increase. Although the diversity of the teacher population has also increased, there still remains:

(t)he disparity between the cultural and linguistic diversity of the teaching population and the student population...This chasm between the diversity of the teaching force and student population is of concern as many teachers report that they do not have the cultural knowledge and experience of working or living in diverse environments. (Robinson & Clardy, 2011, p. 101)

Robinson and Clardy (2011) pointed out “the need for teacher candidates...and in-service teachers...to be explicitly taught the skills needed to successfully teach diverse student

populations.” Other researchers and scholars also suggested the need for teacher candidates to develop the cultural and linguistic competences so that they can work in diverse environments (e.g., Brown, 2007, Smith & Kumi-Yeboah, 2015, & Yazdanpanah, 2017). De Schonewise and Klinger (2012) discussed the linguistic and cultural issues that practicing teachers need to keep in mind so as to provide support for the ELL students. Lopez et al. (2013) found that coursework for practicing teachers that is focused on English language development is positively related to the learning outcomes of the ELLs.

Linguistic competence

Linguistic competence refers to knowledge about language forms and their meanings (Brown, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). According to Krashen (1982), “adults have two distinct and independent ways of developing competence in a second language. The first way is language acquisition, a process similar, if not identical, to the way children develop ability in their first language” (p. 10). He reminded us that we may not be explicitly aware of the rules of the language, but rather “feel” what is correct and what is not (Krashen 1982). The second way to develop competence in a second language is by language learning. This kind of learning is a conscious process of language development (Krashen, 1995). It is knowing the rules of that language and being able to talk about them (Krashen, 1982). It also gives people more options to use language appropriately in both written and oral forms in different settings (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000).

Linguistic competence can be fully developed when English Language Learners acquire a language in a natural, meaningful, and authentic learning environment. Paulson (1974) wrote that “if we want to teach our students to function in another language, we would do very well to

systematically steer our teaching towards . . . activities which serve to teach not only language but also the social use of language” (p. 360).

Communicative competence

Closely related to linguistic competence is communicative competence, the knowledge and skills that enable a person to communicate effectively (Paulston, 1974; Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 1995). Savignon (1972) defined communicative competence as the ability for one to function in a communicative setting of dynamic exchange where linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total information input, both linguistic and paralinguistic. According to Peregoy and Boyle (2017), the term *communicative competence* is used “to emphasize that proficient language use extends beyond grammatical forms and meaning to include social conventions required for successful communication” (p. 43). Richards (2006) suggested that communicative competence includes the following aspects of knowledge:

- Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions
 - Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)
 - Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)
 - Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one’s language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies)
- (p. 3).

Lucas et al. (2008) spoke to the need for teachers to have essential understandings so they can be responsible to the linguistic and communicative needs of ELLs. Among these understandings are:

- the fundamental difference between conversational language proficiency and academic language proficiency,
- the need for comprehensive and meaningful linguistic input and output in second language learning,
- the opportunities for direct and frequent interactions with fluent speakers of the target language,
- the role of native language skills as a resource for learning a second language,
- the importance of a safe environment for learning a second language, and
- the need for explicit attention to linguistic form and function.

Based on these understandings, Lucas et al. (2008) encouraged teachers to engage in linguistically responsive pedagogical practices, including “learn(ing) about the language and academic backgrounds of the ELLs in their classes... identifying the language demands inherent in classroom tasks...[and] scaffolding learning for ELLs” (pp. 366 - 368).

Cultural competence

Cultural competence refers to the ability of a person “to interpret each culture in the perspective of the other” (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 167). Such ability enables teachers to communicate and relate to students with different cultural or linguistic origins (Keengwe, 2010).

According to Jones and Nichols (2013), the term “cultural competence” originated in the healthcare field, when “health care providers realized that cultural attributes played a significant role in their ability to communicate effectively with ethnically diverse communities and bring

about desired medical outcomes” (p.1). The roots of the term, according to Jones and Nichols, can be traced back to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The adoption of the term “cultural competence” in the field of public education was prompted by “a growing recognition that the institutional performance data concerning ethnic minorities in the national public school systems are at alarmingly low rates for some subgroups” (Jones & Nichols, pp. 1-2).

The existing “cultural dissonance between contemporary teachers and their students necessitates that educators must consistently seek culturally responsive practices” through “development of (their) cultural competence” (Chiu et al., 2017, p. 47). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2001) wrote that “teachers who are prepared to help students become culturally competent are themselves culturally competent; they know enough about students' cultural and individual life circumstances to be able to communicate well with them” (p. 97). Culturally competent teachers tend to practice socially just education that helps close the gap facing ELLs and other non-mainstream students (Pai, Adler, & Shadiow, 2006).

METHOD OF STUDY

This study used a pre and post survey design to collect the data for answering the research questions. The pre-survey was administered to candidates at the beginning of the semester. The post survey was conducted at the end of the semester. Both surveys contained questions that asked teacher candidates to rate their level of linguistic communicative and cultural knowledge for working with English Language Learners. Four of the items addressed knowledge related to cultural competence, one addressed knowledge related to communicative competences, and the remaining four items measured knowledge related to language competences (Table 1).

We limited our study into the knowledge aspect of competences for teacher candidates because we believe that this represents the foundation of the competencies needed by teacher candidates to work with ELL students. We also feel that the other aspect of the competences, namely, the skills component, would be best evaluated when the TECs are using these skills in the classroom, an opportunity that was not sufficiently available during the present course.

Subjects of study

The subjects in the study were TECs enrolled in *Diversity and English Learners* (DEL), a required course that introduces culturally responsive pedagogy and approaches to teaching English Language Learners (ELLs). The DEL course is an introduction to methods for developing the linguistic, cultural, and communicative competences of teacher candidates.

In 2015, the principal investigator (PI) gave an essay quiz to the graduate students enrolled in the MA-TESOL program at a university in the Midwest of the United States. Perhaps not surprisingly, the fully certified classroom teachers in the program showed very low linguistic competences. Until they took the quiz, they were not even aware of English language knowledge and how to explain their knowledge in English to ELLs. English speaking native speakers and TECs are already fluent in English. The challenge for them was learning how to teach English to ELLs to develop the five modalities of academic English (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and discourse).

TECs were exposed to Herrera's (2010) biography-driven culturally responsive teaching strategies which alert teachers to the richness and potential for learning present in children's lived experiences (sociocultural, linguistic, cognitive, and academic histories). These are important funds of knowledge which support effective learning and development (Moll et al., 2005).

Candidates in the class wrote a reflective language learning autobiography as a profile and reviewed literature to become familiar with theories, concepts, and methods in second language acquisition. They read and discussed cultural studies and posed questions in weekly online discussion forums.

One required assignment was a project called the *Action Plan*. TECs were asked to create an action plan for two English Language Learners (ELLs) and were required to include a student profile (age, grade, first language, second language, levels of English Language proficiency, cultural and educational backgrounds). Each ELL profile represented a student at a different stage of language learning/acquisition development in the domains of cultural, linguistic, social, and psychological aspects of language acquisition. TECs went on to describe their ELLs' language learning/acquisition development and Second Language Learning/Acquisition process. They had to demonstrate how their action plan would support these students throughout the academic year employing specific strategies. The challenge of this project consisted in finding English Language Learners during the course of one semester, interviewing them, implementing effective English language learning strategies and culturally responsive pedagogy, and writing a reflective paper. Using their practicum experience, the TECs were able to complete this project in collaboration with their mentor.

Participating TECs signed consent forms after the research study was approved by the IRB. Thirty-nine undergraduate students responded to the pre-survey, as did two graduate students. Thirty-four undergraduates responded to the post survey, but only one graduate student completed it.

Data analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data and answer the research questions. The descriptive statistics were used to provide a summary of the candidates' level of knowledge related to the competences before and after taking the course. The inferential statistics took the form of a paired sample t-test and an independent sample t-test. The paired sample t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the pre and post survey in candidates' competences for addressing the diverse needs of English Language Learners. The independent sample t-test was used to determine if the change in competences between the pre and post survey differed between candidates of different educational levels.

RESULTS OF STUDY

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for pre and post survey questions. Those questions cover such areas as the respondents' knowledge about cultural assimilation and their comfort levels in applying culturally responsive methods learned from the course. The table shows that the mean scores are moderately low on the pretest survey (around 2.5 on a 1-5 Likert scale) and moderately high on the post survey (around 4 on a 1-5 Likert scale). While the TECs did not make remarkable strides towards culturally responsive methods, the findings suggest that at least in theory, they were open to the need for such a stance and more alert to their opportunities for future professional development.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics for Candidate Competences from the Pre and Post Surveys

	Pre-Survey			Post-Survey	
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Knowledge about cultural assimilation	31	2.77	0.990	3.81	0.601

Knowledge about acculturation	31	2.52	0.926	3.55	0.675
Skills in communicating with ELL students	31	2.39	1.022	4.26	0.773
Knowledge about culturally responsive pedagogy	31	3.00	1.183	4.42	0.672
Comfort level using culturally responsible pedagogy	31	3.19	1.276	4.23	0.717
Comfort level using the Natural Approach	31	1.94	1.063	3.68	0.945
Comfort level using Total Physical Response method	31	1.94	1.063	3.77	0.884
Comfort level using Communicative Language method	30	2.03	1.066	3.73	.828
Comfort level using Task-Based Language method	31	2.65	1.473	3.71	.873

Table 2 presents the inferential statistics of a paired sample t-test comparing the results between the pre and post survey responses. The comparisons of pre and post survey responses for the nine questions regarding the respondents' knowledge of and comfort levels in using culturally responsive strategies reached statistical significance in each case. The p values were less than the critical value of 0.01, suggesting that after taking the course, the students thought highly of their knowledge and comfort levels in dealing with multicultural experiences. Also, the effect size in each case is very large, ranging from 0.85 to 2.06. The results suggest that the course has helped the students to develop competences in multicultural strategies such as heeding the funds of knowledge their students bring to the classroom, creating opportunities for students to fully participate in language and social interactions throughout the school day, and turning to available community resources to support language learning, academic success, and social mobility.

Table 2.

Comparing Candidate Competences between the Pre and Post Surveys

	Mean Diff	df	p	Cohen's d
Knowledge about cultural assimilation	1.03	30	0.00	1.27
Knowledge about acculturation	1.03	30	0.00	1.27
Skills in communicating with ELL students	1.87	30	0.00	2.06
Knowledge about culturally responsive pedagogy	1.42	30	0.00	1.48
Comfort level using culturally responsible pedagogy	1.03	30	0.00	1.00
Comfort level using the Natural Approach	1.74	30	0.00	1.73
Comfort level using Total Physical Response method	1.84	30	0.00	1.87
Comfort level using Communicative Language method	1.70	30	0.00	1.78
Comfort level using Task-Based Language method	1.07	30	0.00	0.85

The following two tables (Table 3 and Table 4) compared changes in pre and post survey responses regarding TECs' knowledge, skill, or comfort in the various competency areas between groups of different educational levels based on their highest educational degree. Students with high school diplomas were in one group (low group), and students with a college or graduate school degree were in the other group (high group). The information is sequenced in the same manner as the previous two tables with D1 covering knowledge of cultural assimilation.

Table 3 shows the change of results between the pre and post survey responses for each group. For the nine questions regarding knowledge or comfort level about culturally responsive strategies, there was a marked tendency for the respondents with a high school diploma to experience more increase in their knowledge or comfort level than respondents with a college or graduate degree.

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics for Candidates with Different Levels of Education

Education Level	N	Pre Survey		Post Survey		Change	SD
		Mean	N	Mean			
D1	Low	22	2.59	20	3.85	1.35	0.933
	High	12	3.25	11	3.73	0.45	1.440
D2	Low	22	2.23	20	3.50	1.25	0.967
	High	12	3.00	11	3.64	0.64	1.120
D3	Low	22	2.14	20	4.25	2.20	1.196
	High	12	2.83	11	4.27	1.27	1.348
D4	Low	22	2.86	20	4.45	1.65	1.531
	High	12	3.33	11	4.36	1.00	1.000
D5	Low	22	2.91	20	4.25	1.45	1.572
	High	12	3.75	11	4.18	0.27	1.191
D6	Low	22	1.64	20	3.85	2.25	1.118
	High	12	2.50	11	3.36	0.82	1.940
D7	Low	22	1.59	20	3.85	2.30	0.979
	High	12	2.50	11	3.64	1.00	0.894
D8	Low	22	1.82	20	3.80	2.15	1.137
	High	12	2.67	11	3.60	0.80	1.135
D9	Low	22	2.27	20	3.80	1.70	1.780
	High	12	3.58	11	3.55	-0.09	1.640

Table 4 reports the results of an independent sample t-test in comparing the two groups of respondents. The results show that the difference reached statistical significance in six areas with five of them pertaining to comfort level in using the various strategies. The Cohen's d suggests that the effect sizes were relatively large, especially in the six areas where the difference reached statistical significance. The results show that high school graduates were more likely to report an increase in their knowledge or comfortable level in using various strategies.

Table 4.

Comparing Candidates with Different Levels of Education

	t	df	p	Mean Dif	Cohen's d
D1	2.104	29	0.044	0.895	0.74
D2	1.599	29	0.121	0.614	0.58
D3	1.975	29	0.058	0.927	0.73
D4	1.263	29	0.217	0.650	0.50
D5	2.160	29	0.039	1.177	0.85
D6	2.622	29	0.014	1.432	0.90
D7	3.644	29	0.001	1.300	1.39
D8	3.068	28	0.005	1.350	1.19
D9	2.753	29	0.010	1.791	1.05

IMPLICATIONS

The study shows that TECs' self-reported beliefs about their abilities around the competences in language, culture, and communication were fairly low when they started the course and were significantly higher by the end of the course. The improvement in the competences was statistically significant in each area.

A comparison of the TECs between groups who earned high school diplomas as their highest degree and those receiving college degrees shows significant differences. TECs with a high school diploma reported more improvement in their knowledge of culturally responsive approaches to teaching and in their comfort level in applying the various pedagogies for working

with ELL students. Their progress in these areas was markedly higher than the data collected from participants with a college degree.

Factors influencing this result include unknown level of practical (clinical) or classroom experience of respondents. In addition, there was no clinical work that would address the more sophisticated levels of the mode of development of English as a Second Language acquisition/learning. However, because the TECs were required to complete an action plan project, their understandings from the DEL course and the several projects they conducted with ELLs seemed, in fact, to progress in terms of competence and confidence. This acquired knowledge may help them in their future work as teachers to address the diverse needs of the ELLs more successfully.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important that teacher candidates develop their competence to support the linguistic needs of ELLs (Peregoy & Boyle, 2017). This support is badly needed for the English language learners since language is so deeply entwined in culture and can present some confusions and misunderstandings for these learners. It is notable that “sociocultural differences and social interactions...play a major role in the school environments in relation to a realignment of the function of language, from oral language used in everyday life to written language with fewer nonlinguistic and situational cues” (Minami & Ovando, 2004, p. 569). Without the linguistic support of teachers, ELLs may face major obstacles in understanding the expectations in their daily learning.

To develop linguistic competence, teacher education programs would benefit from a curriculum that enables TECs to examine the theoretical areas of pragmatics, semantics, syntax, morphology, and phonology. Once they have a basic understanding of these areas, they should

have less trouble applying their understanding of linguistic competence to their content subject area while working with ELLs.

Closely related to linguistic competence is the competence in communication. TECs should develop communicative competence so as to help their students know how to use language appropriately to communicate in authentic social and school environments (Richards, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This kind of help would give the new English speaker access to a broader range of social opportunities.

Additionally, the development of TECs' communicative competence and linguistic competence needs to be integrated with that of cultural competence (Gay, 2018). Developing cultural competence is crucial for TECs to better support ELLs within the United States and its schools (Brown & Lee, 2015). "Although students in the United States are becoming increasingly diverse [linguistically and culturally], most of the nation's teachers are White, female, and monolingual" (Gay, 2018, xiii). The academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and social-class groups "will increase if schools and teachers reflect and draw on their cultural and language strengths" (Gay, 2018, p. xii).

Teacher Education programs can help preservice teachers develop these competences through coursework that incorporates knowledge and skills pertaining to those competences. Such preparation through content courses, methods classes, and clinical work will better prepare candidates for engaging and satisfying practice in classrooms where the student population is increasingly diverse. Colleges can evaluate their courses to include knowledge around these competences, making the concepts explicit and requiring activities and course-related projects that give TECs vital practice in applying their knowledge and transferring their understanding

into skills they can utilize with ELLs. Clinical work and a practicum in culturally and linguistically diverse settings should become a requirement for successful TECs.

Another way to better prepare the teacher candidates to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse student population is through the attraction of a more diverse body of teacher candidates. As of this writing, the demographics show that a majority of TECs tend to be White, female, and monolingual. Colleges can make recruiting diverse candidates into teacher education programs a priority. The diversification of the teacher candidate population should help teacher preparation programs implement culturally responsive content and pedagogy.

To evaluate the impact of a redesigned teacher preparation program in developing the competences of the teacher candidates, we need to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. One limitation of the current study is that we focused primarily on the knowledge aspect of the competences. TEC knowledge of those competences is an important starting point in the development of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogies. Beyond the knowledge element of these competences, there is still a great deal more for TECs to learn. Next steps should include opportunities to practice skills in diverse settings. Pre and post quantitative surveys can measure the progression of knowledge and skills of TECs' linguistic, communicative, and cultural competences. Qualitative data, such as that gathered in observations, peer coaching, team teaching, journal entries, and case studies can be used to critically examine TECs' levels of these competences in practice and provide opportunities for helpful feedback and coaching.

CONCLUSION

TECs need to develop the linguistic, communicative, and cultural competences to effectively work with ELLs. As our study shows, the majority of TECs are not well-prepared to

work with ELLs from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Practicing teachers come into the classroom at many different knowledge levels about these competences. Similarly, English language learners come to the k-12 classroom at many different levels of language development. A competent teacher should plan instruction to address the different content knowledge and language skills of students. The ultimate goals for preparing practicing teachers are to help ELLs develop academic language proficiency, support their acquisition of content knowledge, and encourage and elicit efforts to interact and communicate with their peers. Reflecting and examining their own language and cultural competences is necessary to help TECs better address ELLs' diverse needs and utilize the rich funds of knowledge that can enhance learning for everyone in the learning setting.

This study showed that practicing teachers have relatively low level of knowledge around the linguistic, communicative, and cultural competences that are needed for working with English Language Learners. The study also showed that with a well-designed and successfully implemented course that focuses on those competence areas, the knowledge level of the TECs around these competences can be significantly improved.

At the same time, it is important to realize that “. . . developing cultural competence and fostering students' cultural competence is complex and requires a systematic, deliberate, intentional, and explicit effort and strategies” (Ukpokodu, 2011, p. 449). TECs need experience in multicultural and multilingual settings with extended clinical time and supervision from culturally and linguistically competent mentors. A teacher education program that is committed to the development of competences for practicing teachers needs to be cognizant of this factor so as to help TECs develop and implement these competences when working with ELLs.

THE AUTHORS

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