

Teachers' Perceptions of Effective School-Wide Programs and Strategies for English Language Learners

"We argue that teacher learning and thus collective efficacy should focus on meeting the needs of students at the margins, especially students such as ELLs who are counting on the school to equip them with the tools that they will need for full participation in the economic, social and political life" (p. 124).

What is this study about?

The researchers wanted to consider the reasons that some teachers of English language learners (ELLs) believe themselves to be under-prepared for the essential work of teaching students whose first language is not English. Teachers may not always feel that they have background knowledge and instructional strategies to effectively support ELLs. This can sometimes lead to teachers' self-confidence being challenged.

Based on a review of research and their own experiences working with schools where teachers had success supporting the academic achievement of English language learners (ELLs), the researchers investigated the following question: Are teachers' ratings of the effectiveness of their school's ESL programming correlated with measures of collective efficacy, school climate, teacher experience, and the proportion of ELLs in schools and classrooms?

What's Important

The researchers noted that 'efficacy' describes the belief that people have about their own capabilities. Those with a strong sense of self-efficacy view difficult tasks as challenges that can be overcome if they set goals and stay focused when obstacles are encountered. The authors noted that collective efficacy relates to schools as the unit of study and refers to a shared belief in teachers' collective power to overcome obstacles.

The Details of the Study

Participants/Method and Procedures:

Participants in this study were 578 elementary teachers in California. Their classes were comprised of at least 10% English language learners. The researchers conducted interviews with randomly-selected study participants. The selection process included stratifying the sample of teachers by the percentage of ELLs in the teacher's class. The researchers then selected three teachers at random from each strata or quartile.



All participants completed two questionnaires that measured collective efficacy and school climate. They also rated their perceptions of the effectiveness of the language development instructional strategies used in their school, as well as the success of the programs for ELLs.

Results:

The research findings indicated that teachers' perceptions of the success of the instructional strategies used to support ELLs in their school was not impacted by the concentration of ELLs in either the school or individual teacher's classroom. In addition, researchers were surprised to find that teacher experience was not associated with perceptions of effective ESL strategies or programs.

The researchers found that collective efficacy, school culture and focus, and perceptions of school-wide effective instruction and programs for ELLs were strongly correlated with one another. While the researchers noted that this finding is not surprising, this study was the first to document these specific relationships. The researchers found that teachers' perceptions of their own efficacy in supporting ELLs was related to collective efficacy and other school climate measures. Collective efficacy was associated with perceived strength of both ESL strategies and programs. These findings suggest that teachers who believe that they are part of a school which promotes and supports good instruction, also believe they can work to overcome student and family characteristics beyond their control. These findings suggest that "when teachers consider their collective capacity, a more confident voice is found" (p. 123).

In addition, the subscale measuring 'school focus' on the climate survey, accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in the group efficacy for ELL strategies. The researchers noted that this finding suggests that ESL instructional strategies were considered as part of the overall goals for instructional practices at schools. The climate variable measuring culture was also associated with ratings of effective practice. The 'affirmation' subscale, which assessed whether a school routinely recognized individual achievements, however, was not found to be related to effective practice for ELLs. The researchers interpreted this to mean that teachers in schools that have a positive climate developed a strong belief in the instruction program at their school.

Limitations:

The researchers cautioned that because the data in this research are correlational, causality cannot be established. It may be that collective efficacy leads to increases in confidence in the ESL approaches and programs of a school.

Citation:

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What are the implications of this research for my practice?

