Examining English Learner Supports During the Pandemic Era:

A Causal-Comparative Study

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Abstract

Marginalized students require support for equitable learning opportunities. The problem was the abrupt transition from in-person to online learning in the 2020 pandemic era presented challenges for educators to implement supports, such as the communicative approach and social-emotional learning, necessary for English learner (EL) success. Although qualitative research has explored EL challenges during online learning, additional quantitative research was needed to examine program success. A theoretical framework was used to examine language learning approaches, social-emotional learning, ELs, and online learning during the 2020 pandemic era. The purpose of this causal-comparative quantitative study was to test for statistically significant differences in Florida public school districts' EL ACCESS test scores between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received implementation of communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs during the 2020 pandemic era. A mixed analysis of variance test was used to analyze 2019 and 2020 EL ACCESS test scores in Florida. Each district was categorized into control or treatment groups based on a clustering sampling method of district variable implementations. Three research questions guided the examination of the effects of the communicative approach, social-emotional learning, and both approaches applied together as independent variables. Analyses revealed no statistical significance of programs on EL test scores. Recommendations include future research efforts with a larger scale and post-online learning scores and evaluation criteria for Florida schools' instructional initiatives.

Keywords: English learners, pandemic, communicative approach, social-emotional learning

Dedication

I dedicate the effort and time of the dissertation process to my family. First and foremost, I dedicate my work to my beloved grandmothers, Gloria Becker and Catherine Crader, who taught me about love and light as well as instilled in me a sense of hard work and loyalty. Rest in truth. I also dedicate the achievement to my parents, Gregory and Josephine Becker, who have poured so much of themselves into my opportunities for success that the achievement also belongs to them. Finally, I dedicate the process to my loving husband, Jordan Wright. You are my love and my life. Without you, this accomplishment would never be possible, and I am forever grateful for your relentless patience and selflessness.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The consistent increase in English learner (EL) populations across the United States requires educational professionals to apply research-driven instructional techniques to meet the diverse needs of student populations (Fillmore, 2014; Lara-Alecio et al., 2018). Although the inability to communicate can be mistaken for the inability to comprehend academic concepts, ELs can reach the same rigorous academic standards as native English-speaking peers when appropriate language supports are provided (Baker, 2017). Language supports are necessary for ELs to have equitable opportunities to meet the same high expectations as their native English-speaking peers (Romo et al., 2018).

During the 2020 pandemic, online learning mandates increased responsibilities, and stress levels of teachers had a negative effect on instructional quality as educators rushed to gain the digital competencies necessary for online instruction (Malkus et al., 2020). A lack of research-driven language supports as well as student challenges of online learning transitions negatively affected ELs in public schools (Sayer & Braun, 2020). Moving forward, examination of the effects of targeted EL supports is necessary to improve instructional efforts and provide equitable learning experiences. In unprecedented times, educators require the preparation of research-driven instructional supports for use in the event of potential future online learning mandates. Targeted supports for examination are introduced in this chapter, as well as the background of the problem, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, research questions and hypotheses, theoretical framework, definitions of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations.

Background of the Problem

The background of the problem is ELs have the potential to achieve rigorous learning

standards but require support for unique linguistic and emotional needs (Fillmore, 2014). Two nationally mandated instructional requirements for public schools during the 2020 pandemic era were explicit English instruction and comprehensible input of content area instruction (Umansky et al., 2020). During the 2020 pandemic era, ELs represented 10.1%, or 5 million, of the overall student population and were at risk of widened achievement gaps if integral supports were not continued during online learning initiatives (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022). As the problem continued, the people affected were students who identified as culturally and linguistically diverse as well as educators and school leaders who had students who identified as culturally and linguistically diverse present in the school community (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020; Panisoara et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2021).

During 2020 online learning initiatives, ELs faced an increase in educational inequities, such as inaccessibility to digital resources, minimal communication between schools and families, and lack of the social interaction necessary for language acquisition (Sayer & Braun, 2020). As research initiatives have focused on qualitative explorations of stakeholder perspectives of challenges and inequities, research is lacking regarding the effects of targeted instructional strategies on EL success (Kim & Padilla, 2020; Sayer & Braun, 2020). The increased challenges emphasized the need for quality instruction to assist ELs in the United States to overcome challenges in online learning transitions. Although prior research implied EL success in alignment with the communicative approach and social-emotional learning initiatives, further research was needed to explore the effects of the communicative approach and social-emotional learning consistencies in 2020 online learning transitions on EL language proficiency (Dresser, 2013; Mbeh, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

The problem was the abrupt transition from in-person to online learning in the 2020 pandemic era presented challenges for educators to implement best practices, such as the communicative approach and social-emotional learning principles, necessary for EL success (Openo, 2020). Research on ELs during the pandemic era included qualitative designs focused on challenges in obtaining resources and negative emotional effects (Kaharuddin, 2020; Kim & Padilla, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020). Quantitative analyses of targeted instructional approaches could fill the gap in research by examining the effects of instructional supports to prepare educators for future online learning transitions. Sayer and Braun (2020) reported as few as 35% of ELs within a targeted district participated in instructional efforts during remote learning, emphasizing the need for improved online instruction. Further research on effective instructional practices in online learning transitions can support educators to provide ELs with the necessary support to continue to reach high goals both in-person and online.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this causal-comparative quantitative study was to test for statistically significant differences in Florida public school districts' EL Assessing Comprehension and Communication State-to-State (ACCESS) test scores between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs during the 2020 pandemic era. Examination of a combination of the communicative approach and social-emotional learning was imperative for future instructional efforts in online learning transitions because aligned practices have the potential to support students both academically and holistically (Koondhar et al., 2018; Toth, 2019). A statistical examination was applied with a mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA) test in

alignment with a causal-comparative quantitative methodology.

The English proficiency data from the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 ACCESS tests were selected as dependent variables in the mixed ANOVA tests. The implementation of the communicative approach, social-emotional learning, and a combination of both approaches in the transition from in-person to online learning were the between-subjects independent variables. Annual spring test scores in 2019 and 2020 were the within-subjects independent variable of time. A statistical examination of implemented programs during online learning in the 2020 pandemic era was necessary because the inferences provided research-based considerations for struggling educators in unprecedented times (Kamei & Harriot, 2021; Malkus et al., 2020). Continuous variables for each research question were collected from aggregated EL language proficiency ACCESS test scores from Florida public school districts. Each school district was grouped with a cluster sampling method based on the implementation of the independent variables during the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years.

The primary research goal of the study was to provide educators of ELs with research-driven tools for use during future online learning initiatives. In alignment with the research goal, the research objective was to examine the effects of the communicative approach and social-emotional learning initiatives on EL language proficiency gains during online learning. Relevant populations were ELs in Florida, educators who taught ELs, administrators of schools with EL student populations, families of ELs, and communities with EL populations within public school districts. A crucial focus suggested for future research was the target population as Florida public schools have over 265,000 ELs (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2022a). By focusing on the needs of marginalized students, education research can promote equity for future direction in 21st-century academia.

Significance of the Study

The results of the study were designed to inform educational professionals of best practices to reinforce when transitioning from in-person to online learning initiatives. Statistical analyses from the study will be shared with educational leaders and professionals in the academic community for reflection and future practice if society requires additional abrupt online learning transitions. Study results can improve professional practice by supporting policy change for the use of research driven EL supports in districts throughout the state of Florida. Results of the study present an opportunity for positive social change by providing research-based instructional practices promoting equitable learning experiences for all students in U.S. public schools, despite varying English proficiency levels. Research-driven instructional supports are crucial for ELs to experience equitable opportunities for success comparable to their native English-speaking peers (Johnson et al., 2018).

Research Questions

Each research question had two independent variables and a dependent variable. The dependent variable remained consistent with EL ACCESS test scores for each research question. ACCESS test scores presented continuous variables necessary for mixed ANOVA test assumptions with data in percentage form (Laerd Statistics, 2015). Between-subjects independent variables in the study were instruction aligned to the communicative approach, social-emotional learning principles, as well as a combination of both approaches. Time was the within-subjects independent variable for each research question, with data from the spring of 2019 and the spring of 2020. Each research question was examined with mixed ANOVA tests to measure effects on EL language proficiency over time.

Research Question 1: Was there a statistically significant difference between the

treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction for students during the 2020 pandemic era?

Research Question 2: Was there a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era?

Research Question 3: Was there a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of both communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied together during the 2020 pandemic era?

Hypotheses

$H1_0$: There was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction for students during the 2020 pandemic era.

$H1_a$: There was a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction for students during the 2020 pandemic era.

$H2_0$: There was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era.

$H2_a$: There was a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era.

$H3_0$: There was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control

groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received implementation of both

communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied

together during the 2020 pandemic era.

H3a: There was a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control

groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received implementation of both

communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied

together during the 2020 pandemic era.

Theoretical Framework

Pertinent theories in the literature review aligned with the research questions by

examining the communicative approach and the social-emotional learning theory. The learning

theories aligned with the study's approach to research-aligned instruction to enhance both the

academic and holistic needs of ELs (Koondhar et al., 2018; Toth, 2019). Each theory aligned

with the research questions by representing the independent variables. Relevant theoretical

propositions in the literature were background information on ELs in U.S. public schools and the

effects of the 2020 pandemic-mandated online learning initiatives to align with the target

population and the study time frame.

Examination of the communicative approach as an independent variable for Research

Question 1 was crucial for a time-relevant connection to the purpose of the study (Koondhar et

al., 2018). As a foundation for the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages

established by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the

communication approach has gained popularity in language instruction across the United States

(Swanson & Hildebrandt, 2017). The communicative approach directly connected with the

purpose of the study by reflecting the research-driven instructional potential for progressive

language instruction efforts.

From a holistic perspective, examination of the social-emotional learning theory as an independent variable for Research Questions 2 and 3 was imperative to connect future practice to relevant challenges presented during the pandemic (Yu, 2021). As the Latinx population faced disproportionately increased cases of COVID-19, EL stress levels increased during online learning (Baquero et al., 2020; Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020). In response to unique student needs in unforeseen educational challenges, sole academic initiatives were not sufficient to provide adequate learning support for ELs in online learning (Kaharuddin, 2020).

Despite the differences in academic and holistic foci, both instructional initiatives support student success. The combination of both the communicative approach and social-emotional learning for the independent variables in Research Question 3 connected to the purpose of the study by examining additional possible benefits for ELs in U.S. public schools. Pandemic and EL inclusions were also pertinent to the purpose of the study by examining challenges and gaps in research.

Definitions of Terms

In each educational field, definitions of terms can vary. Varied perceptions and assumptions of meaning can lead to confusion and inconsistency in research analyses. The following definitions present the details of the terminology applied in the study.

Assessing Comprehension and Communication State-to-State (ACCESS) language tests are World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment tests designed to measure EL English proficiency levels and are administered annually to ELs in Florida (FLDOE, 2022a).

Bilingual programs refer to education programs with instruction in more than one language (Polanco & Luft de Baker, 2018).

Communicative approach for language learning refers to an instructional method of language teaching focusing mainly on oral communication skills through authentic exchanges of meaning (Toro et al., 2019).

Educators refer to all teachers who instruct ELs in U.S. public schools, not solely English as a Second Language (ESL) educators, due to the required background knowledge of the language and cultural understanding necessary for successful instructional practices in all content areas (Coates, 2016).

English learners (ELs) refer to students in the U.S. public school system requiring language support due to lower English proficiency levels in speaking, listening, reading, and writing than native English-speaking peers (Cook, 2015; U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2021).

Social-emotional learning theory refers to a holistic instructional approach to focus on five interpersonal and intrapersonal skills necessary for social-emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2022c).

Target language refers to the language a student is attempting to learn at a given time (R. Zhang et al., 2021).

2020 pandemic era refers to the 2019–2020 school year when different academic institutions across the United States adopted varying strategies and time frames of responses to increasing COVID-19 cases (Unger & Meiran, 2020).

Assumptions

Assumptions are critical in causal-comparative research design because the assumptions underlying the design process, participant selection, and data analysis of causal study structures

affect research outcomes (Mayrhofer & Waldmann, 2016). A crucial assumption of the study

pertained to the alignment of educator practice to language program instructional expectations.

Florida districts were strategically selected for inclusion in control and treatment groups for

mixed ANOVA result comparisons based on district-wide adoptions of independent variables.

Although districts reported the adoption of theory-driven approaches and programs, no statewide

measurement of implementation of individual teachers existed. Despite careful selections for

treatment groups, an assumption of educator fidelity to district mandates was unavoidable.

Another integral assumption for the causal-comparative study was multiple unobservable factors,

such as home environments, affecting the causal inference of EL success during online learning

efforts (Gangl, 2010).

Scope and Delimitations

Scope in research reflects the selected processes for research design and application

(Fageha & Aibinu, 2013). The coverage of the study focused on ELs in Florida enrolled in public

schools during the 2020 pandemic era. Rather than continuing qualitative research methods

regarding the identification of student challenges, the focus of quantitative analysis of student

results examined the effects of specific instructional efforts, such as the communicative approach

and the social-emotional learning theory. Annual reading achievement scores on state tests were

excluded due to a disconnection of the communicative approach to sole reading scores as

opposed to all four language domains provided in the English proficiency levels of the Florida

ACCESS test scores (Bindileu, 2019; FLDOE, 2022a). Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018)

suggested causal relationships as a critical study delimitation. Due to the causal-comparative

design of the study, the lack of control of extraneous factors fails to limit causal relationships

affect the study outcome and hindered implication for study transferability (Theofanidis &

Fountouki, 2018).

Limitations

Although limitations are inevitable in all research methodologies and designs, the selection of causal-comparative design set high limitations for study transferability. Causal-comparative design examines variables from a past time frame, resulting in the inability to control extraneous variables and identify unobservable causal inferences (Fulmer, 2018; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The inability to control external variables affected the ability to measure the causal inferences of the study, negatively affecting internal validity (Fulmer, 2018). An additional negative effect of causal-comparative design was the collection of data from past time frames. An examination of data from a specific former time frame represented analysis specific to the time frame, negatively affecting external validity (Fulmer, 2018).

Despite the inability for replication, a causal-comparative design was necessary for the scope of the study regarding the examination of student data from a former time frame (Fulmer, 2018). Steps to limit methodological limitations were the use of mixed ANOVA tests in statistical analyses to provide a pre-and post-test for each treatment and control group for the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years. By identifying effective instructional strategies during online learning transitions, educational professionals can learn from past events to better prepare for future circumstances.

In addition to methodological limitations, researcher bias was a risk on study effects based on instructional preferences in professional practice. Although CASEL's social-emotional learning theory can be implemented through programs as well as freestanding standards, the communicative approach required a checklist to address criteria for district inclusion in the treatment groups (CASEL, 2022c; Toro et al., 2019). A limitation of researcher bias in the

district selection process was the use of subject matter experts (SMEs) to identify imperative

elements of the communicative approach for checklist classification in the cluster sampling

method. The inclusion of SMEs to decrease researcher bias negatively affected dependability by

increasing researcher objectivity as well as setting clear objectivity guidelines for transferability.

Although research participants were not directly contacted, in alignment with the causal-

comparative study design, response bias can contribute to study limitation due to potential

instructional inconsistencies of the independent variables. Byrne and Prendergast (2020)

suggested educator perception and practice can affect the implementation and effects of

reformatory programs. District adoption of programs reflecting the instructional implementation

of the study's independent variables did not guarantee educator fidelity and effective

implementation (Byrne & Prendergast, 2020). Hopkins et al. (2015) suggested district

professional development infrastructure affects educators' instructional practices aligning to

district-wide reforms. The inconsistency of district-mandated educational programs is a pertinent

consideration for study reliability and provides opportunities for future research of the same

research questions with a magnified scope of public schools in one district.

Chapter Summary

The focus of educational reform on the needs of marginalized students was crucial for

equitable instructional practices. An introduction, background of the problem, statement of the

problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, research questions and

hypotheses, theoretical framework, definitions of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations,

and limitations brought attention to the need for examination of key theories in online learning

initiatives of U.S. public schools. Theory-aligned instruction, such as aspects of the

communicative approach and social-emotional learning, reviewed in chapter two, provided an

opportunity for the examination of the effective instructional application of EL needs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Explicit research-driven instructional practice is integral for necessary equity reform for diverse 21st-century learners (Liu & Ball, 2019). Marginalized EL populations require additional instructional support for success in educational environments (Fisher & Frey, 2019). The problem was the abrupt transition from in-person to online learning in the 2020 pandemic era presented challenges for educators to implement best practices, such as the communicative approach and social-emotional learning principles, necessary for EL success (Openo, 2020). The purpose of this causal-comparative quantitative study was to test for statistically significant differences in Florida public school districts' EL ACCESS test scores between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after the treatment groups received communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs during the 2020 pandemic era.

From 1992 to 2017, ELs consistently demonstrated proficiency averages lower than the averages of native English-speaking peers (The Nation's Report Card, 2022). Instructional supports necessary for EL success were elements of the communicative approach as well as the social-emotional learning theory (Al-Amri, 2020; Sugishita & Dresser, 2019). Although past research focused on the effectiveness of linguistic and holistic support for EL academic success, further research was needed to examine the effects of support during online classroom transitions of the 2020 pandemic era. Existing research concerning ELs during the pandemic era had explored inequitable resource access, online academic support, and emotional health challenges. The research was lacking regarding the effectiveness of both academic and holistic support on EL academic success (Kim & Padilla, 2020; Sayer & Braun, 2020; Zulikhatin Nuroh et al., 2021). Examination of academic and holistic EL supports was integral for the effective application of research-driven instruction in future online practices.

Elements of the chapter include the literature search strategy, theoretical framework, and research literature review. Methods and resources for obtaining research articles are listed in the literature search strategy section. The theoretical framework examines background information on the communicative language learning approach and the social-emotional learning theory. The research literature review includes background information, development, and challenges related to ELs; the communicative approach; the social-emotional learning theory; and the effects of the 2020 pandemic on education.

Literature Search Strategy

Online databases were utilized as literature search strategies for the study. The primary database utilized was ProQuest, with JSTOR and Academia as secondary databases. In addition to databases, Google Scholar was utilized as a supplemental search engine. Primary terms in the literature search were *ELs*, *the communicative approach*, *social-emotional learning*, and *pandemic challenges*. Secondary terms were *challenges*, *success*, *benefits*, *development*, *instruction*, *emotional health*, *middle school*, *educator perspective*, *student perspective*, *prejudice*, *COVID-19*, and *Florida*. During the literature search, database filters were applied to ensure at least 76% of the research articles were from peer-reviewed journals that were no more than 5 years old. Journals of all research articles were independently researched to identify the source as peer-reviewed. In addition to peer-reviewed sources, state and national education departments were also incorporated for the selection of time-relevant academic statistics.

Theoretical Framework

The inclusion of targeted instructional supports was integral for the success of EL populations in early 21st-century learning environments (Gonzales & Skarin, 2019). As educator professionals sought research-driven support to enhance EL comprehension across content areas,

both linguistic and social-emotional factors required consideration for effective outcomes.

Progressive language learning techniques, such as communicative language teaching approaches

derived from Noam Chomsky's theory for communicative competence, provided a direct path to

content meaning despite language barriers (Bindileu, 2019; Savignon, 1991). Holistic student

supports, such as the social-emotional learning theory derived from CASEL (2022c), built

student foundations for integral social and emotional competencies. The purpose of this causal-

comparative quantitative study was to test for statistically significant differences in Florida

public school districts' EL ACCESS test scores between the treatment and control groups from

2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received communicative approach-aligned instruction and

social-emotional learning programs during the 2020 pandemic era. An examination of the

communicative approach and social-emotional learning theories connected to the purpose of the

study as foundations for selected EL supports. A combination of both linguistic and holistic

instructional supports for the inclusion of theories was pertinent for examination due to the

connection of theory implementation to student success (Duong & Bradshaw, 2017; Maulizan,

2016).

The Communicative Approach

The communicative approach to language learning focuses on meaningful

communication efforts to simultaneously build language proficiency (Koondhar et al., 2018).

Target language exchanges of meaning for authentic communication efforts promote student

motivation to produce oral target language output (Bindileu, 2019). Practices aligning to

communicative language teaching promote linguistic authenticity by utilizing language as a tool

rather than an academic target (Koondhar et al., 2018; Savignon, 1991). A focus on student oral

language skills based on context-driven, authentic interaction emphasizes content meaning as

opposed to linguistic goals (Bindileu, 2019). Perspectives of communicative language learning curriculum prioritize student-centered language learning criteria with authentic communication, collaboration, scaffolded language based on student needs, the inclusion of everyday vocabulary, as well as student-based language goals (Bindileu, 2019). Instructional implementation of communicative approach-aligned practice can be embedded as a freestanding checklist in curricular design without the need for external program selection (Bindileu, 2019).

Development of the Communicative Approach

The communicative approach was developed in the late 1960s in alignment with Chomsky's theory for communicative competence in language learning (Bindileu, 2019). The focus on unique and purposeful exchanges founded on the communicative approach gained popularity as a response to the lack of pragmatic linguistic components of the audio-lingual method, which was a former favored instructional approach during World War II (Koondhar et al., 2018). Unintentional language learning strategies, such as phrase memorization derived from behavioral theory practices, limited the opportunities for students to mold language structures for active practices for self-expression (Bindileu, 2019; Koondhar et al., 2018). The focus of student-centered instructional efforts coincided with Krashen's language learning hypotheses, specifically with the natural approach, which resulted in increased popularity of the communicative approach in the following decades (Koondhar et al., 2018). Nationwide adoption of communication approach-aligned strategies into renowned language standards, such as the ACTFL and the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages, increased implementation in 21st-century language learning efforts (Swanson & Hildebrandt, 2017).

Analysis of Application

As a developing common practice in the language research field, the communicative

approach gained popularity in 21st-century educational research. Maulizan (2016) found a

statistically significant increase in reading proficiencies of students who experienced methods

aligned to the communicative approach rather than traditional grammar-translation methods. Al-

Amri (2020) supported the implementation of the communicative approach through qualitative

research efforts in a case study exploring the improvement of communicative competence and

positive student perspectives of communicative approach-aligned instruction. In addition to

reading proficiencies and communicative competence, communicative-based activities can

increase EL participation in oral expression by engaging learners to build the self-efficacy

necessary for academic confidence (Yildirim, 2020).

Despite positive student perception of communicative approach effects on

communication, researchers questioned the effectiveness of communicative approach

instructional techniques on EL reading achievement in 21st-century learning environments

(Cotoc, 2020; Rahmawati, 2019; Wiyono et al., 2017). Although the communicative approach

had a positive effect on interpersonal competence, Wiyono et al. (2017) suggested the approach

did not provide a statistically significant increase in student reading proficiency. Al-Amri (2020)

and Maulizan (2016), in both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, demonstrated opposing

results to Wiyono et al.'s findings, suggesting the implementation of the communicative

approach resulted in higher reading achievement for ELs. The results of communicative

approach instructional strategies improved not only phonetic competency but also lexical and

grammatical skills for task-based academia and specific language for work preparation (Al-Amri,

2020; Bindileu, 2019; Lyubov et al., 2018).

Alignment to the Study

The communicative approach aligned with the study because ELs require consistent

quality instructional techniques to meet rigorous content expectations while simultaneously

building target language competencies (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016; C. K. Lee, 2010).

Students can experience multifaceted challenges, such as personal, environmental, and

contextual factors when attempting to speak a second language in front of peers (Aslan & Sahin,

2020). Communicative approach-aligned instruction provides research-driven linguistic support

in standard education environments by providing students with comprehensible input and

scaffolded techniques for target language production (Koondhar et al., 2018). A common

implementation of the communicative approach in 21st-century instructional efforts emphasized

the relevance of aligned instructional supports for EL academic improvement (Swanson &

Hildebrandt, 2017). Benefits of the communicative approach for language learners led to the

research study's assumption of higher target language proficiencies of ELs who experienced

communicative approach-aligned instruction.

Social-Emotional Learning Theory

The social-emotional learning theory focuses on the inclusion of social-emotional

competencies in 21st-century instruction to promote whole-child support rather than academic

achievement (Domitrovich et al., 2017). Ahmed et al. (2020) defined social-emotional

competencies as the skills students require to "recognize, understand, label, express and regulate

emotions" (p. 666). Positive effects from social-emotional learning competencies in research

include increased goal-oriented mindsets, self-control, emotion regulations, positivity, and

realistic planning skills (Allbright et al., 2019; Domitrovich et al., 2017). CASEL founded the

theory by identifying self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and

responsible decision-making as the five foundational social-emotional competencies for positive

student development (Ahmed et al., 2020).

Social-emotional competencies can be divided into intrapersonal and interpersonal categories (Domitrovich et al., 2017). Social awareness and self-management refer to the identification and control of personal emotions, whereas social awareness and relationship skills refer to interpersonal empathy and the establishment of healthy relationships with others (CASEL, 2022a). Responsible decision-making aligns with both intrapersonal and interpersonal competency categories as the ability to form healthy decisions on personal and social levels (CASEL, 2022a). Each competency can support students to build relationships and become responsible community members by promoting positive learning environments and social justice initiatives (Kennedy et al., 2019).

Social-emotional learning instructional implementations can be accomplished through the integration of freestanding standards into curricular design or the integration of a social-emotional learning program (Neth et al., 2020). Social-emotional learning-based programs built curricula or specific guidelines to follow set standards for developmentally appropriate social-emotional learning competencies. CASEL (2022a) evaluated a standard alignment for several programs promoting social-emotional competencies, including EL Education, Facing History and Ourselves, Lion's Quest, Second Step, Student Success Skills, and Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways. Although each program varied in theme, strategy, and design, the programs shared a common goal to build student social-emotional competencies for positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes (CASEL, 2022a; Taylor et al., 2017).

Development of Social-Emotional Learning

In response to a politically driven, sole focus on academic proficiency after the National Commission on Excellence in Education's 1983 *A Nation at Risk*, CASEL developed the social-emotional learning theory in the 1990s to refocus academic efforts on holistic student support

(CASEL, 2022b; USDE, 1983). After initial implementation, holistic social-emotional learning efforts were not prioritized in the subsequent decades due to the increased academic emphasis in place with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017; USDE, 2021). Despite former contradictions with nationally mandated academic policy, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 aligned with social-emotional learning practices in the inclusion of safe school climates conducive to student learning in school accountability measures (Ferguson, 2016). In 21st-century education reforms, social-emotional learning research and implementation expanded across the nation in response to the infidelity of the accountability era as well as the selection as a focused research interest by the American Educational Research Association Middle Level Education Research Special Interest Group (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017; Neth et al., 2020).

Analysis of Application

The social-emotional learning theory had a positive effect on student academic success by strengthening students' metacognitive learning strategies and increasing graduation rates (Taylor et al., 2017). Toth (2019) suggested social-emotional learning instructional techniques created a statistically significant increase in reading proficiency and decreased achievement gaps in minority student populations. Allbright et al. (2019) utilized qualitative means in a case study to suggest social-emotional learning practices benefited student achievement with positive behavior, school-wide initiatives, school climate, positive relationships, explicit instruction, and student data application. Social-emotional learning practices not only benefited students' social competence but also positively affected educators' regulation of emotions, resulting in positive learning environments for diverse learners (Palacios & Lemberger-Truelove, 2019; Sugishita & Dresser, 2019).

Although the holistic perspective demonstrated positive effects on student achievement in research, academic scholars questioned components of social-emotional learning foundations. Cho et al. (2019) suggested one challenge of social-emotional learning practices was the diverse cultural perceptions of educators and student guardians. Despite the differences in cultural norms among students within a learning community, a meta-analysis demonstrated social-emotional practices had positive effects on all students, including culturally and linguistically diverse student populations (Taylor et al., 2017). Blewitt et al. (2021) noted limitations of social-emotional practices, such as time constraints, lack of ongoing effective professional development, and low educator self-efficacy, were overcome through a practical selection of strategies applied consistently in daily practices.

Alignment to the Study

The social-emotional learning theory aligned with the study because ELs require social-emotional competencies to overcome multifaceted challenges in learning environments (Dresser, 2013). Social and emotional supports were integral for equitable learning opportunities for ELs (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Kennedy et al., 2019). Academic implementation of social-emotional learning coincided with educator goals of supporting EL well-being and accurately identifying EL academic needs (Cook, 2015; Johnson et al., 2018). Social-emotional learning techniques enhanced EL language proficiency by meeting emotional needs to reduce learning anxiety during literacy instruction, which portrayed alignment with the purpose of the study (Dresser, 2013; Fisher & Frey, 2019). The potential benefits of social-emotional learning led to the research study's assumption of higher language proficiencies in ELs who experienced social-emotional learning embedded instruction.

Research Literature Review

Equitable education required differentiated practices for students who identified as culturally and linguistically diverse in early 21st-century learning environments (Harshbarger, 2019). As the EL population continued to demonstrate academic achievement gaps in U.S. public schools from 1997 to 2017, research-driven practice and perspective became tools for educational equity (Glatt Yochai, 2019; The Nation's Report Card, 2022). Academic supports, such as linguistic, social, and emotional supplemental programs, were necessary adaptations for educational institutions required to promote equitable learning opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse student populations (Glatt Yochai, 2019; Salas, 2017). The application of the communicative approach and social-emotional learning strategies was integral to the purpose of the study because the strategies positively affected language proficiency by meeting the unique linguistic, social, and emotional needs of ELs (Sugishita & Dresser, 2019; Wiyono et al., 2017).

English Learners

In the United States, ELs are defined as students who are seeking to attain standard levels of English proficiency (NCES, 2022). Individual ELs have varied primary languages, unique language proficiency levels, background experiences, personalities, and interpersonal competencies (Cho et al., 2019; NCES, 2022; USDE, 2021). Students in the EL population have mandated access to language learning programs to receive support for simultaneous expectations of learning a language and achieving rigorous academic standards (Fillmore, 2014). In alignment with ESSA, each state was required to annually assess EL progress in language proficiency, provide assessment accommodations, and implement accountability systems for ongoing goals and formative assessment measures (USDE, 2021).

Development of the EL Population

The EL population represented approximately 10% of the student population in the United States in 2017 (NCES, 2022). Mexico was the primary home country for ELs who identified as immigrants, with 41.28% of the total EL population, making Spanish the most common primary language spoken in the United States other than English (Romo et al., 2018). Trends for large populations of ELs formed in western, southern, and southeastern states (NCES, 2022). States depicting the most rapid EL population growth were California, Arizona, Texas, Illinois, Florida, and New York (Romo et al., 2018). Romo et al. (2018) noted individuals who speak a second language increased from 11% in 1980 to 20.3% in 2010. Despite the ongoing increase in language learning populations, ongoing challenges remained for ELs in public schools (Fillmore, 2014). Aslan and Sahin (2020) suggested multifaceted elements of academic language learning environments caused frustration for ELs, according to qualitative research analyses.

Modern EL Challenges

Although ELs had the intellectual potential to achieve high academic goals, the lack of integral support resulted in negative outcomes (Fillmore, 2014). From 1992 to 2017, students who identified as having a Hispanic ethnicity consistently demonstrated an average reading proficiency of lower than the proficiency levels demonstrated by White students (The Nation's Report Card, 2022; Romo et al., 2018). Aslan and Sahin (2020) suggested "gender, age, culture, teacher traits, and classroom climate" (p. 21) can negatively affect the active classroom participation of ELs.

Although ELs were expected to gain language proficiency in U.S. schools over time, language proficiency requirements also increased. Educators can confuse student gains in basic target language communicative competence with increased proficiency in academic vocabulary.

Khatib and Taie (2016) emphasized Cummins's distinction of basic interpersonal communicative skills and cognitive academic language proficiency as pertinent to accurate EL proficiency assessment and appropriate support integration. Despite varying proficiency levels, ELs required high academic expectations and practice with complex texts supported with literacy-infused instruction (Fillmore, 2014; Lara-Alecio et al., 2018). Baker (2017) explored academically successful EL characteristics in a qualitative study of five participants. The results of the study indicated ELs benefited from instrumental reading support, emotional support, differentiated strategies for unique student needs, and continued targeted support throughout high school (Baker, 2017). Lara-Alecio et al. (2018) utilized a larger participant group of 276 for quantitative research to identify literacy infusion as beneficial support for ELs.

In addition to language and environmental barriers, educator bias based on cultural insensitivity to student ethnicity, socioeconomic status, cultural stereotypes, and background experiences can negatively affect EL progress and program placement (Glatt Yochai, 2019; Umansky et al., 2020). Common factors educators perceive to be associated with ELs are disruptive behaviors and low academic performance, which correlate to the disproportionate exclusionary discipline rates in 16 states (Cho et al., 2019; Whitford et al., 2018). Cho et al. (2019) suggested effective educators emphasized EL strengths rather than lack of skill, especially for students with refugee backgrounds. Students categorized in high-risk categories, such as homelessness, Title I, and migrant identifications, were more likely to be enrolled in ESL programs than in the standard student population, emphasizing the need for research-driven educator perspectives for educational equity (USDE, 2021). As research efforts for EL success progressed, the consideration of geographic location was an imperative consideration for research inclusion.

ELs in Florida

Florida supported the third-highest number of EL students in the United States, with 265,000 students tested into programs in 2022 (FLDOE, 2022a). Urban school districts tend to enroll larger concentrations of EL populations than do rural areas, which creates unequal EL population distributions throughout Florida school districts (NCES, 2022). Of the overall EL enrollment in Florida, the state demonstrated a 6.4% EL exclusionary discipline rate, with a single in-school suspension rate of 7.0% and a multiple out-of-school suspension rate of 6.0% (Whitford et al., 2018). Crane and Makkonen (2019) noted lower multitiered emotional support for students in Florida compared to other states with high EL student populations. The disproportionate exclusionary discipline rates demonstrated the need for the focus on marginalized student communities in Florida's instructional reform efforts.

Alignment to the Study

The identification of the challenges ELs confront in U.S. learning environments aligned with the study by indicating the necessity for pertinent support. The academic, social, and emotional needs of ELs required additional instructional support, such as elements of the communicative approach and social-emotional learning theory (Fritzen Case, 2015). Magnified challenges for ELs during the pandemic were lack of access to technology, medical issues, family challenges, social confinement, and mental health issues (Sayer & Braun, 2020; Sugarman & Lazarín, 2020). These increased challenges required increased implementations of student support and research-driven language learning instructional techniques.

Language Learning

The application of research-driven support for ELs required the implementation of appropriate instruction pertinent to unique student needs (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016).

Krashen's affective filter hypothesis posited affective factors, such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety, directly affect language learner proficiency gains (Wang, 2020). Wang (2020) examined the affective factors of 121 language learners to suggest educators can utilize the hypothesis to increase student learning motivation in instructional efforts. Barrow and Markman-Pithers (2016) suggested key instructional components of effective language supported alignment of communication to proficiency levels, small-group collaboration, explicit vocabulary instruction, use of academic level target language, and positive relationships. Language learning program selections for ELs in U.S. schools required careful consideration of multifaceted challenges to overcome negative factors in the language learning process.

Language Learning Practices for ELs

Common language programs mandated by state education departments include bilingual education programs and sheltered English immersion (López et al., 2015). Bilingual education programs utilize both English and students' native languages for dual immersion environments, while sheltered English immersion programs provide English-only instruction with scaffolded linguistic supports (López et al., 2015). Although bilingual education programs demonstrated higher student achievement, the design requires approximately 20% of ELs to share the same primary language as well as the hiring of certified bilingual educator teams (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016; López et al., 2015). Sheltered English immersion programs provide support aligned to the communicative approach for language learning with a student-focused curriculum, language as a tool to exchange ideas and information, purposeful instruction, and scaffolded academic contexts (Savignon, 1991).

Modern Language Learning Challenges

Although the application of communicative approach-aligned instruction can increase

student participation, communicative competencies, and reading proficiency, the essential

element for student success is classroom quality (Al-Amri, 2020; Barrow & Markman-Pithers,

2016; Maulizan, 2016; Yildirim, 2020). Gkonou et al. (2018) examined educator perspectives on

language learning psychology in a mixed-methods analysis of 311 participants, which

emphasized the importance of educator fidelity on instructional quality and learning

environments. Rahmawati (2019) explored challenges educators faced in the communicative

approach implementation process with a small number of participants to identify specific factors

to overcome. The results found student motivation, professional roles, class size, and income as

common challenges for communicative approach integration (Rahmawati, 2019). Daily

challenges of communicative approach integration coincided with the rigorous challenge of

effective communicative approach curricular design processes, which negatively affected

implementation rates (Koondhar et al., 2018).

Language Learning Programs in Florida

Although national education expectations required states to assess ELs and provide

language support programs, detailed guidance for program selection was not provided during the

2020 pandemic era, resulting in varied program designs among states (López et al., 2015). The

350% growth rate of the EL population in Florida included 21% of Spanish-speaking ELs

qualifying for the national mandate of bilingual programs for schools with a 20% shared native

language of ELs (López et al., 2015). Of the 67 Florida county school districts, 16 offered

bilingual education programs (Bilingual Education in Florida, 2021). Florida had no bilingual

programs in the northwest region, and only two counties offered bilingual programs in the

northeast region (Bilingual Education in Florida, 2021). The lack of bilingual programs in

northern Florida mandated the use of district-selected English immersion supportive programs

for ELs in standard classroom settings. The necessity of standard classroom teachers to provide

linguistic support for ELs in the Florida region demonstrated a common expectation for the

implementation of communicative approach-aligned programs and instructional efforts.

Alignment to the Study

The application of the communicative approach supported the purpose of the study

because aligned instructional strategies had positive effects on EL academic success (Al-Amri,

2020). Language learning requires unique instructional characteristics, such as linguistic,

comprehensive, and applicable criteria (Wiyono et al., 2017). Quality curriculum and instruction,

such as practices founded on the communicative approach, are integral for EL success. Sheltered

English immersion programs are applicable not only to in-person learning environments but also

to online learning platforms (Solodka et al., 2021). The implementation of language learning

supports during the online learning transitions of the 2020 pandemic era was a relevant research

opportunity to examine student outcomes for future practice. In addition to linguistic EL

supports, social-emotional characteristics promoted EL success in progressive learning

environments (Giboney Wall & Musetti, 2018).

Social-Emotional Learning

In addition to academic support for proficiency level-aligned language instruction,

holistic supports are integral for successful language learning factors. Allbright et al. (2019)

suggested social-emotional learning holistic supports improved student relationships and school

climate. Student relationships and school climate were prominent elements in lowering students'

affective filters and improving student achievement levels (Wang, 2020). Social challenges

presented in the EL community, such as violence, drugs, and bullying, brought attention to the

need for social-emotional learning for culturally and linguistically diverse student populations

(Dresser, 2013).

Social-Emotional Learning for ELs

Among academic-focused instructional supplements in standard classroom environments, ELs required holistic support for successful language development outcomes (Giboney Wall & Musetti, 2018). Burroughs and Barkauskas (2017) suggested social-emotional learning initiatives provided students with the tools necessary to form supportive relationships and develop into engaged citizens in the community. The implementation of instruction embedded in social-emotional learning foundations increased students' sense of empathy for other students of diverse cultures, to benefit students who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse (Fisher & Frey, 2019). Toth (2019) suggested leadership opportunities for students during collaborative activities were a crucial benefit of social-emotional learning for ELs in standard classrooms.

In addition to empathy and leadership, self-efficacy was a common research focus for EL benefits of social-emotional learning practices. Niehaus and Adelson (2014) applied a quantitative research design to examine the effects of EL self-efficacy; data indicated a positive correlation between EL emotional health factors and academic achievement. Sandilos et al. (2020) explored EL self-efficacy from a qualitative perspective and identified relevance between support selection and EL self-efficacy in successful practice. The intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies promoted by social-emotional learning created a positive learning environment for enhanced student efficacy and academic opportunities for linguistically diverse learners (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016).

Modern Social-Emotional Learning Challenges

Despite successful social-emotional learning initiatives in U.S. schools, a divide existed between academic research and the common application of holistic support for at-risk students

(Giboney Wall & Musetti, 2018). Cho et al. (2019) applied exploratory research efforts to identify educator perspectives as an area for improvement due to increased emphasis on EL skill deficiency rather than strengths in program selection processes as well as daily instructional implementation. The lack of social-emotional learning integration in U.S. schools not only limited the potential for quality environmental learning factors but also increased negative EL emotional health criteria, which correlate with low achievement levels (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). Sugishita and Dresser (2019) suggested schools can select social-emotional learning standards or programs pertinent to unique student needs to form beneficial support for EL communities.

Social challenges during online learning aligned with the social-emotional theory design to utilize relationships to make learning experiences more meaningful for students (CASEL, 2022a; Neth et al., 2020). As ELs faced multifaceted challenges in 21st-century academia, positive social interaction was pertinent to forming successful paths within learning environments (Johnson et al., 2018; Kamei & Harriot, 2021). Baker (2017) applied a qualitative research design to explore tendencies of successful EL outcomes. The data indicated positivity, ongoing support, and emotional support for reading promoted EL success. Despite positive results of social-emotional learning initiatives, each state-mandated different guidelines for holistic program implementations (Ferguson, 2016).

Social-Emotional Learning Programs in Florida

Although national mandates did not require assessments of holistic support practices in U.S. schools, ESSA encouraged each state to establish school environments conducive to student success (Ferguson, 2016). The state of Florida did not mandate the implementation of social-emotional learning standards into districts' curricula, but districts had the opportunity to select

social-emotional learning programs for standard use (Florida SEL Collaborative, 2022). Social-emotional learning programs across the state include Leaps, Conscious Discipline, Sanford Harmony, Leader in Me, Restorative Practices, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Five-Star Life, Student Success Skills, You Are Not Alone, Child Safety Matters, Merrell's Strong Kids, Second Step, Teen Safety Matters, Character Counts, Project Wisdom, Botvin Life Skills, and SS Grin (Florida SEL Collaborative, 2022).

Alignment to the Study

Instructional and curricular application of social-emotional learning competencies supported the purpose of the study because instructional strategies aligned to the theory enhanced EL academic and emotional success (Duong & Bradshaw, 2017; Sugishita & Dresser, 2019). Online learning initiatives presented unique academic and interpersonal challenges to ELs, increasing the need for holistic support for at-risk students (Baquero et al., 2020). Kamei and Harriot (2021) noted social-emotional learning efforts in online learning environments supported students deficient in social connection opportunities in an unprecedented era, which can be beneficial in state-mandated online learning transitions.

Pandemic Challenges to Education

Existing educational issues and reform initiatives were halted in 2020 as the mandated online learning initiative during the pandemic era shifted standard classroom settings into online platforms without time for sufficient training (Martinez & Broemmel, 2021). Although online learning presented benefits for the inclusion of cognitive, analysis, knowledge construction, knowledge expansion, and collaborative domains in learning development, unforeseen transitions into technologically driven design negatively affected educator practice due to high time consumption, decreased professional motivation, and low student engagement (Panisoara et

al., 2020; Yu, 2021; Zhong, 2020). Young Doo et al. (2020) developed a meta-analysis to

determine best practices for the selection of online learning supports. The data demonstrated

scaffolded metacognitive techniques to be effective for online learner success (Young Doo et al.,

2020). Despite attainable research-driven strategies, the heightened need for the emotional health

of all stakeholders and inconsistent educator motivation in online learning initiatives negatively

affected instructional quality (Maqsood et al., 2021; Panisoara et al., 2020).

Educator Challenges

Varying levels of technological proficiencies among educator communities created

difficulties in the consistent implementation of research-driven strategies (Cotoc, 2020). Malkus

et al. (2020) noted a number of educators were learning how to apply technology-based

instruction for the first time simultaneous to the daily application of online learning programs. In

addition to inconsistent proficiencies, Martinez and Broemmel (2021) applied qualitative

research designs to explore educator perspectives demonstrating inconsistent perceptions of

sufficient support, resulting in unclear support initiatives. Panisoara et al. (2020) utilized

qualitative research means to explore educator motivational issues during online learning

transitions. The data indicated high levels of negativity, burnout, and technologically related

stress (Panisoara et al., 2020).

Kaharuddin (2020) explained that research-driven instructional strategies, such as cultural

integration, were not sufficient in overcoming the mental barriers of educators and students in

quarantined online learning. Panisoara et al. (2020) noted a common need for clear, effective

strategies to support student learning in online classrooms. As educators confronted motivational

obstacles for best practices, students experienced challenges regarding lack of access to

technology, social regulations, communication barriers, and academic struggles (Kamei &

Harriot, 2021; Kim & Padilla, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020).

Student Challenges

Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) analyzed qualitative data and found student stress levels were even higher than those of educators during the mandated online learning era. Unique characteristics, such as personality traits, education level, self-efficacy, and socioeconomic status, had negative results on student success in online learning programs, creating inequitable learning opportunities (Openo, 2020; Sandilos et al., 2020; Yu, 2021). Yu (2021) noted online learning had negative effects on student health and attitude toward learning based on unique student characteristics. Yuan et al. (2019) suggested effective practices for rigorous digital literacy in online platforms were attainable through the application of relevant instructional support. Culturally responsive instructional techniques and positive focus in learning environments presented opportunities for ELs to develop active learning roles (Yuan et al., 2019). As students lacked successful online learning supports, academic challenges coincided with age-relevant hardships of distance learning initiatives.

Challenges Specific to ELs

Marginalized student populations experienced disproportionately negative effects from online learning compared to the general population (Sayer & Braun, 2020). The marginalizing factors faced by ELs during the pandemic increased student affective filters, resulting in higher learning issues than in former in-person learning initiatives (Sayer & Braun, 2020; Wang, 2020). Chametzky (2017) suggested common responses to high affective filters in online learning environments include isolation, interaction, motivation, and settling behaviors. In response to affective factors regarding resources, academic support, and emotional support, U.S. educators reported ELs as difficult to reach during online learning initiatives (Sugarman & Lazarín, 2020).

EL Resource Challenges. Baquero et al. (2020) described negative factors in the Latinx community to include housing uncertainty, limited access to medical support, and language barriers affecting health literacy. A lack of basic access to technical devices, Internet connections, and remote learning supports increased inequitable educational opportunities for the EL community (Mahyoob, 2020; Sugarman & Lazarín, 2020). Kim and Padilla (2020) utilized a qualitative case study and found the digital divide among EL families to have a significant connection to EL learning opportunities during online instruction. The lack of resources to receive instruction was not the only hindering factor to the educational equity of ELs.

EL Academic Challenges. A decrease in academic motivation and instructional support expanded ongoing social and academic challenges unique to ELs to worsen issues of educational inequity (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014; Openo, 2020; Umansky et al., 2020). The high technical proficiency necessary to implement the communicative approach for positive research-driven online learning initiatives created barriers to the integration of consistent linguistic supports (Al-Amri, 2020; Cotoc, 2020). In addition to the lack of linguistic support, the decreased opportunity for educator collaboration limited integrated strategies for EL success, such as scaffolded instruction (Kamei & Harriot, 2021; Villavicencio et al., 2021). As students lacked communication opportunities in academic language, proficiency gains slowed in oral output (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020; Sayer & Braun, 2020). Negative effects on communicative competencies emphasized the need for student support specific to student proficiency levels and self-efficacy for all learners to overcome at-risk characteristics (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020; Openo, 2020; Sandilos et al., 2020).

EL Emotional Challenges. Communicative competency was not the only negative effect ELs experienced during online learning transitions. Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) used a

mixed methodology to research the negative emotional factors of online learning transitions on

ELs. The data analysis presented implications of increased stress levels throughout the EL

population (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(2020, as cited in Baquero et al., 2020) reported, that although the Latinx population formed only

approximately 18% of the nation, the Latinx community represented 34% of the COVID-19

cases across the United States. As ELs faced uncertainty amid the pandemic, negative emotional

barriers in quarantined environments outweighed educator efforts in learning communities

(Kaharuddin, 2020).

Alignment to the Study

The inclusion of pandemic difficulties in education aligned with the study by identifying

pertinent challenges in EL support consistencies. Every student can reach high academic

expectations with appropriate instructional support in both in-person and online academic

settings (Yuan et al., 2019). The inclusion of the communicative approach and the social-

emotional learning theory presented research-driven solutions for student needs (Cotoc, 2020;

Kamei & Harriot, 2021). The focus on challenges in the pandemic era was crucial for future

research efforts to prepare for the possibility of unprecedented online learning transitions in

future practice.

Gap in Literature

The lack of research-driven academic and social-emotional support for ELs in online

learning initiatives presented a literature gap in the education field. Despite efforts to reinstate in-

person learning initiatives, unknown factors of the pandemic era resulted in uncertain time

frames for online learning initiatives from state to state. Challenges presented in the research,

such as the lack of resources, communication barriers, and decreased language exposure,

unveiled unique EL needs for inclusion in improvement efforts (Kim & Padilla, 2020; Sayer & Braun, 2020; Sugarman & Lazarín, 2020). Further research for online EL learning supports was crucial because educators required a selection of successful research-driven strategies to address the unique needs of marginalized student populations. Decreased instructional quality is not an inevitable result of in-person to online learning transitions if educators have the instructional tools necessary to overcome challenges.

Chapter Summary

As educational professionals strive for social equity in early 21st-century academia, research-driven practices are crucial for the unique needs of students who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse. Achievement gaps and social inequity are challenges for ELs in 21st-century learning environments (Aslan & Sahin, 2020; Johnson et al., 2018). Instructional supports, such as the communicative approach and social-emotional learning strategies, create opportunities for ELs to benefit not only on an academic level but also in a holistic manner (Al-Amri, 2020; Sugishita & Dresser, 2019). Unique educational challenges presented by the mandated quarantine in the pandemic era escalated common issues for marginalized learners. Although previous research had examined the effectiveness of the communicative approach and social-emotional learning implementations on EL success, further research was needed to examine the statistical significance of both academic and holistic supports for ELs during mandated online learning transitions of the 2020 pandemic era. The present study extended the knowledge base by examining the effectiveness of both academic and social supports during transitional online learning initiatives in Florida.

The application of a quantitative methodology with a causal-comparative study design provided an opportunity to examine statistically significant gains of implementation of the

communicative approach, the social-emotional learning theory, and a combination of both

approaches on EL proficiency levels on ACCESS tests during the pandemic era. The causal-

comparative design aligned with the study by identifying relationships between variables for an

event from a past time frame. The quantitative methodology aligned with the research questions

by examining the effects on EL proficiency resulting from the implementation of the

communicative approach and social-emotional learning as independent variables demonstrated

on annual ACCESS tests as the dependent variables.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As educators strive to provide effective instruction for students in online learning initiatives, research-driven instruction is imperative for equitable reform in 21st-century education (Liu & Ball, 2019). Marginalized student populations, such as ELs, require additional instructional support to experience the same learning opportunities as their English-speaking peers (Fisher & Frey, 2019). The problem was the abrupt transition from in-person to online learning in the 2020 pandemic era presented challenges for educators to implement best practices, such as the communicative approach and social-emotional learning principles, necessary for EL success (Openo, 2020). The purpose of this causal-comparative quantitative study was to test for statistically significant differences in Florida public school districts' EL ACCESS test scores between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs during the 2020 pandemic era.

The study design had three research questions:

Research Question 1 Was there a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction for students during the 2020 pandemic era?

Research Question 2: Was there a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era?

Research Question 3: Was there a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of both communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs

applied together during the 2020 pandemic era?

Six hypotheses directed the research. The null hypothesis for Research Question 1 stated, there was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction during the 2020 pandemic era. Failure to reject the null hypothesis for Research Question 1 would support the alternative hypothesis of a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction for students during the 2020 pandemic era.

For Research Question 2, the null hypothesis stated that there was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era. A rejection of the null hypothesis of Research Question 2 would support the alternative hypothesis of a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era. Rejection of the null hypotheses would result in a statistically significant effect of the independent variables on EL language proficiency (DeMoulin & Kritsonis, 2009).

Research Question 3 combined the between-subjects independent variables of Research Questions 1 and 2 to examine the benefits of a combination of instructional approaches. The null hypothesis for Research Question 3 stated, there was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received implementation of both communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied together during the 2020 pandemic era. Failure to reject the null

hypothesis of Research Question 3 would result in a true alternative hypothesis (DeMoulin &

Kritsonis, 2009) of a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups

from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received implementation of both communicative

approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied together during the

2020 pandemic era. In addition to the research questions and hypotheses, the study design and

rationale, role of the researcher, research procedures, data analysis, reliability and validity, and

ethical procedures describe the analysis of the effectiveness of instructional approaches for ELs

in online programs.

<p style="text-align:center;">**Research Methodology, Design, and Rationale**</p>

A quantitative research methodology aligned with the study based on the requirement of

statistical analyses to determine the statistical significance of instructional approaches on EL

success (B. Lee, 1985). The causal-comparative design was necessary to examine variables

specific to practices formerly applied in online learning initiatives during the pandemic era

(Corbetta, 2003). Application of a causal-comparative quantitative design aligned with the

research questions by providing analyses to examine the retrospective influences of variables on

EL language development (Fulmer, 2018).

Methodology

A quantitative research methodology was appropriate to determine the statistically

significant effects of independent variables on the dependent variable. Between-subjects

independent variables for the research questions were the communicative approach, social-

emotional learning, as well as a combination of both approaches. Time was the within-subjects

independent variable for each research question. Dependent variables in response to the

instructional approaches of each research question were EL linguistic proficiency scores from

annual ACCESS tests. The use of English proficiency data from students' ACCESS test scores

provided a continuous dependent variable to meet mixed ANOVA assumptions (Laerd Statistics,

2015).

Although the pandemic era presented an opportunity for qualitative research efforts on

perception in attitudes, supports, and resources, the lack of state testing data created difficulties

for quantitative analysis of instructional approaches (Kaharuddin, 2020; Kim & Padilla, 2020;

Middleton, 2020). The application of a quantitative research design was necessary to provide

educators with research-driven evaluations of practices related to student results. By examining

the effects of specific instructional approaches on EL proficiencies, educational professionals can

make informed decisions when designing supportive EL instructional techniques for digital

curriculum in future practice.

Design

A retrospective causal-comparative design was appropriate for the research analysis due

to the examination of variable relationships during a targeted past time frame (Fulmer, 2018).

Although the selection of a causal-comparative design decreased the control of extraneous

variables in comparison to other quasi-experimental designs, the design was necessary due to the

inability to manipulate variables affecting students' ability to learn a language during a past time

frame (Fulmer, 2018; B. Lee, 1985). External variables affecting language learning processes

include social, emotional, physical, and environmental elements, which differ from student to

student (Dresser, 2013; Wang, 2020). Despite the limited validity from uncontrollable extraneous

variables, the causal-comparative design was beneficial for educational professionals to reflect

on successful learning outcomes during unprecedented times. Trends in successful outcomes can

assist educators' instructional decision-making for potential future applications if state officials

reinstate online learning mandates.

Selected between-subjects independent variables for the research questions included the implementation of the communicative approach, the social-emotional learning theory, as well as a combination of both approaches applied together. Between-subjects independent variables served as criteria in the district selection process. Time was the within-subjects independent variable for each research question. The dependent variable for each research question was EL linguistic proficiency data from annual Florida ACCESS tests. Each dependent variable was measured with a mixed ANOVA test to analyze district averages of EL ACCESS test scores from the spring of 2019 and the spring of 2020.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to remain objective during data collection and analysis (B. Lee, 1985). In alignment with causal-comparative design, identification of variants in the independent variable was crucial to limit negative effects on study validity (B. Lee, 1985). My employment in the state of Florida created potential conflicts of district categorization in the participant selection process. Precise research-driven elements and SME perceptions were applied for the specific inclusion criteria of each participant group. The inclusion of SMEs helped mitigate researcher bias in the participant selection process. Due to my practices and preferences as a language educator, researcher bias also required mitigation to disconnect researcher favor and predictions of the effectiveness of research strategies in the study results. The collection of data from a past time frame and the use of digital software for statistical analysis mitigated researcher bias in the data analysis process.

Research Procedures

In addition to objectivity in research analysis, the causal-comparative research design

required detailed considerations for each step of the research procedures. Zyphur and Pierides

(2020) emphasized the presence of both logic and ethical values throughout quantitative

methodological processes. The research procedures for the causal-comparative quantitative study

included population and sample selection, archival data, instrumentation, instrument validation,

and data collection.

Population and Sample Selection

The target population for the study was K–12 ELs from public school districts in Florida.

Each research question examined an aggregated data set of EL ACCESS scores, per school

district, related to a selected between-subjects independent variable. Research Question 1

examined average data scores from districts aligned to the communicative approach, or districts

in Group 1. Research Question 2 examined data from school districts aligned to the social-

emotional learning theory, or districts in Group 2. Research Question 3 examined data from

school districts aligned to both the communicative approach and the social-emotional learning

theory, or districts in Group 3. Groups 1, 2, and 3 were compared to Group 0, a control group

without district alignment to the communicative approach or social-emotional learning, to

increase the validity of statistical conclusions (B. Lee, 1985).

A cluster sampling method design was aligned with the use of a parameter with specific

language characteristics (Latpate & Kshirsagar, 2019). A cluster sampling method was necessary

to group selected districts to align with the study's independent variables. The selection criteria

for all four groups were specific to the independent variables implemented at districts during

online learning initiatives of the pandemic era. For each research question, the participating

districts were selected based on implementation or lack of implementation of the target

instructional approaches and programs during the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years.

The criteria for Group 1 were founded on district communicative approach implementations during the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years. Despite the foundations of the communicative approach in the design of the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages, an instructional analysis was required due to the lack of specific communicative approach-aligned programs in district-wide implementations (Swanson & Hildebrandt, 2017). A determination of the communicative approach in a district's instruction was determined based on specific instructional characteristics.

Considering no official checklist existed to determine the effective implementation of the communicative approach, the perspectives of three SMEs were applied in the participant selection criteria for Research Questions 1 and 3. Although SMEs are not required for quantitative mixed ANOVA tests, the inclusion of SMEs' reflections mitigated researcher bias via a collaborative identification of the most influential aspects of the communicative approach for the selection of appropriate school districts in variable-aligned groups. The selected criteria to determine the use of the communicative approach were target language immersion, student-centered curriculum, the inclusion of four language skills, cultural awareness, authentic materials, authentic assessments, and metalinguistic error correction (Alharbi, 2020; Jabeen, 2014; Moncada Linares & Díaz Romero, 2016; Toro et al., 2019; see Appendix A). Districts not meeting the selection criteria were excluded.

Criteria for Group 2 participant selection were social-emotional learning program adoption or the implementation of freestanding social-emotional learning standards from the theory founder, CASEL (2022c). Specific social-emotional learning theory-aligned programs provided clear indicators of instructional implementation, eliminating the need for further SME analysis of the independent variable application for Research Question 2. The selection criteria

excluded districts without social-emotional theory curricular integration during the 2018–2019
and 2019–2020 school years. Criteria for Group 3 selection combined the criteria for Groups 1
and 2. Each group was selected from within the same state to enhance comparability of the
geographic locations of districts reflecting the implementation of the independent variables
(Leonhardt et al., 2017).

Sample sizes necessary for the true random sample required data from each district with
published state data for all four groups for each test to maintain a confidence level of 95%
(Select Statistical Services, 2022). Study sample sizes were determined by the Select Statistical
Services sample size calculator. The requirement of equal sample sizes for mixed ANOVA tests
required each data set to have the same number of district student linguistic proficiency scores.
Districts grouped with additional data from the smallest set were selected randomly.

Archival Data

Archival data from the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years were collected from the
FLDOE website. Each data set was recorded in Microsoft Excel workbooks on a password-
protected computer. Aggregated data of ACCESS district test scores were publicly accessible via
the state website for ELs in Grades K–12 (FLDOE, 2022b). The use of publicly accessible data
for research analysis did not require permission from the state (see Appendix B). District names
depicted personally identifiable information but were not entered into the Excel document. Study
participant data were categorized by group and district number. Site permission was not required
for the completion of the communicative approach checklist as I completed the forms, and no
contact was made with district personnel.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for the participant selection process was a criteria checklist to

determine the alignment of each district's curriculum and instruction to the communicative

approach. The alignment of communicative approach elements was necessary because

communicative approach instructional application served as the independent variable for

Research Question 1 and partially as the independent variable for Research Question 3. Data sets

of Group 1 and Group 3 required the use of the communicative approach. Research-driven

criteria were target language-only instruction, student-centered curriculum, the inclusion of four

language skills, cultural awareness, authentic materials, authentic assessments, and

metalinguistic error correction (Alharbi, 2020; Jabeen, 2014; Moncada Linares & Díaz Romero,

2016; Toro et al., 2019).

Instrumentation Validation

Reviews and suggestions of three foreign language education SMEs were critical for the

classification of sufficient communicative approach elements. Collaborative insights helped to

reduce researcher bias in the participant selection process and enhance reliability and validity

(Sireci, 2007). SME selection was based on capability, with a minimum of 10 years of language

instruction experience, expertise in positions as department heads or program directors, and

availability for participation (Sterling Mattoon, 2005). SME 1 was a university foreign language

department head with 20 years of language teaching experience (see Appendix C). SME 2 was a

regional ESL department head for U.S. public schools with 28 years of language teaching

experience (see Appendix D). SME 3 was a language program director with over 15 years of

experience (see Appendix E). Each SME approved the elements selected for inclusion in the

communicative approach participant selection criteria checklist.

The participant selection criteria checklist determined whether each school district's

instructional practices reflected the consistent district-wide implementation of the

communicative approach. After evaluation of the SMEs' suggestions, authentic assessments and

Likert-style questions were added to the checklist design. Checklist reviews were based on

between-subject independent variable implementations during the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020

school years. A careful evaluation of the criteria checklist was conducted to determine whether

school districts' practices reflected targeted instructional programs. Because the study design

utilized archival data for statistical analysis, no additional instrumentation was required in the

data collection process.

Data Collection

Once the districts were grouped based on alignment to the research question independent

variables, the data sets were copied into an Excel workbook. Each data set was grouped by

research question and group for analysis preparation. The data were transferred in random order

for listing in the Excel workbook. District names were replaced with codes—letters for groups

and numbers for districts—for organizational purposes (Swales, 2021). For example, the 11th

linguistic percentage listed in the Group 1 data set was labeled as A11. All data sets were stored

confidentially in a password-protected digital device in a locked location.

Data Analysis

EL linguistic proficiency data sets were randomly categorized and coded in group

clusters in an Excel document. Parametric data were examined with SPSS software paired with

Laerd Statistics. A two-way mixed ANOVA test examined the research questions. The two-way

mixed ANOVA test analyzed data for statistically significant differences in EL ACCESS test

scores as the dependent variables for each research question. Time was used as the within-

subjects independent variable with annual test data from the spring of 2019 and the spring of

2020 (Laerd Statistics, 2015). Between-subjects independent variables were district participation

in adopted programs with communicative approach-aligned instruction for Research Question 1,

social-emotional learning programs for Research Question 2, and both approaches applied

together for Research Question 3. Results of the mixed ANOVA tests either rejected or failed to

reject the null hypotheses regarding statistically significant effects of the independent variables

on EL linguistic proficiency levels (Laerd Statistics, 2015).

Statistical assumptions of mixed ANOVA tests included the use of one continuous

dependent variable, the inclusion of a within-subjects independent variable and a between-

subjects independent variable, no significant outliers, normal distributions, homogeneity of

variances, and sphericity (Laerd Statistics, 2015). The use of box plots determined whether any

significant outliers existed in the data sets that could negatively affect results due to a large

influence. All the data reported served as the true random sample, but if data were removed from

the set due to outliers, the remaining data sets served as the actual sample. Application of the

Shapiro–Wilk test of normality was used to test the data for normal distributions (Laerd

Statistics, 2015). The homogeneity of variances was tested with Levene's test for equality of

variances (Laerd Statistics, 2015).

Once the outlier and normality assumptions were tested, the repeated measures procedure

in SPSS was used as an alternative test for outliers with Studentized residuals, normality with

normal Q-Q plots, and homogeneity of variances with Levene's test for equality of variances

(Laerd Statistics, 2015). Although a sphericity test was a mixed ANOVA test assumption, the

test was not necessary for the pretest and posttest design because three separate time frames were

not used for data collection to test for all possible pairings (Mishra et al., 2019). Each research

question was examined simultaneously with the repeated measures procedure in SPSS. After the

assumptions were tested, the two-way mixed ANOVA procedure in SPSS tested for statistical

significance between the between-subjects independent variables and within-subjects

independent variables.

Research Question 1

        The null hypothesis for Research Question 1 stated, there was no statistically significant

difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group

received communicative approach-aligned instruction during the 2020 pandemic era. If the two-

way mixed ANOVA procedure in SPSS did not detect a statistically significant difference,

analyses failed to reject the null hypothesis, and a post hoc test determined potentially

statistically significant main effects (DeMoulin & Kritsonis, 2009). If the two-way mixed

ANOVA procedure in SPSS detected a statistically significant difference, study analyses of one-

way ANOVA tested for each simple main effect, resulting in a rejection of the null hypothesis

and a true alternative hypothesis. The alternative hypothesis for Research Question 1 stated,

there was a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from

2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction for

students during the 2020 pandemic era.

Research Question 2

        The null hypothesis for Research Question 2 stated, there was no statistically significant

difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group

received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era. If the two-

way mixed ANOVA procedure in SPSS did not detect a statistically significant difference,

analyses failed to reject the null hypothesis, and a post hoc test determined potentially

statistically significant main effects. If the two-way mixed ANOVA procedure in SPSS detected

a statistically significant difference, study analyses of one-way ANOVA tested for each simple

main effect, resulting in a rejection of the null hypothesis and a true alternative hypothesis

(Demoulin & Kritsonis, 2009). The alternative hypothesis for Research Question 2 stated, there

was a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to

2020 after a treatment group received implementation of social-emotional learning during the

2020 pandemic era.

Research Question 3

The null hypothesis for Research Question 3 stated, there was no statistically significant

difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups

received implementation of both communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-

emotional learning programs applied together during the 2020 pandemic era. If the two-way

mixed ANOVA procedure in SPSS did not detect a statistically significant difference, analyses

failed to reject the null hypothesis, and a post hoc test determined potentially statistically

significant main effects (DeMoulin & Kritsonis, 2009). If the two-way mixed ANOVA

procedure in SPSS detected a statistically significant difference, study analyses of one-way

ANOVAs for each simple main effect resulted in a rejection of the null hypothesis and a true

alternative hypothesis. The alternative hypothesis for Research Question 3 stated that there was a

statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020

after treatment groups received implementation of both communicative approach-aligned

instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied together during the 2020 pandemic

era. Despite the capability to reject null hypotheses, the causal-comparative design limited the

generalization of study results due to the inability to control extraneous factors as a

nonexperimental research category (Fulmer, 2018).

Reliability and Validity

Careful consideration of reliability and validity was required to improve the relevance of the retrospective causal-comparative study results (Lesko et al., 2020). The study's causal-comparative design had no threats to external validity regarding testing reactivity, interaction effects of selection and experimental variables, or reactive effects of experimental arrangements due to the use of archival data from former learning initiatives. The specificity of variables was imperative for the study results. Control over the specificity of variables was addressed by using the communicative approach checklist criteria to identify specific variables for participant inclusion. Variable specificity was crucial for the inclusion of ELs in research to avoid the overgeneralization of minority populations (Hill, 2021). School districts selected for implementation of one independent variable excluded aspects of another independent variable to reduce the threat of multiple treatment interference and selection bias (Infante-Rivard & Cusson, 2018).

Despite the use of archival data, a threat to internal validity was maturation (Handley et al., 2018). The use of data from different school years to measure reading proficiency improvement over time affected the maturation of students from year to year. The application of a causal-comparative study design limited the ability to address extraneous variable controls. Limitations of the study were considered in the research analysis. Additional limitations of the causal-comparative design on internal validity were the fallacy of homogeneity and the post hoc fallacy (Fulmer, 2018). Although the study design limited control to internal validity, study reliability was strengthened by the use of archival data to limit errors in the data collection process. Researcher objectivity was also enhanced through the design by the use of prerecorded student test scores from archival data. The inclusion of SMEs and archival data addressed the

potential for researcher bias regarding the personal preference of target instructional strategies.

Ethical Procedures

Participant protection was an integral element throughout the research process. Informed consent was imperative to protect human research participants throughout the research process (Castro-Molina, 2020). Receipt of informed consent forms from all contacted stakeholders in the study was necessary to maintain ethical research procedures. State-wide district information necessary for categorization in the participant selection process was publicly accessible along with archival district EL ACCESS test scores. Due to the availability of data from the FLDOE website, no human participants were contacted throughout the research process.

The Belmont Report identified respect for persons, beneficence, and justice as foundations for ethical research procedures (Adashi et al., 2018). Respect for persons was not an issue because the analysis of data required no human contact (Adashi et al., 2018). Data for the study will be protected in a secure, locked location on a password-protected device for a minimum of 5 years after study completion. In addition, the data for the study were separated from all personally identifiable information via the removal of student names and school district names to enhance confidentiality and promote beneficence by decreasing participant risk of identification. Justice was also demonstrated through fair procedures in the participant selection process with the review of SMEs (Adashi et al., 2018).

Chapter Summary

As educators continue to strive for equity in curriculum and instruction practices, intermittent online-mandated instruction requires research-driven designs to maintain best practices for equitable learning experiences (Ibacache et al., 2021). The purpose of this causal-comparative quantitative study was to test for statistically significant differences in Florida

public school districts' EL ACCESS test scores between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs during the 2020 pandemic era.

A process of statistical analysis required careful considerations for the study methodology, design, rationale, role of the researcher, research procedures, data analysis, reliability and validity, and ethical procedures. Research findings and data analysis results can help educators make research-driven decisions when selecting supports for ELs in online learning initiatives.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Data Analysis Results

The background of the problem was ELs have the potential to achieve rigorous learning standards but require support for unique linguistic and emotional needs (Fillmore, 2014). The problem was the abrupt transition from in-person to online learning in the 2020 pandemic era presented challenges for educators to implement best practices, such as the communicative approach and social-emotional learning principles, necessary for EL success (Openo, 2020). The purpose of this causal-comparative quantitative study was to test for statistically significant differences in Florida public school districts' EL ACCESS test scores between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs during the 2020 pandemic era.

Three research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: Was there a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction for students during the 2020 pandemic era?

Research Question 2: Was there a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era?

Research Question 3: Was there a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of both communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied together during the 2020 pandemic era?

Criteria in the data analysis process included data collection, data analysis and results, and reliability and validity.

Data Collection

The Florida ACCESS testing data demonstrated the annual averages of EL proficiency rates for each district in the state (FLDOE, 2022a). Aggregated district data reflected a combination of demographic characteristics of students throughout the state. The FLDOE (2022b) published archival ACCESS testing data for public availability and granted permission for the data to be applied for research purposes (see Appendix B). Annual ACCESS test data were analyzed for three treatment groups and a control group, resulting in four between-subjects independent variables coded as 0, 1, 2, and 3. A two-way mixed ANOVA tested for statistically significant differences between and within the treatment groups and control group over time. Each district with public data was selected from the smallest treatment group to maintain a confidence level of 95% (Select Statistical Services, 2022). Equal size data sets were necessary for data analysis. Once districts were clustered into independent variable-aligned treatment groups, the smallest data set was five total districts' scores. Five districts were randomly chosen from the larger data sets to form equal sizes for the three treatment groups and the control group.

Research Question 1

The null hypothesis for Research Question 1 stated that there was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction during the 2020 pandemic era. The data set selected for analysis of Research Question 1 was aggregated EL ACCESS test scores from districts implementing communicative approach-aligned instruction for the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years. The data set excluded districts with social-emotional learning programs to distinguish the independent variables for each research question and mitigate selection bias (Infante-Rivard & Cusson, 2018).

Effective data collection efforts for communicative approach alignment created a challenge as no state-mandated evaluation criteria existed for linguistic support in instruction. In response to the lack of state language support indicators, researcher-generated participant selection criteria identified key characteristics of the communicative approach for district selection purposes (see Appendix A). The communicative approach participant selection criteria were approved by three SMEs with 15–28 years in language education (see Appendices C–E). Communicative approach practices in the criteria included native-language instruction for four language skills, authentic materials, student collaboration, and metalinguistic error correction practices (Bindileu, 2019; Koondhar et al., 2018; Savignon, 1991).

Inconsistent district practices and lack of public access to specific district language supports created complications in aligning districts to the communicative approach checklist criteria. Despite common native language supports from school translators throughout the state, 16 districts offered bilingual programs with mandated target language instruction for at least 50% of the instructional distribution (Bilingual Education in Florida, 2021). The bilingual programs' practices were founded on The Coral Way Bilingual Program, in which 50% of instructional practices were facilitated explicitly in English as the target language (Coady, 2019). The even distribution of a two-way target language instruction as well as the use of collaboration and authentic materials in The Coral Way Bilingual Program demonstrated a connection between the bilingual program philosophies and the communicative approach (Coady, 2019). As the program with the closest foundational similarities to the communicative approach, districts providing the dual language bilingual program in Florida were selected for inclusion in Group 1.

In the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years, five Florida districts met the criteria for Group 1. The data sets were transferred from the Florida ACCESS test score database to an

Excel document without district names. The data set was copied directly from the Excel

document into an SPSS data sheet and labeled as "the communicative approach." The

communicative approach data set formed the first category of the participation between-subjects

independent variable and was coded as 1. Category 1 was distinguished from the other between-

subjects independent variable categories as the only group participating in the communicative

approach without district social-emotional learning programs.

Research Question 2

The null hypothesis for Research Question 2 stated, there was no statistically significant

difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group

received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era. The data set

selected for analysis of Research Question 2 was aggregated EL ACCESS test scores from

districts implementing social-emotional learning programs for the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020

school years. The data set excluded districts with communicative approach-aligned instructional

programs to distinguish the between-subjects independent variables for each question and

mitigate selection bias (Infante-Rivard & Cusson, 2018).

Of the 45 districts offering social-emotional programs at the time of the study, only 16

published time-relevant program start dates for the 2018–2019 school year and did not offer a

bilingual program. Two of the 16 districts did not publish ACCESS test scores for both the 2019

and 2020 spring testing sessions (FLDOE, 2022a). The scores from the 14 districts were

recorded from the Florida ACCESS test score database in an Excel document. From the 14

districts, five were randomly selected and transferred into an SPSS data sheet for equal group

sizes. The data set was labeled as "social-emotional learning." The social-emotional learning

data set formed the second category of the participation between-subjects independent variable

and was coded as 2. Category 2 was distinguished from the other between-subjects independent variable categories as the only group participating in social-emotional learning programs without district implementation of the communicative approach.

Research Question 3

The null hypothesis for Research Question 3 stated that there was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received implementation of both communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied together during the 2020 pandemic era. The data set for Research Question 3 was district averages of EL proficiency scores from districts with both communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning program implementations applied together during the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years. The selection of districts into the data set for Research Question 3 required the same criteria for both data sets in Research Questions 1 and 2.

Of the 16 districts offering bilingual programs in Florida during the pandemic era, 11 also offered social-emotional learning programs (Bilingual Education in Florida, 2021; Florida SEL Collaborative, 2022). The 11 districts' test scores were transferred from the Florida ACCESS test score database to an Excel document. From the 11 districts, five were randomly selected and transferred into an SPSS data sheet. The data set was labeled as a "combination." The combination data set formed the third category of the participation between-subjects independent variable and was coded as 3. Category 3 was distinguished from the other between-subjects independent variable categories as the only group participating in both the communicative approach and social-emotional learning programs applied together.

Data Sets

The inclusion of a control group in addition to the three between-subjects independent variables for the research questions strengthened study validity (Handley et al., 2018). The data set selected for the control group excluded Florida districts implementing communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs during the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years. Fifty districts' aggregated EL ACCESS scores were recorded into an Excel document. Of the 50 school districts, five were randomly selected and transferred into an SPSS data sheet. The data set was labeled as "control" and coded as between-subjects independent variable 0. Table 1 shows test scores from two periods for each data set, in alignment with two-way mixed ANOVA test assumptions (Laerd Statistics, 2015).

Intervention Fidelity

Although the selection of a causal-comparative design limited control to the internal validity of the study, the use of archival data decreased deviation from the initial dissertation proposal (Fulmer, 2018). Because district EL proficiency scores were accessible on the FLDOE website, the time frame for data collection was instantaneous. No deviation from the proposal was necessary for the data collection process. The causal-comparative study design required the statistical examination of the effects of independent variables already implemented in the treatment groups during a past time frame (Fulmer, 2018). The between-subjects independent variable for Research Question 1 was district implementation of the communicative approach through bilingual programs. District implementation of social-emotional learning programs was the between-subjects independent variable for Research Question 2. The implementation of both the communicative approach and social-emotional learning programs applied together was the between-subjects independent variable for Research Question 3. The research questions required time as the within-subjects independent variable with EL ACCESS test scores from the spring of

2019 and the spring of 2020. English proficiency levels from annual ACCESS test scores were

the dependent variables for each research question.

Table 1

Data Sets

Label	Value	EL ACCESS test scores	
		2019	2020
0	Control	.26	.29
		.18	.18
		.22	.19
		.27	.25
		.18	.29
1	Communicative approach	.20	.19
		.20	.20
		.26	.26
		.20	.20
		.19	.17
2	Social-emotional learning	.26	.21
		.26	.19
		.20	.23
		.19	.21
		.21	.16
3	Combination	.22	.22
		.21	.20
		.22	.21
		.21	.20
		.28	.26

Note. No values were reused for multiple data sets.

Data Analysis and Results

Statistical analyses with mixed ANOVA tests required assumptions for both test design and data sets. The first two assumptions related to the study design regarded the variables selected for statistical tests (Mishra et al., 2019). The selection of a continuous dependent variable was the first assumption for mixed ANOVA tests (Laerd Statistics, 2015). Test score percentages from the EL ACCESS score report were applied as data to meet the assumption. The inclusion of both a within-subjects independent variable and at least two between-subjects independent variables formed the remaining two assumptions of test design for mixed ANOVA tests (Mishra et al., 2019). Time was the within-subjects independent variable for each research question to meet the assumption. Between-subjects independent variables were participation in communicative approach-aligned instruction for Research Question 1, social-emotional learning programs for Research Question 2, both communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied together for Research Question 3, and a control group for strengthened validity of each research question (Handley et al., 2018). Additional assumptions regarding data sets were outliers, normal distributions, homogeneity of variances, and sphericity (Laerd Statistics, 2015).

Outlier Assumptions

The third assumption for mixed ANOVA tests was the exclusion of outliers in data samples. Outliers can negatively influence study results by altering the means and standard deviations of data sets (Laerd Statistics, 2015). An application of box plots tested for outliers in the Explore procedure in SPSS. The data had seven outliers, as assessed by inspection of a box plot for values greater than 1.5 box lengths from the edge of the box (see Figure 1). The communicative approach treatment group had one outlier and three extreme outliers. The social-

emotional learning treatment group had one outlier. The combination treatment group had one

outlier and one extreme outlier.

Figure 1

Box Plots Outlier Test
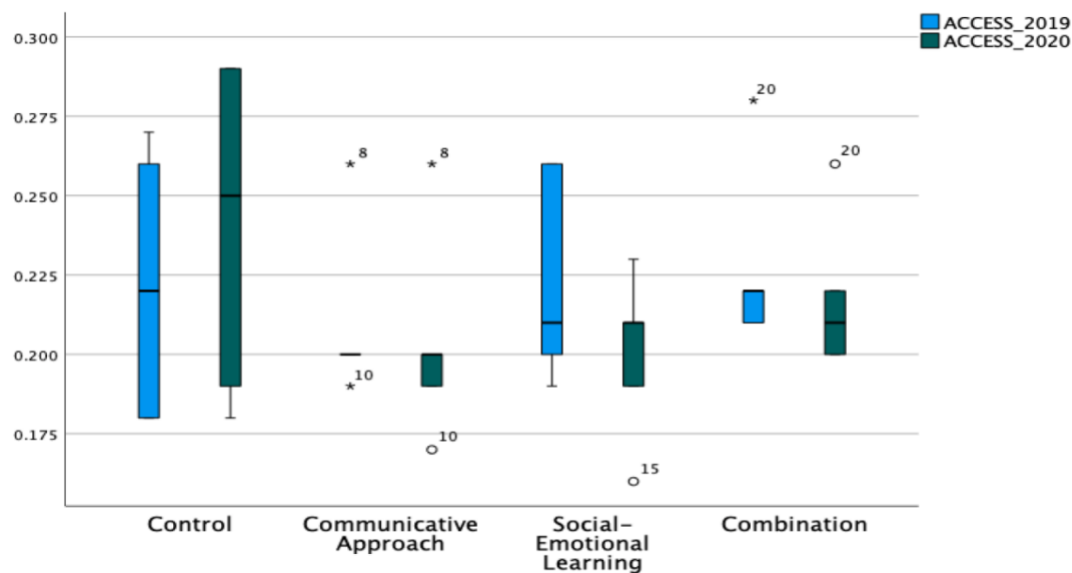
Note. The *symbol represents extreme outliers.

Response to Outlier Assumption Violations

In response to the violated outlier assumption, the outliers remained in the data analysis.

Leys et al. (2019) noted extreme outliers can be both legitimate and illegitimate. In the

communicative approach treatment group, two of the five data values were the same from pretest

(.20) to posttest (.20). A third data value altered slightly, from .20 to .19. Outliers represented in

the data were caused by close test scores in the data sets, not from unusual or uncharacteristic

circumstances. Courvoisier and Renaud (2010) emphasized the inclusion of an entire data set as

necessary for correct inferences. Although the inclusion of outliers was not ideal for statistical

analysis, the removal of outliers was not the sole accepted response for accurate statistical

inferences, particularly true for small data sets (Cousineau & Chartier, 2010). Farrokhi and

Mahmoudi-Hamidabad (2012) suggested control of outliers rather than exclusion is pertinent to

the evaluation of true parameters.

Normal Distribution Assumptions

Another assumption for mixed ANOVA tests was a normal distribution of the differences

between the dependent variables of the two data sets (Mishra et al., 2019). The Shapiro–Wilk test

analyzed the data sets for normal distributions (see Table 2). The EL ACCESS test scores for the

control group and social-emotional treatment group were normally distributed, as assessed by the

Shapiro–Wilk test ($p > .05$). The pretest EL ACCESS test scores from 2019 had values above

.05, resulting in skewed distributions of the communicative approach treatment group and the

combination treatment group. The two skewed distributions violated the normal distribution

assumption for mixed ANOVA tests (Laerd Statistics, 2015).

Response to Normal Distribution Violations

The skewed distributions in the communicative approach and combination treatment

groups violated the two-way mixed ANOVA normal distribution assumption. In response to the

violation, the data sets were left in place and the test continued as planned. A robust design of

mixed ANOVA tests allowed for deviations from normality without altered results (Wilcox,

2021). Schmider et al. (2010) suggested mixed ANOVA tests can maintain both type I and type

II errors with violation of normal distribution assumptions. The robust design allowed for the

continuation of the two-way mixed ANOVA procedure in SPSS.

Table 2

Shapiro–Wilk Test of Normality

Between-subjects variable	Value	Within-subjects variable	Sig.	Distribution
Control	0	2019 scores	.228	Normal
Control	0	2020 scores	.177	Normal
Communicative approach	1	2019 scores	.005	Skewed
Communicative approach	1	2020 scores	.217	Normal
Social-emotional learning	2	2019 scores	.124	Normal
Social-emotional learning	2	2020 scores	.679	Normal
Combination	3	2019 scores	.007	Skewed
Combination	3	2020 scores	.090	Normal

Note. Sig. values < .05 identified skewed distributions.

Homogeneity of Variance Assumptions

Levene's test of equality of error variances was used to measure the homogeneity of variance. The homogeneity of variance assumption tests established equivalent variances between the pretest and posttest groups for within-subjects independent variables (Mara & Cribbie, 2017). Homogeneity of variances existed ($p > .05$), as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances. The p value for each dependent variable was higher than .05—.469 for 2019 ACCESS scores and .122 for 2020 ACCESS scores—resulting in no violation of the homogeneity of variance assumption (see Table 3).

Table 3

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

		Levene statistic	*df*1	*df*2	Sig.
2019 ACCESS scores	Based on mean	.887	3	16	.469
	Based on median	.778	3	16	.523
	Based on median and with adjusted *df*	.778	3	15.346	.524
	Based on trimmed mean	.929	3	16	.450
2020 ACCESS scores	Based on mean	2.247	3	16	.122
	Based on median	1.352	3	16	.293
	Based on median and adjusted *df*	1.351	3	14.929	.295
	Based on trimmed mean	1.162	3	16	.132

Note. The 2019 sig. and 2020 sig. were > .05 based on the mean, resulting in no statistical

significance.

Sphericity Assumptions

Sphericity is an assumption for two-way mixed ANOVA tests (Mishra et al., 2019).

Box's test of equality of covariance matrices tests for variance among the between-subjects

independent variables when three or more timeframes are applied for the within-subjects

variables (Laerd Statistics, 2015). In alignment with the study design of a pretest and posttest for

EL proficiency, sphericity testing was not necessary for the continuation of the two-way mixed

ANOVA procedure in SPSS.

Two-Way Mixed ANOVA Analysis

The two-way mixed ANOVA procedure was applied in SPSS to determine an interaction

effect on the EL ACCESS scores dependent variable from the group and time independent

variables. The procedure examined assumptions of homogeneity of variances and tested for an

interaction effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables with an alpha of .05 on

a 95% confidence level (Laerd Statistics, 2015). The difference in test score means varied among

between-subjects independent variables (see Table 4).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics

Group	2019 (pretest)			2020 (posttest)		
	M	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
0	.2220	.04266	5	.2400	.05292	5
1	.2100	.02828	5	.2040	.03362	5
2	.2240	.03362	5	.2000	.02646	5
3	.2280	.02950	5	.2180	.02490	5
Total	.2210	.03194	20	.2155	.03692	20

Note. The two-way mixed ANOVA requires two time frames for time to be the within-subjects

independent variable. The design requires pretest and posttest data sets. The means of Group 0

increased, while the means of Groups 1, 2, and 3 decreased from 2019 to 2020.

The profile plots generated from the two-way mixed ANOVA procedure indicated a

potentially statistically significant interaction effect (see Figure 2). The tests of within-subjects

effects examined a two-way interaction effect of the independent variables of intervention and

time in the two-way mixed ANOVA procedure in SPSS. Despite the intersection of groups in

profile plots, the *p* value of the interaction effect (.365) was greater than the alpha of .05. There

was not a statistically significant interaction between the intervention and time on EL ACCESS

test scores, $F(3, 16) = 1.134$, $p = .365$.

Figure 2

Estimated Marginal Means of ACCESS Test Scores Over Time
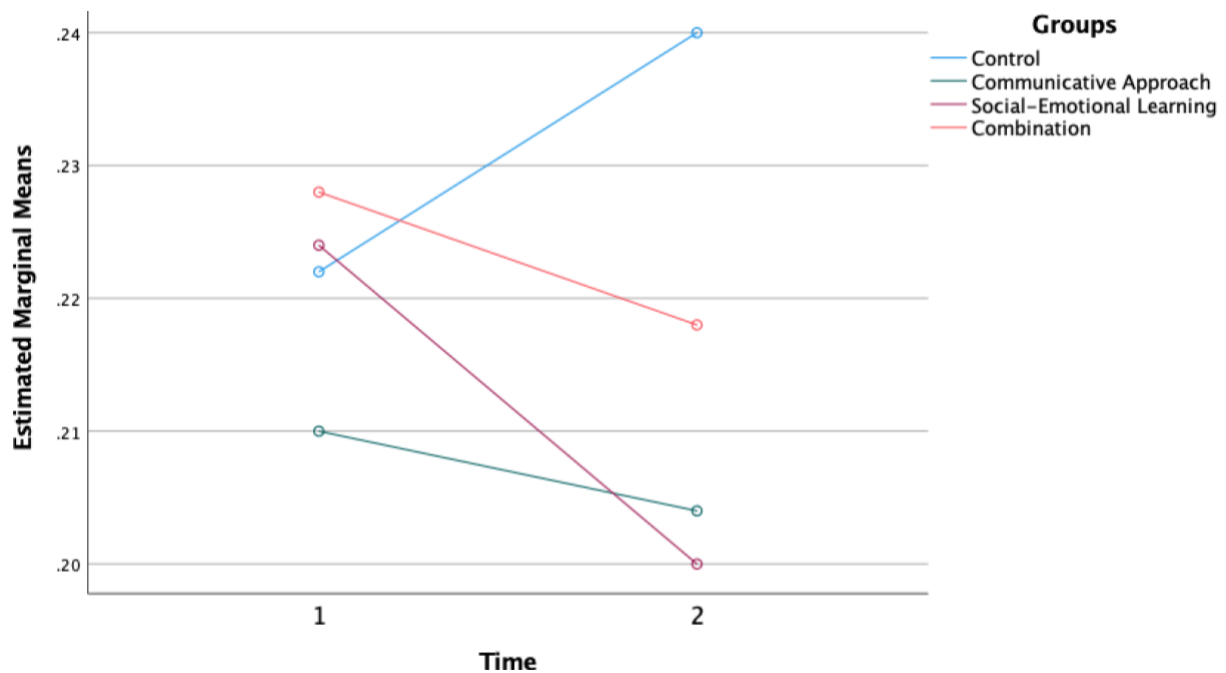
Note. Intersections between groups indicated a potentially statistically significant interaction.

In response to no statistical significance between interaction and time on EL ACCESS test scores, Levene's test of equality of error variances examined the main effects of within-subjects independent variables and between-subjects independent variables separately (see Table 3). The main effect of time showed no statistically significant difference in EL ACCESS test scores from 2019 to 2020, $F(1, 16) = .450$, $p = .512$. The main effect of group showed no statistically significant difference in EL ACCESS test scores between intervention groups, $F(3, 16) = .651$, $p = .594$. Results indicated no statistical significance between collapsed groups of time or group, with p values higher than .05 (see Table 5).

Table 5

Analysis Results

Effect	α	*p*	Result
Interaction	.05	.365	No statistical significance
Time	.05	.512	No statistical significance
Group	.05	.594	No statistical significance

Note. The *p* value must be $< .05$ for statistical significance.

　　　A post hoc power test in SPSS determined the retrospective power with a test of between-subjects independent variables in response to sample size and parameter estimates (Lenth, 2007). Low power levels can fail to detect statistical significance, increasing the threat of type II error in the study (Y. Zhang et al., 2019). The observed power for data sets in 2019 was 8.9%, $1 - \beta = .089$. The observed power for data sets in 2020 was 27%, $1 - \beta = .270$. Table 6 shows the power levels as less than 90%, which could fail to identify a statistical significance between interaction, group, or effect (Y. Zhang et al., 2019).

Table 6

Observed Power Levels

Dependent variable	Observed power
2019 ACCESS scores	.089
2020 ACCESS scores	.270

Note. Power levels $< .90$ increase the threat of type II error.

Research Question 1 Analysis

Research Question 1 examined, was there a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction for students during the 2020 pandemic era? The statistical analysis resulted in a true null hypothesis. There was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction during the 2020 pandemic era.

Research Question 2 Analysis

Research Question 2 examined, was there a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era? The statistical analysis resulted in a true null hypothesis. There was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era.

Research Question 3 Analysis

Research Question 3 examined, was there a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of both communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied together during the 2020 pandemic era? The statistical analysis resulted in a true null hypothesis. There was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received implementation of both communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied together during the 2020 pandemic era.

<div align="center">

Reliability and Validity

</div>

Study reliability and validity are imperative considerations before the acceptance of study results. Statistical analyses of interaction effects in human participants required not only protection and discretion for all participants, as noted in *The Belmont Report*, but also protection of study validity and reliability (Adashi et al., 2018; Douglas, 2001). Douglas (2001) noted second language acquisition research requires evidence for selected analysis methods, reliable analysis procedures, and justified interpretations. Strategies for enhancing study internal validity, external validity, and reliability included study design, data collection methods, and analysis procedures.

Internal Validity

The distinguished separation between experimental variables was a threat to the internal validity of the study. Between-subjects independent variables of targeted instructional programs required the assumption of educator fidelity to district-wide program adoptions. District-wide adoptions of instructional programs were not guaranteed to be implemented at the classroom level. Equality for effective implementation in individual classrooms within district groups also required questioning. Despite the lack of publication on the quality of individual classroom communicative approaches and social-emotional learning facilitation in Florida, Cooke et al. (2007) suggested that district-wide adoptions of instructional programs demonstrated positive effects. The selection of district-wide program initiatives rather than independent classroom practices provided an overall demonstration of the effects of program implementation throughout the state.

Another threat to internal validity was outliers and skewed distribution in data sets. The inclusion of outliers and skewed distributions can negatively affect internal validity by altering study inferences, causing changes over time (Douglas, 2001). Internal validity was strengthened

with the application of both Laerd Statistics and SPSS for computer-based analyses. By applying

an identical statistical process for each research question, each group received the same treatment

throughout the language analysis process.

Maturation was also a threat to internal validity due to the inclusion of student test scores

from two different time frames (Flannelly et al., 2018; Handley et al., 2018). A two-way mixed

ANOVA was selected to measure independent variables along with a control group. The

inclusion of control groups enhanced the study's internal validity and credibility (Handley et al.,

2018). By analyzing test scores from groups receiving and not receiving the same instructional

program, effects of maturation were not mistaken for effects from between-subjects independent

variables.

External Validity

The selection bias of participating districts was a threat to the external validity of the

study. External validity required careful grouping strategies. The application of a communicative

approach implementation checklist with SME approval was applied to define specific grouping

characteristics. Another strategy to enhance study reliability was the use of a random selection of

Florida school districts in the cluster sampling process to reduce researcher bias in the data

collection process. The exclusion of districts with programs implementing independent variables

from other research questions increased control for demonstrated evidence of research question

validity in language research (Douglas, 2001).

Reliability

A threat to the reliability of the study was the changes in testing conditions over time.

The pandemic era presented several extraneous variants as threats to reliability. Instructional

inconsistencies created complex factors to consider during the pandemic era, resulting in unique

circumstances between whole districts and individual classrooms, particularly with EL

populations (Sugarman & Lazarín, 2020). Despite the inconsistencies between classrooms, an

application of state-wide aggregated data examined an overall analysis for ELs throughout the

state of Florida with a larger scope to account for potential inconsistency. Although the use of

archival data from a past time frame in alignment with a causal-comparative research design

limited the opportunity for study transferability, the study created opportunities for future

research to be repeated for different time frames of the pandemic era or in different states

(Fulmer, 2018). The inability to manipulate the between-subjects independent variables in the

causal-comparative design also negatively affected the study reliability by hindering the

generalization of statistical inferences (B. Lee, 1985).

Attrition is another threat to study reliability. The use of EL ACCESS test scores from the

2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years created reliability issues as the same students were not

guaranteed to remain in the same school district the following year. Barry (2005) suggested

attrition associated with longitudinal data can affect data sets and alter study inferences. The

inclusion of aggregated district data applied the means of Florida school districts' EL ACCESS

test scores. The application of test score averages mitigated the effects of individual student

attrition within selected school districts on the data.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this causal-comparative quantitative study was to test for statistically

significant differences in Florida public school districts' EL ACCESS test scores between the

treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received communicative

approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs during the 2020 pandemic

era. Research Question 1 resulted in a true null hypothesis: There was no statistically significant

difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction during the 2020 pandemic era. Research Question 2 resulted in a true null hypothesis: There was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era. Research Question 3 resulted in a true null hypothesis: There was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received implementation of both communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied together during the 2020 pandemic era. Further discussion of statistical findings of both treatment and control groups is necessary for the development of study interpretations.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this causal-comparative quantitative study was to test for statistically significant differences in Florida public school districts' EL ACCESS test scores between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs during the 2020 pandemic era. The mixed ANOVA statistical analyses supported the true null hypotheses for all three research questions. There was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received communicative approach-aligned instruction during the 2020 pandemic era. There was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after a treatment group received implementation of social-emotional learning during the 2020 pandemic era. There was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups from 2019 to 2020 after treatment groups received implementation of both communicative approach-aligned instruction and social-emotional learning programs applied together during the 2020 pandemic era. Although examination resulted in no statistical significance, opportunities for the application of research findings are presented in interpretations, limitations, recommendations, implications for leadership, and a conclusion.

Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions

The statistical analyses of a mixed ANOVA test in SPSS resulted in no statistical significance and thus supported the null hypotheses for all three research questions (see Table 3). The true null hypotheses suggested the communicative approach and social-emotional learning, applied both independently and simultaneously, did not have a statistically significant effect on EL ACCESS language proficiency scores during the 2020 pandemic era. Although research-

driven supports were effective instructional tools for the educational equity of ELs before the

pandemic era, district implementations were not sufficient to maintain a positive effect in the

state of Florida during the 2020 pandemic era (Fisher & Frey, 2019; Liu & Ball, 2019).

Communicative Approach Results

In alignment with 21st-century language instructional reforms, the communicative

approach has become common practice in public schools across the United States (Swanson &

Hildebrandt, 2017). Maulizan (2016) suggested the communicative approach had a higher

success rate in student literacy in comparison to traditional language learning methods.

Harshbarger (2019) supported Maulizan's findings by emphasizing the success of

communicative approach-aligned strategies, such as student collaboration and scaffolded

instruction. Solodka et al. (2021) expanded on the communicative approach success for ELs by

suggesting successful applicability for implementation in online learning platforms as well as in-

person learning environments.

The U.S. online learning mandates of the 2020 pandemic era intensified research focus

on online language learning. Ylina et al. (2022) explored a qualitative analysis of student

perspectives and found online language learning presented the same opportunities as in-person

environments. Hazaymeh (2021) supported Ylina et al.'s findings by suggesting the use of digital

technologies in online instruction did not hinder students' perspectives of their ability to achieve

language learning standards. Alkhresheh (2021) contradicted positive findings regarding online

language learning by exploring student perspectives of decreased instructional quality due to

mandated online language instruction. Khreisat (2022) performed a meta-analysis of qualitative

studies of online language learning during the pandemic era and suggested three common

effective strategies were collaborative learning, a flipped classroom technique, and scaffolded

instruction. The effective response to collaborative learning and scaffolded instruction were pertinent to the study results because of their direct alignment to communicative approach-aligned instruction (Koondhar et al., 2018; Savignon, 1991).

Although qualitative research analyses of student perspectives of online learning during the pandemic era increased after students returned to in-person learning environments, a gap remained in quantitative analysis of student proficiency levels in response to online language instruction. Another gap in research was the examination of instruction exclusively aligned to the communicative approach. A quantitative analysis of EL proficiency levels was needed to confirm the results of instructional success presented in qualitative studies. Despite Khreisat's (2022) suggestion of positive effects of communicative approach-aligned instructional techniques, based on qualitative analysis, the present study's results disconfirmed the consistent effects of the communicative approach on EL proficiency levels during the online learning transitions of the 2020 pandemic era in the state of Florida.

Social-Emotional Learning Results

In alignment with ESSA, social-emotional learning practices have expanded across the United States in response to educator infidelity in the accountability era and increasing research trends (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017; Neth et al., 2020). Allbright et al. (2019) suggested social-emotional supports demonstrated school-wide benefits regarding student connections and school climate. Wang (2020) expanded social-emotional learning research by reiterating the importance of decreasing student affective factors of motivation, confidence, and anxiety to increase student academic achievement levels. Giboney Wall and Musetti (2018) suggested holistic supports are beneficial for the success of the EL population. Research efforts have identified positive academic effects specific to the EL population in response to program

objectives of individualistic goals, leadership opportunities, and heightened self-efficacy (Duong & Bradshaw, 2017; Sandilos et al., 2020; Sugishita & Dresser, 2019; Toth, 2019).

During the 2020 pandemic era, social-emotional learning was pertinent for the educational success of ELs in online learning environments due to the substantial increase of challenges for the marginalized student population (Manspile et al., 2021). Hamilton et al. (2021) suggested effects of online learning practices highlighted inadequate social-emotional implementation in both online learning efforts as well as previous in-person instructional initiatives. Rockwood (2021) disconfirmed the issues of implementation by finding educator improvement in social-emotional integration during mandated online learning. DeArmond et al. (2021) analyzed a national representation of 477 schools and found 66% of the schools integrated social-emotional learning instruction during the pandemic era, but only 7% applied consistent approaches to collect data for the programs.

The lack of evaluation of social-emotional learning effects on student achievement during the 2020 pandemic era presented a gap in research. Further evaluation was necessary to examine the effects of social-emotional learning on student achievement for both the general population as well as the EL subgroup. With higher risks of poverty and unemployment, ELs face increased holistic and linguistic challenges from the effects of isolated learning due to educational inequalities (Manspile et al., 2021; Peterson et al., 2021). Although social-emotional learning programs have resulted in positive academic outcomes for ELs in past research, the present study's results disconfirmed the consistent effects of social-emotional learning programs on EL language proficiency levels during the online learning transitions of the 2020 pandemic era in the state of Florida.

Conclusions

No statistical significance of the communicative approach or social-emotional learning applied independently or simultaneously was indicated in the results, indicating ineffective instructional efforts in Florida during the 2020 pandemic era. Despite EL students' academic success in response to the implementation of the communicative approach and social-emotional learning preceding the 2020 pandemic era, the targeted programs were not sufficient to maintain statistically significant effects during online learning transitions (Al-Amri, 2020; Giboney Wall & Musetti, 2018). Effective program implementation can require motivation, time for curricular development, as well as educator fidelity and motivation (Gkonou et al., 2018; Koondhar et al., 2018; Rahmawati, 2019). Qualitative research from the 2020 pandemic era identified low educator motivation and high student stress as critical educational challenges (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020; Panisoara et al., 2020). Study conclusions aligned with Kaharuddin's 2020 findings to confirm research-driven instructional strategies as insufficient in overcoming the mental barriers of educators and students in quarantined online learning. The scope of the study applied solely to Florida public school districts during the 2020 pandemic era.

Limitations

Limitations of the research design, data collection process, and data analysis require consideration for research credibility. Analyses of human participant data required protection for participants, as well as study validity and reliability (Adashi et al., 2018; Douglas, 2001). Key limitations of the study were identified to affect internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

Internal Validity

Errors in participant selection can affect the internal validity of a study (Flannelly et al., 2018). The lack of clear evaluation criteria for language learning standards and holistic support

in Florida public schools presented limitations to selecting appropriate districts for data sets in each research group. Specific criteria included year ranges for implementations of social-emotional learning programs as well as SME-approved checklists for implementations of the communicative approach to minimize researcher bias in the clustering process of Florida districts.

Another limitation to internal validity was maturation (Flannelly et al., 2018; Handley et al., 2018). The use of ACCESS test scores from the spring of 2019 and the spring of 2020 represented the within-subject factor of time for the mixed ANOVA test. The maturation of participants over a year resulted in multifaceted external variables, particularly for a causal-comparative design, in which variables are uncontrollable (Fulmer, 2018). Control groups shared the same maturation risk as treatment groups to isolate the selected independent variables analysis from uncontrollable external variables.

Limitations in the data analysis process also affected internal validity due to the inclusion of outliers and skewed data sets. The use of similar values within randomly selected data sets of clustered groups resulted in four extreme outliers (see Figure 1). In addition to outliers, two of the eight data sets demonstrated skewed distributions with sig. values less than .05 (see Table 2). The robust design of the mixed ANOVA statistical test allowed for the deviations without altered results (Schmider et al., 2010).

External Validity

Researcher bias was a threat to external validity in the participant selection process. A cluster random sampling method decreased the effects of researcher bias during the grouping process. Once districts were grouped based on independent variable implementations during the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years, district names were removed from data sets and then

randomly selected from the list for study inclusion. A cluster random sampling method reduced

researcher bias and increased the possibility of presenting accurate parameters of the overall

student population in the state (Yunus, 2018).

Another limitation to external validity was the selection of a causal-comparative design

for a marginalized population. Focus on the EL population limited generalizability to the general

population (Andrade, 2018). The examination of variables from a past time frame decreased

control of external variables compared to other quasi-experimental designs due to the limitation

of researcher manipulation (Fulmer, 2018; B. Lee, 1985). Limited control of external factors was

distinctly threatening to validity during the 2020 pandemic era, in which complex challenges

negatively affected instructional efforts (Kaharuddin, 2020). Although the selection of a causal-

comparative design limited validity, examination of practices in the 2020 pandemic era was

beneficial for reflection of educational practices for future consideration of instructional efforts

in online learning transitions. As a result of limited validity, the causal-comparative design was

not sufficient for generalizability (Fulmer, 2018).

Data Reliability

A limitation to the reliability of the data collected was the assumption of independent

variable implementations within school district program adoptions, affecting the consistency of

obtained data (Andrade, 2018). The use of district test averages in a statewide scope resulted in

assumptions of district-mandated practices at the classroom level. Although set criteria guided

district selection in the participant clustering process, a lack of instructional evaluation during the

2020 online transitions brought into question the consistency of independent variable

implementation. Inconsistency in implementation caused by complex factors included varying

educator technology proficiencies and decreased educator motivation, which negatively affected

the consistency of research-driven instruction in the 2020 pandemic era (Cotoc, 2020; Gkonou et

al., 2018; Martinez & Broemmel, 2021; Panisoara et al., 2020). In response to assumptions of

independent variable implementation, the use of district-wide programs was selected over

independent classroom initiatives within districts for increased implementation rates in response

to the availability of support and resources (Cooke et al., 2007).

Attrition also served as a threat to the reliability of the study (Andrade, 2018). A pre-

test/post-test analysis presented reliability issues as there was no guarantee students remained in

the same Florida school district for the duration of both the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school

years. Attrition in quantitative longitudinal data presented limitations as attrition can affect

values in the data sets (Barry, 2005). The application of district test averages rather than

individual student test scores decreased the threat of attrition on study reliability by decreasing

the effects of altering district rosters.

The reliability of the data collected was also threatened by changes over time regarding

testing conditions. Unique circumstances in unprecedented online instructional transitions

combined with multifaceted emotional challenges associated with the 2020 pandemic era

presented uncontrollable inconsistencies in learning environments from the spring of 2019 to the

spring of 2020 (Martinez & Broemmel, 2021; Panisoara et al., 2020). Inconsistencies of external

variables in public schools across the state presented challenges to study reliability due to the

limited trustworthiness of the causal relationship controlled by the independent variables as

opposed to outside factors. In response to the limitation, a statewide scope was utilized for a

larger scale of participants to account for the inconsistent implementation of variables in

educator practice. Despite the response to the study's limitations in reliability, the causal-

comparative quantitative design had a negative effect by hindering the generalizability of the

conclusions (Fulmer, 2018).

Recommendations

Although the causal-comparative quantitative design limited the generalizability of the study, an examination of the effectiveness of programs during the online learning transition of the 2020 pandemic era was imperative for research-driven instructional direction (Fulmer, 2018). The true null hypotheses indicated no statistically significant effect of the communicative approach or social-emotional learning on EL ACCESS test scores in Florida during the 2020 pandemic era. The decreased effectiveness of programs suggested as effective for EL populations in former research brings into question selected programs for future instructional reform (Al-Amri, 2020; Duong & Bradshaw, 2017). Nagorna et al. (2021) suggested online instructional transitions presented an opportunity to guide a modernization of educational reforms in response to global needs. Further research in online instructional transitions is necessary to continue research-driven reforms around the globe.

The finding of no statistical significance in the mixed ANOVA test presented opportunities for future research. Once clustered groups were organized based on district independent variable implementations, every district average was selected to enhance confidence levels. Former research practices have indicated low power levels fail to detect statistical significance between groups, resulting in an increased type II error (Y. Zhang et al., 2019). Despite the inclusion of all Florida districts meeting independent variable implementation requirements, the number of districts implementing the targeted instructional practices was not sufficient, resulting in power levels of less than .90 (see Table 6). Future research should extend the study by not only selecting districts implementing the independent variables in Florida but also expanding the population to a region-wide district inclusion to increase the number of values

in data sets to increase confidence levels to 95% or higher.

Another opportunity for future research is an extension of data sets for three within-subjects independent variables as opposed to a pretest/posttest design. The two within-subject independent variables were EL ACCESS test scores from the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years to represent data from before and during online instruction. Mixed ANOVA statistical tests can have three within-subject factors for the analysis of three separate time frames (Laerd Statistics, 2015). Future research should examine the EL ACCESS test scores from the 2021–2022 school year in addition to the 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 school years. The additional within-subject independent variables can examine the effectiveness of targeted program response rates in educational environments post-online learning for an examination of effectivity fluctuation before, during, and after online transitions of the 2020 pandemic era. Rosanbalm (2021) suggested social-emotional learning programs were imperative for successful student transitions back to in-person learning environments in the post-pandemic time frame. Examination of all three timeframes can be useful to detect changes in effectiveness over time, directing the focus of integral programs for inclusion in educational reform.

In conjunction with recommendations for future research, the study conclusions provided recommendations for policies and practices of educational practitioners, policymakers, and researchers in Florida. Despite finding no statistically significant effects of the communicative approach or social-emotional learning on Florida EL ACCESS test scores during the 2020 pandemic era, limitations of the study bring into question evaluation practices throughout the state. The lack of formal, transparent evaluation criteria for program implementations, such as the communicative approach and social-emotional learning, presented challenges in the identification of districts with successfully implemented targeted programs during the study time

frame. Evaluation of educator professional development initiatives is necessary to indicate

successful response to district reform initiatives (Merchi et al., 2016). Future practices in Florida

should provide clear, transparent evaluation criteria for district-wide professional development

initiatives in addition to program adoption and training.

Implications for Leadership

Focus on the EL population in the examination of the interruption of academic efforts

during the 2020 pandemic era is crucial for educational equity (Martinez & Broemmel, 2021).

Consistent academic achievement gaps demonstrated by linguistically marginalized student

populations of lower than the proficiency averages of majority student populations from 1992 to

2017 indicated a crucial focus for positive social change (The Nation's Report Card, 2022).

Multifaceted challenges specific to ELs in the pandemic era caused frustration and withdrawal

from academic goals (Aslan & Sahin, 2020). By targeting successful programs for ELs, research

can direct educators, districts, and state policies to provide ELs with the support necessary for

successful outcomes. As ELs make up approximately 10% of the U.S. student population,

focusing on successful practice for EL success is crucial for positive social change (NCES, 2022;

The Nation's Report Card, 2022).

Continued research on EL academic success in response to instructional programs as well

as district evaluations of educator and school program implementations are key actions

educational leaders can implement based on study findings. Baker (2017) suggested ELs can

complete academic programs with sufficient educational assistance, such as instrumental and

emotional support, differentiated strategies, as well as vertical program alignment. As

educational leaders develop reform strategies, EL supports should be prioritized to help students

overcome heightened barriers, such as socioeconomic marginalization and linguistic isolation

(Sayer & Braun, 2020).

Conclusion

Despite EL academic success in response to the implementation of the communicative approach and social-emotional learning preceding the 2020 pandemic era, the results of the mixed ANOVA statistical test analyses indicated no statistically significant effect of program implementations applied individually or simultaneously during the 2020 pandemic era (Al-Amri, 2020; Duong & Bradshaw, 2017). The implication of the study results confirmed Kaharuddin's 2020 findings of insufficient research-driven instructional strategies in overcoming mental barriers of educators and students in quarantined online learning. Future research opportunities should examine a larger scale of region-wide test scores and additional within-subject independent variables to examine post-online learning time frames. In addition to future research, clear evaluation criteria are necessary to confirm educator implementation of district program adoptions in Florida. A critical outcome of the study was the need for further research specific to the EL population to provide all students with an equitable opportunity for academic success.

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Appendix A

Communicative Approach Participant Selection Criteria

The checklist is for researcher completion to determine appropriate clustered grouping

assignments for districts in the participant selection process.

1: The district consistently implements the given criteria.

2: The district implements the given criteria, but in an inconsistent manner.

3: The district does not implement the given criteria.

1. Did the students engage in English-only educational experiences at least 70% of each

   school day?

   1 _____   2 _____   3 _____

2. Did the students receive pull-out services with an English as a second language specialist

   or receive instruction from a standard classroom teacher with an English as a second

   language certification?

   1 _____   2 _____   3 _____

3. Did the students receive translation services or supports in their native language?

   1 _____   2 _____   3 _____

4. Did the students receive student-centered curriculum and instruction?

   1 _____   2 _____   3 _____

5. Did the students experience educational activities promoting all four language skills

   (speaking, listening, reading, and writing)?

   1 _____   2 _____   3 _____

6. Did the student curriculum promote cultural awareness?

1 _____   2 _____   3 _____

7. Did the students engage in English-only collaborative learning experiences?

1 _____   2 _____   3 _____

8. Did the students experience metalinguistic error correction, such as elicitation or

repetition?

1   _____   2 _____   3 _____

9. Did the school district adopt a social-emotional learning program for the eighth-grade

level?

1 _____   2 _____   3 _____

10. Did the school district mandate the application of free-standing social-emotional learning

standards into eighth grade curriculum?

1 _____   2 _____   3 _____

11. Did the students have access to authentic materials by native English-speaking authors?

1 _____   2 _____   3 _____

Appendix B

Florida Department of Education Data Accessibility Permission

Fri 10/29/2021 12:04 PM

Please be cautious
This email originated from outside of ACE organization

Good afternoon,

Thank you for contacting t[   ]arding your request. While we can't confirm that the data you are reviewing is within a report that our particular Bureau produced, we can say that the aggregated data publicly available on the Department's website is for use to the general public including researchers.

This is not to say the Department supports your research findings and/or methodological approaches, but the data available to the public on the Department's website can be used for analysis by public users.

Thank you,

Appendix C

Subject Matter Expert 1

Re: Dissertation Subject Matter Expert Request

⊗   This message has a digital signature, but it wasn't verified because the S/MIME control isn't currently supported for your browser or platform.

CH   ████████████████████████████

Tue 8/3/2021 7:41 AM

To: Kristina Wright

Hi Kristina!

That's so great that your are pursuing a terminal degree!

Yes, I took a quit look at the survey and I recommend you use a Likert scale or multiple options answers to be able to gather more detailed data. The yes/no questions really limit the information you will get and sometimes responders will not have a definite answer.

I have been teaching for 20 years.

Let the know if you want me to look at it more, if you agree with me suggestion, you may email me a revised version.

Best,

████████████████████

Appendix D

Subject Matter Expert 2

Hi Kristina,

Apologies for my slow response! This is our crazy time of the year. I looked over your survey and I thought your questions were targeted and thoughtful. The one thing that stood out to me as I was reading was the fact that many school personnel might not know some of the terminology in the survey. One suggestion I would make would be to provide a brief example for some of the questions with program-specific language, such as: "metalinguistic error correction" or "authentic materials." Sometimes we assume that education professionals know what we mean when referring to these terms, but they may interpret a term differently than the way we have intended it. I know you would like to have the most accurate data possible, so I think this might help. For example, I might word question #6 (Did the student curriculum promote cultural awareness?) as: "Do all of your students see examples of people who look like them in their textbooks and reading materials?"

Please let me know if you have other questions or would like further input. I think you needed my years of experience in the field: 28 years.

I wish you the best in your future endeavors!

Appendix E

Subject Matter Expert 3

Hi, Kristina!

Nice to hear from you and that you are coming along with your dissertation. ██████████████ ██

had a good look at it yet, but what did you follow in order to create the survey questions? Maybe it is included in one (or more!) of the references you included? I just know from my own experience and creating surveys there was a pretty strict guideline and/or recommendations in the literature about how to structure them in order to be sure they are valid. One point I remember clearly is the idea of using a Likert scale instead of a Yes/No option; is there any reason you chose this structure? Any information you can give me about that would be really helpful.

In terms of how many years I have been teaching language, I have been teaching English and some Spanish classes for at least 15 years and then before that I worked with ESL children with speech and language disorders. Is that enough experience in this case?

Best,

██████████

Appendix F

Subject Matter Expert 3 Continued

Sat 10/30/2021 3:59 AM

Please be cautious
This email originated from outside of ACE organization

Hi Kristie!

Apologies for the delay in responding, it has been a really hectic time for me as I have just started teaching a Masters course on TBLT (a lot of my students are teaching foreign languages using a very synthetic/structured approach and they are trying to get away from that and add more "real-life" and authentic tasks to their classrooms. Apart from that we have our first 12 person course since before C

To respond to our previous correspondence, as we discussed, I believe that the points on the list you shared with me (on August 5th) do align with the tenets of the communicative approach and I also highly suggest that you include some type of authentic assessments as an additional criterion.

Again, good luck and let me know if there is anything else you need!

Happy Halloween :)