



ESOL URBAN HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The current interest in student performance and evaluation often neglects the impact instruction has on the academic achievement of English Learners. Similarly, recent literature focuses on educators' specific set of qualities and abilities without considering the implications of self-perception and professional development as instrumental parts of teacher effectiveness. The purpose of this article is to understand the pedagogical experiences of ESOL teachers in an urban high school. Through interviews and observations, this article provides an overview of the instructional realities ESOL educators face in today's classrooms. Furthermore, findings reveal the relationship between self-perception and instructional performance in the ESOL classroom.

The education field and the literature surrounding teaching and learning often focus on understanding what it takes to make students achieve higher. Recent publications make reference to the impact teachers have on student achievement and the qualities educators need to have to be considered good teachers (Chin-Yin, Indiatsi, & Wong, 2016; McGlynn-Stewart, 2015; Stronge, Ward & Grant, 2011). Some of the most commonly identified strengths for good and qualified teachers describe the educators' abilities to be academically flexible and address the individual, personal and instructional needs of all their students (Chin-Yin, Indiatsi, &

KEYWORDS

ESOL teachers, ESOL instruction, Urban public schools, Self-efficacy

Wong, 2016; McGlynn-Stewart, 2015; Stronge, Ward & Grant, 2011). While much of the literature focuses on identifying the teachers' qualities and strengths as educators, research gives little attention to how English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers perceive their individual instructional strengths and the effect these self-perceived strengths have in their daily practices as ESOL educators.

Similarly, extensive research shows that ESOL teachers face many instructional challenges in the classroom associated with the diverse learning needs and styles of their students (Baecher, 2012; Batt, 2008; Crandall, 1996; Elfers, Stritikus, Percy Calaff,

Von Esch, Lucero, Knapp, Plecki, 2009; Light, 2006). Throughout the years, experts in the field have developed different manuals to meet the needs of diverse learners and to support the instructional practices of ESOL teachers (de Oliveira & Yough, 2015; Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2000; Hill & Björk, 2008; Rutherford, 2010). However, the applicability of many of these resources is limited to specific circumstances, and not all learning needs, styles, and educational realities are addressed. Thus, ESOL educators are left without guidance to decipher and struggle with the best approach to take in supporting their ESOL students' personal, literacy-related, language-based, social and emotional needs.

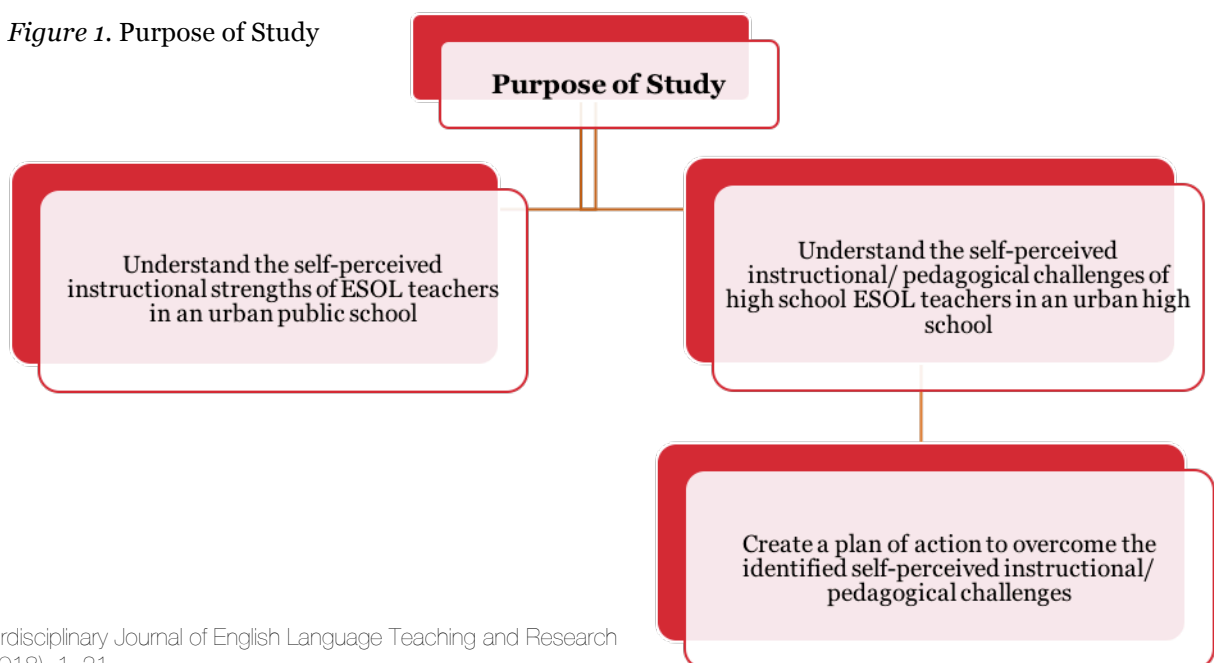
Although available resources exist for addressing best practices for accommodating, adapting, and scaffolding instruction (de Oliveira & Yough, 2015; Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2000; Hill & Björk, 2008; Rutherford, 2010), inquiry surrounding classroom implementation based on ESOL educators' self-concept of their abilities is needed (Yeung, Craven, & Kaur, 2014). Hence, this case study seeks to contribute to the current body of research addressing the impact ESOL teachers' perception of self-efficacy has in their instructional practices. In addition, this case study seeks to understand the instructional experiences of high school ESOL teachers at an urban high

school. The vision of this article is to encapsulate ESOL teachers' realities in today's classrooms. Moreover, this study seeks to provide a space in the literature where urban schools are addressed as a positive learning environment in which educators support one another and reinvent their instructional practices to support their students. Lastly, this article offers real-life instructional strengths, challenges, and action plans that can serve as a guide and reference for ESOL teachers educating Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the instructional experiences of ESOL teachers in an urban high school. For this study, the urban high school will be referred to by the pseudonym of Sunflower High. The instructional practices of ESOL teachers are defined as didactic experiences ESOL educators have in their classrooms when teaching diverse population of students with diverse academic, linguistic, and educational backgrounds. Furthermore, as shown in *Figure 1*, the purpose of this study is three-fold: (1) to understand the self-perceived instructional strengths of ESOL teachers in an urban public school, (2) to understand the self-

Figure 1. Purpose of Study



perceived instructional challenges of high school ESOL teachers in an urban public school, and (3) to create a plan of action to overcome the identified self-perceived instructional challenges. As such, opening a dialogue with ESOL educators about their pedagogical reality in the ESOL classroom is necessary to extend the literature encompassing effective teaching approaches in the ESOL field. In addition, this article seeks to share self-identified strengths of ESOL teachers as an opportunity to open a department-wide dialogue about how ESOL teachers can support one another based on their identified strengths and instructional challenges.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions used to guide this study were as follows:

Central Question

What are the self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges of ESOL educators in an urban public high school?

Sub-questions

1. What are urban ESOL public high school educators' experiences regarding their instructional practices?
2. How do the self-perceived instructional strengths of ESOL educators in an urban high school compare to the strengths and challenges identified in the observations?
3. How are the participants' self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges present in their daily practices?
4. How do participants overcome their self-perceived instructional challenges? Was the action plan successful?

LITERATURE REVIEW

ESOL programs—also known as English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in some states—have experienced a continuous growth throughout the years, and enrollment of English Learners (ELs) has risen to an all-time high (NCES, 2016). Although bilingual education and ESOL education programs are often grouped in the literature, they are in reality two different entities—only ESOL support is required by law. ESOL programs “often take a whole language approach where they try to integrate English with other academic subjects” (Williams, 1997, p. 10). Hence, many K-12 ESOL programs offer classes such as language of science and language of history in which content knowledge is presented while focusing on the acquisition of the English language.

The main purpose of ESOL classes and programs is to develop English literacy, not to promote the use of other languages in the classroom. As a result, students in the ESOL classroom “are oftentimes immersed into the mainstream culture in an attempt to accelerate the process of language acquisition” (Pentón Herrera, 2015, p. 114). ESOL programs are designed to be culturally relevant and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programs at universities are expected to prepare ESOL educators to overcome challenges associated with educating such a diverse population of students. However, teaching such diverse heterogeneous populations—with different cultures, languages, academic experiences and expectations, and many other factors—make instruction a challenging task (Pentón Herrera, 2015).

Recent researchers have reflected on the many instructional challenges ESOL educators face in the classroom (e.g., Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005; Protacio & Jang, 2016; Senom, Zakaria & Ahmad Shah, 2013; Toledo-López & Pentón Herrera, 2015). Some of the most common challenges presented in the current literature reference the little control ESOL educators have over these situations. Senom, Zakaria, and Ahmad Shah (2013) explain that one common challenge for ESOL educators is

the reality shock of transitioning from their idealistic concept of teaching to the reality inside their classrooms. In addition to the reality shock of today's teaching environment, ESOL educators are faced with educating diverse academic levels of proficiency in their classrooms (Toledo-López & Pentón Herrera, 2015), lack of effective instructional resources (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005), and finding a balance between curriculum and student motivation (Protacio & Jang, 2016)—all of which make teaching an even more challenging task for novice K-12 educators. The reality is that ESOL teachers face daily challenges that require flexible and innovative thinking, as every ESOL student is different and their instructional and linguistic needs do not fit in a one-size-fits-all approach (Toledo-López & Pentón Herrera, 2015).

On the other hand, there is also a growing body of literature focusing on the qualities and skills that ESOL educators need to have to be considered effective (Chin-Yin, Indiatsi & Wong, 2016; McGlynn-Stewart, 2015; Stronge, Ward & Grant, 2011). It is important to note that the concepts of *effective* or *good* teacher are elusive considering the complex tasks of teaching, particularly teaching CLD students. Lewis, Parsad, Carey, Bartfai, Farris and Smerdon (1999) aptly state that “teacher quality is a complex phenomenon, and there is little consensus on what it is or how to measure it” (p. 1). In fact, there is considerable debate surrounding how educators' effectiveness is evaluated based on their inputs (e.g., qualifications), teaching processes (e.g., instructional practices), and the product of teaching (e.g., effects on student learning and achievement) (Stronge, Ward & Grant, 2011). The current focus on the ESOL teachers' quality and effectiveness considers only statistical data and leaves little room to individual teacher strengths outside of what is considered acceptable (Danielson, 2013; NEA, 2010). Furthermore, the goal of measuring ESOL teachers' quality and strengths based on set standards obviates the

educators self-perceived strengths as valid and important (Stronge, Ward & Grant, 2011).

Corpora addressing secondary English teachers' attitudes and practices have found that teachers' beliefs affect their teaching effectiveness the most (Díaz Larenas, Alarcón Hernandez, & Ortiz Navarrete, 2015; Johnson, 1992; Yoshihara, 2012). For example, Johnson (1992) found that secondary ESOL teachers' theoretical beliefs and self-awareness guide their literacy instruction and contribute to the reflection and improvement of their teaching practices. Comparatively, Díaz Larenas et al. (2015) conclude that secondary English teachers' realization of their students' needs empowers them to take more active instructional roles in the classroom, obviating the language curriculum and creating tensions with the school administration. Similarly, Yoshihara (2012) identifies that secondary ESOL teachers' beliefs and teaching practices are influenced by their life experiences, learning experiences, teaching experiences and mentors. Yoshihara (2012) recommends further exploration of secondary ESOL teachers' beliefs as the first step towards meaningful professional development opportunities that impact instructional practices.

Although the findings shared by Díaz Larenas, et al. (2015), Johnson (1992), and Yoshihara (2012) are insightful, additional studies considering ESOL educators' beliefs and instructional practices are necessary. The amount of literature on the relationship between teachers' self-perceived strengths and their pedagogical practices was small 34 years ago (Gilman, 1984), and it continues to be so today—especially for secondary ESOL educators. ESOL teachers' sense of self-efficacy and self-perceived strengths are relevant because they can potentially influence “both the kind of environment that they create as well as the various instructional practices introduced in the classroom” (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008, p. 2). On the basis of the social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura, self-efficacy is the “individuals' perceptions of their capabilities to plan and execute specific behavior” (Scherer, Jansen, Nilsen,

Areepattamannil & Marsh, 2016, p. 3). As such, educators' self-perceived strengths reflect their vision of what effective instruction should look like and their disposition of creating a learning environment conducive of those pedagogical practices. ESOL teachers' self-perceived instructional strengths affect their actions and how they instruct in the classroom (Scherer et al., 2016). Thus, the topic of self-efficacy as it pertains to ESOL educators—as well as its impact on educator instruction and student achievement—requires expansion in future ESOL literature.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This study is framed by the *self-efficacy hypothesis*, a psychological and behavioral theory introduced by Albert Bandura. According to Hayden (2014), the theory “introduces the idea that perception of efficacy is influenced by four factors: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and somatic and emotional state” (p. 16). This hypothesis holds that there is a relationship between expectancy and performance; in other words, when individuals perceive they have strengths in some areas, they will generally perform better (Bandura, 1977). Similarly, when individuals perceive that they have difficulties in a specific area, their performance is hampered by their own perceptions (Bandura, 1977). This case study seeks to understand ESOL teachers' instructional experiences as it pertains to their individual perception of self-efficacy. Furthermore, this study identifies the self-efficacy hypothesis as a behavior that ESOL teachers reproduce based on their self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges.

METHODS

The data collection process of this inquiry was guided primarily by face-to-face interviews and observations. Both of these methods of data collection

are qualitative in nature and align with the inquiry's intent of learning more about the participants' real-life experiences (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In addition, the selected qualitative data collection methods—interviews and observations—are useful for understanding the inquiry's setting, contextualizing findings, and diversifying the opportunities to gather relevant data about the participants' reality (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As these methods acknowledge the importance of context, meaning and participant-researcher interaction as important qualitative attributes, they are consistent with the case study design emphasized here (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Four ESOL teachers were asked to participate in this study. Because I am working with teachers on developing their ESOL pedagogical practices, convenience sampling was used of the teachers available at that school (Collins, Onwuegbuzie & Jiao, 2007). There were a total of four participants in this study: three females and one male, all bilinguals. Out of the four teachers, three are non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) and were born in a country outside the United States. The names used in this study are pseudonyms.

Participants and Program Context

Andrea is the Department Chair for the ESOL department at Sunflower High. She is a veteran educator and currently teaches advanced ESOL classes. She was born and raised in the United States and speaks English as a first language (L1) and Spanish as a second language (L2). Beatrice is a veteran educator and currently teaches intermediate ESOL and Applications of Algebra for ELs, also known as AIA. She was born in Korea; her L1 is Korean and English is her L2. She was the department chair at another secondary school for many years but moved a few years ago to Sunflower High.

Table 1. Participants

	Andrea	Beatrice	Claudia	Daniel
Languages Spoken	L1 – English	L1 – Korean	L1 – Spanish	L1 – Spanish
	L2 – Spanish	L2 – English	L2 – English	L2 – English
Teaching Experience	Veteran Educator	Veteran Educator	Veteran Educator	New Educator
	Has been the department chair at Sunflower High for over 5 years.	Previously served as department chair at another secondary school.	Taught in Puerto Rico for many years and recently moved to Sunflower High.	Has been teaching for only five years, and two of those has been at Sunflower High.
Classes Taught	ESOL advanced	ESOL intermediate	ESOL beginner	ESOL newcomer
		Applications of Algebra for ESOL (AIA)	Language of History	Language of Science

Claudia is also an experienced and veteran educator and currently teaches ESOL beginner and Language of History classes. She was born and raised in Puerto Rico and speaks Spanish as her L1 and English as her L2. Claudia moved to New York at an early age and thus could be considered a simultaneous bilingual (Lee, 2013). Lastly, Daniel is an educator who has been teaching for 5 years, but still considers himself a new teacher. He currently teaches ESOL newcomer and Language of Science classes. He was born and raised in Cuba and speaks Spanish as his L1 and English as his L2. Detailed information about the participants can be found in Table 1.

To provide clarity for readers, a brief description of Sunflower High's ESOL program is warranted. The mission of the ESOL program is to prepare ELs to effectively use English language skills and academic strategies to be successful in American classrooms and society. ESOL educators at Sunflower High therefore follow WIDA's English language development standards (WIDA, 2014), as directed by the district. Thus, ELs are evaluated following a rubric and placed in one of five levels, namely: (1) newcomer, (2) beginner, (3) intermediate, (4) advanced, and (5) exiting. Sheltered ESOL classes are offered for the newcomer, beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels, as well as Language of History, Language of

Science, and Applications of Algebra for ESOL (AIA) classes. All of the sheltered ESOL classes count as credit towards high school graduation.

For this research, face-to-face interviews and observations were collected from all four participants. The interviews and observations took place throughout the length of the study—15 weeks—and there was also weekly communication through e-mails and conversations. The interviews were divided into three interview sessions for each participant: (1) at the beginning, (2) in the middle, and (3) at the end of the study. The action plan had as a main purpose to assist participants in overcoming their instructional challenges and to conduct interviews to gather feedback on the success of those action plans. In addition, random observations were conducted throughout the study to reflect upon the educators' self-perceived instructional strengths.

Data Collection

The data were collected through three face-to-face interviews (30-45 minutes) and observations (15-20 minutes) at Sunflower High. Participants were asked a series of questions throughout the three interviews to learn about their instructional experiences and the effectiveness of the identified action

plan to overcome their instructional challenges (see Appendix A). The interviews were recorded for transcribing and analysis purposes. The observation guide/tool used during the observations was provided by the school district and is used for all observations within that school district (see Appendix B).

Interviews

For this research, face-to-face interviews were chosen with the objective of capturing nonverbal elements that could not be captured in any other type of interview (Oltmann, 2016). Furthermore, face-to-face interviews were more convenient for the participants because they did not have to make additional arrangements to answer the interview questions.

A total of three in-person interviews were conducted per participant, each lasting of approximately 30-45 minutes. All of the interviews were conducted at Sunflower High; either in the teachers' classrooms or in common areas inside the school. The first interview was conducted within the first four weeks of the study, and participants were asked to identify their instructional strengths and challenges. The purpose of the first interview was to retrieve information to create an action plan that would help each participant overcome their instructional challenges. The second interview was conducted in the middle of the study and sought to understand the teachers' personal experience about their teaching practices. The last interview was conducted at the end of the study, with the purposing of gathering data about the success of the action plan and the study as a whole for all participants and the ESOL department in the school.

Observations

For this study, each participant was observed once for approximately 15-20 minutes in regular instruction. Only one observation was conducted in this study due to time constraints and schedule conflicts with the school and participants' classes. The

observations were conducted towards the end of the study, with the primary purpose of comparing and contrasting the ESOL teachers' self-perceived strengths and challenges with the researcher's observations. The observations were guided by an observation form provided by the high school's school district (see Appendix B). Furthermore, participants received a courtesy notice about the observations but the specific time and day were not provided, as the design of this study aimed to gather data from unplanned everyday instructions.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a deductive logic, beginning with one or more premises acknowledged as true (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). A deductive approach may be taken when basing analysis on previous literature to further explain themes that have yet to be fully researched within a specific topic (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013). For example, the relationship between teachers' individual beliefs and instructional practices has been previously researched (Díaz Larenas, et al., 2015; Johnson, 1992; Yoshihara, 2012), but the theme of self-perception as an empowering tool for guiding instruction in the secondary ESOL classroom remains fertile.

For this study, findings shared by Díaz Larenas, et al. (2015), Johnson (1992), and Yoshihara (2012) were used to determine pre-set themes that helped uncover the participants' self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges and their implications for teaching. As such, this research used deductive coding to analyze data because the study started with pre-set themes and codes, as explained in the purpose of study. The data retrieved from participants and observations was analyzed to uncover instructional self-perceived strengths and challenges. Observations were primarily used to reflect about the teachers' self-perceived strengths and identify additional strengths they may not have noticed in their teaching practices. Furthermore, for the self-

perceived challenges, action plans were proposed and implemented for overcoming those challenges. The final interviews gathered data about whether the action plan to overcome the teachers' instructional challenges proved effective.

SELF-PERCEIVED INSTRUCTIONAL STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, AND ACTION PLANS

Table 2 shows the instructional strengths and challenges identified by each participant during the interviews. It also shows the action plan created specifically for each ESOL teacher in order to overcome his or her instructional challenge. It is important to note that all participants had a voice in the selected action plan. Many potential action plans were proposed for all scenarios, and each teacher chose the

best approach for his or her challenge based on individual experiences and conversations with me.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Findings have been divided into three different sections to provide a clearer and easier understanding of the data. The first section—divided by names—presents the findings of each participant's action plan and their effectiveness for real life instruction in the ESOL classroom. The first section also discusses the observations conducted for each participant, with a particular focus on the participants' self-identified instructional challenges. The second section offers in-depth information about five themes that were prevalent in all the participants' responses during the interviews. Lastly, the third section answers the three sub-questions identified in the beginning of this study.

Table 2. Instructional strengths, challenges, and action plans

	Andrea	Beatrice	Claudia	Daniel
Instructional Challenges	Teaching advanced ESOL students to write original text summaries and commentaries, rather than plagiarize them.	Individualizing instruction for minority language students within a Spanish-dominant ESOL classroom.	Incorporating technology in the ESOL classes and lesson plans.	Accommodating interrupted education and illiterate ESOL students.
Action Plans	Read texts to students and have them write a summary of the story using their own words and memory (develop auditory proficiency and written skills).	Incorporating instructional support (teacher aid) to work specifically with the minority language students.	Google Classroom workshop for all ESOL teachers in the department.	Incorporating peer-tutoring and individualized small-group instruction to support the learning development of this vulnerable student population.
Instructional Strengths	Scaffolding instruction to facilitate language acquisition.	Utilizing visuals to facilitate learning.	Using different techniques to successfully manage the classroom.	Modifying instruction as needed to facilitate English language acquisition.

Andrea

Andrea identified her instructional challenge to be teaching advanced ESOL students to write original text summaries and commentaries, rather than plagiarize them. The action plan selected to overcome this instructional challenge was to read texts to students and have them write a summary of the story using their own words and memory (develop auditory proficiency and written skills). This action plan partially worked for Andrea's class, because although some students had the opportunity to show their higher-level skills, she explained that "students with lower skills wrote incoherent and confused summaries that were borderline emergent ESOL level." This action plan proved effective for higher-level students, but lower-level students did not have the necessary skills to create their own summaries from only listening to the stories without visual support. Andrea explained, "[the action plan] showed me their true reading and writing abilities, which will enable me to guide students toward accessible texts and appropriate guided writing formats." In a sense, this action plan unintentionally served as an opportunity to assess the students' listening, reading, and writing proficiencies when analyzing texts.

Andrea identified as her instructional strength scaffolding instruction to facilitate language acquisition. During the observation, the classroom alone showed the many scaffolds Andrea offers to her students during her classes. The walls were filled with instructional support explaining concepts, numbering steps, and offering rubrics for the writing process, specifically for writing literary texts. During the class, Andrea used these resources to help her students achieve a goal that was beyond their reach without assisted support. Similarly, when students were ready to work on their own, Andrea would encourage them to complete the tasks independently. The observation showed that Andrea felt very comfortable using scaffolding in her class, to the extent that using scaffolds seemed an inherent extension of her instruction.

Beatrice

Beatrice chose individualizing instruction for minority language students within a Spanish-dominant ESOL classroom as her instructional challenge. The action plan tailored to overcome this challenge was incorporating instructional support (teacher aid) to work specifically with the minority language students. This action plan proved effective for Beatrice's class and was modified from its original action plan. Beatrice stated, "My class is just too big [47 students in her classroom] and although a teacher aid is helpful, there are just too many students in my classroom." As such, she decided to divide her class into two smaller classes, one led by the teacher aid in another classroom and one led by her in her classroom. Beatrice divided the students into two groups: (1) academically advantaged students, and (2) students who needed additional support. The teacher aid took the second group—a smaller group that needed more individualized instruction—and Beatrice took the bigger group that was more independent and grasped content at a much faster pace. This type of grouping is known as academic ability grouping (Slavin, 1986); Beatrice explained, "dividing my class into these two groups really helped me teach and manage my classroom better."

Beatrice chose utilizing visuals to facilitate learning as her instructional strength. During the classroom observation, Beatrice used diverse visual resources to promote language and content learning as noted in her instructional strength. In particular, Beatrice used the overhead projector to work simultaneously with her students in answering the questions and checking the answers for each exercise. The class was fast-paced and students were actively working, answering questions and checking the answers for all their exercises. Beatrice practices a teacher-led classroom environment that works well with advanced ESOL students and keeps them focused on learning and interacting. During the observation, it was apparent that academic ability grouping proved successful, and that Beatrice uses visuals to facilitate

learning, as well as to maintain effective classroom management and keep her advanced students on task.

Claudia

Claudia selected incorporating technology in the ESOL classes and lesson plans as her instructional challenge. The proposed action plan, which was partially designed by Claudia, was to implement a Google Classroom workshop for all ESOL teachers in the department. The action plan proved successful for Claudia and her students. She explained, "I have started a Google classroom in which I can place activities to go about during class, which is a motivational resource, and students can return to the assignment after school hours as well." Although incorporating technology in Claudia's classroom has been successful, she also stated, "I just wish there was something easier that I could use and that would take less pre-planning time." These statements show Claudia's positive attitude towards incorporating Google classroom, but it also reflects the challenges she faces with technology.

Claudia identified her instructional strength to be using different techniques to successfully manage the classroom. Throughout the observation, it became clear that classroom management was not an issue for Claudia. She uses traditional classroom management techniques such as body language and direct teaching methods. Some of the most prevalent body language practices she used during the observation were direct eye contact to convey a message, body proximity as a tool to promote students' self-control, facial expressions to indicate acceptable or unacceptable behavior instead of calling out students' names, and body posture to engender confidence and classroom control. Furthermore, she used direct teaching methods such as lectures and guided activities in which students followed specific guidelines and instructions. Although traditional classroom management techniques are considered obsolete nowadays (Evertson & Weinstein, 2011), the ob-

servations showed that these techniques worked effectively in Claudia's classroom and contributed to students' good behavior and focus.

Daniel

Daniel identified accommodating interrupted education and illiterate ESOL students in the ESOL classroom as his instructional challenge. The proposed action plan was to incorporate peer-tutoring and to individualize small-group instruction to support the learning development of illiterate and interrupted education ESOL students. The action plan proved beneficial for Daniel's classroom because, as he explained, "it is easier to have students who understand each other explain to their peers from their own perspective." Daniel noted that at the beginning of the study his classes were smaller, but by the end of the study his English classes had grown to about 10 additional students per class. He said, "I initially thought that peer-tutoring would only help me in teaching my illiterate students or those with interrupted education. But, when my classes started to expand in numbers I found peer-tutoring to be a lifesaver as well." Peer tutoring proved successful for Daniel and helped him support the language and literacy needs of his illiterate students and those with interrupted education. In addition, it also proved beneficial in managing and supporting the academic needs of new ELs arriving in his classroom throughout this study.

Daniel identified his instructional strength to be modifying instruction as needed to facilitate English language acquisition. During the observation, it was evident that Daniel effectively accommodated instruction to support his students' needs. The class was divided into five groups, and each group had a responsible student, or group captain, explaining and modeling the activity. Daniel circulated the classroom explaining the information as needed and providing specific support to individual students who were not understanding the concepts. At one point,

Daniel created a new group with three students who were struggling to understand the concept and used word builders to explain the conjugation of the verb “to be.” Although accommodating and differentiating instruction are Daniel’s instructional strengths, classroom management and active learning were also identified among his instructional strengths.

Common Themes

In addition to the findings identified from the observation and interviews, as it pertained to the participants’ self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges, we can notice five common themes that the participants experience in their daily practices, as shown and explained in Table 3.

Professional Development

The need for professional development opportunities and the incorporation of quality professional

development sessions was a common trend among the participants’ responses. As Daniel stated, “this study has been beneficial to me personally because I rarely have the opportunity to receive professional feedback on how to improve my daily teaching practices; most of the professional development sessions offered to us by the county focus on testing.” In addition to this, Claudia explained that “when the school administrators conduct observations, [ESOL teachers] are evaluated using a standard rubric that is not appropriate for ESOL and the feedback [ESOL teachers] get to improve instruction is just not realistic.” As an example, Claudia shared that “during my observations, my students are expected to take control of the classroom and ownership of their learning but this cannot happen because they are learning how to put together a sentence in English. I can never get highly proficient in my observations because of this.” Participants agreed that there is a need for meaningful workshops that offer techniques and tips they can

Table 3. Common Themes

Common Themes	Brief Explanation
Professional development	Participants identified the need for relevant instructional training they can readily use in their classrooms.
Opportunity to reflect	Participants shared that there is a need for studies and/or activities they can use to reflect about their realities as ESOL teachers.
Making classes relevant to students	Participants were excited to receive one-on-one support that inspired them to get out of their comfort zone to offer meaningful classes/activities for their students.
Using diverse tools to teach language and literacy	Participants had the opportunity to come together to talk about their classroom experiences and learn from one another. Sharing ideas is not common practice for them, but this project served as an opportunity to start that dialogue.
Technology as an opportunity and a challenge	Participants found technology to be an engaging tool for their classes. However, some participants shared that they have never been trained on how to properly use technology in their classrooms and that learning technological resources/tools without appropriate support can be time consuming and intimidating.

realistically use in their ESOL classrooms.

Opportunity to Reflect

Participants stated that this project gave them the opportunity to reflect about their individual teaching practices and the department's teaching practices as a whole. Andrea, the department chair stated, "we [ESOL teachers] rarely have time to exchange tips and ideas due to the urgency of deadlines and student emergencies. However, this project pushed us to stop for a second and reflect about what we are doing in our classrooms and how we see ourselves as ESOL teachers."

Making Classes Relevant to Students

Participants implemented action plans with the purpose of overcoming self-perceived instructional challenges that were keeping them from incorporating meaningful activities in their classrooms. During the interviews, all participants stated that instruction needs to be relatable and should promote a sense of responsibility in their students. Andrea explained that this project made a positive impact in the ESOL department's vision of inculcating social responsibility through instruction because it offered real-life solutions to specific instructional challenges they were having. As she said, "I regularly prepare lessons of substance, provide students with feedback and remind students of school policies, class conventions and social expectations. But, sometimes I feel like I need to learn more so I can use other approaches to teach those things. In this project, I learned how to use a new tool to continue making my classes relevant."

Using Diverse Tools to Teach Language and Literacy

The use of diverse activities to teach language and literacy was identified as essential in the ESOL classrooms. Participants shared different didactic tools they use regularly to include multi-sensory

presentations, using students' background knowledge, story diagrams, collaborative work, and vocabulary development charts. Although participants have had little opportunity to collaborate in the past, the tools they use in their classroom to teach language and literacy are similar and they were surprised to learn how their peers also use them.

Technology as an Opportunity and a Challenge

The use of technology in the classroom was identified as both an opportunity and a challenge. Claudia stated, "using Google Classroom in my class was great and my students loved using the Chromebooks to answer questions." In this sense, technology was identified as an opportunity to engage students and keep them motivated towards learning. Technology is a tool that attracts students because they are surrounded by technology and they can relate to computers and cellphones the most.

On the other hand, some participants stated that technology was an uphill battle in the classroom. Andrea stated, "persuading students to use their own words and ideas instead of plagiarizing has become increasingly difficult with the ubiquitous cellphone." Furthermore, as Beatrice shared, "using technology is a challenge for me because I do not know when students are using their cellphones or Chromebooks to work on the activities or for Facebook, I do not know how to manage that." Appropriate use of technology in the classroom is something new for many educators (Mumtaz, 2000). In addition, the participants in this study had never received formal training about techniques they can use to successfully manage the use of technology in their classrooms and to keep students on task while using their cellphones or Chromebooks.

Research Sub-questions

In addition to the central question, this study had three (3) sub-questions. The first sub-question was "What are urban ESOL public high school educators' experiences regarding their instruction-

al/pedagogical practices?" The findings suggest that all participants had different teaching experiences in their classroom, although they were teaching the same student population. Andrea, the department chair and a veteran educator, felt confident about her ability to use scaffolding but had a challenge with how students use technology to plagiarize information. Beatrice and Claudia, also veteran educators, had a similar experience with technology in their classroom. All three of these veteran educators understood the importance of including technology but did not know how to manage it. This finding echoes Glowiak's (2014) article on the challenges veteran teachers encounter to understand and manage technology in the classroom. Thus, it is not enough to promote the use of technology and expect educators to have the necessary skills to incorporate it. School counties and administrators need to also offer workshops and professional development opportunities that specifically focus on the effective incorporation and management of technology in the ESOL classroom.

The second sub-question, "How do the self-perceived instructional strengths of ESOL educators in an urban high school compare to the strengths and challenges identified in the observations?" sought to make a connection between the participants' self-perceived pedagogical skills and their teaching practices. The findings indicate that the participants' self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges were accurate. Furthermore, some cases in the observations suggest that some participants also had additional instructional strengths that had not been self-identified. Knowing and understanding individual and other co-workers' instructional strengths and challenges was beneficial for all participants. All four ESOL educators shared that having this opportunity to reflect and learn about each other's instructional reality motivated them to collaborate in the future and conduct small workshops within the department to address specific instructional challenges.

Lastly, the third sub-question, "How are the participants' self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges present in their daily practices?" explored the impact that strengths and challenges had in the daily instruction of participants. The findings suggest that the self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges are present in the daily pedagogical practices of participants and have an impact in the overall classroom environment and delivery of information. Many of these findings align with previous studies on these specific self-identified instructional strengths and challenges. For example, Beatrice's ability to group her classes based on her students' academic skills impacts her daily instruction. This type of grouping is known as academic ability grouping, and literature shows the positive academic impact it has for students in ESOL and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms (Khazaenezhad, Barati, & Jafarzade, 2012; Matthews, Ritchotte, & McBee, 2013; Missett, Brunner, Callahan, Moon, & Azano, 2014). Similarly, Daniel's feedback on the potential of peer-tutoring in the ESOL classroom reflects Bowman-Perrott, deMarín, Mahadevan, & Etchells (2016) findings that "peer tutoring encourages gains for ELLs [English Language Learners] of varying levels of English proficiency. Further, ELLs appear to gain academic and social benefits from this empirically supported practice" (p. 378).

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The purpose of qualitative case studies is to search for meaning and understanding while immersing the researchers in a thorough descriptive study of the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study sought to understand the phenomenon of the participants' self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges in an urban public high school. Therefore, the research findings and conclusions are not necessarily representative of all ESOL teachers in urban high schools. Furthermore, the action plans implemented in this study should not be

considered best practices for similar self-perceived instructional challenges, as they were specifically tailored for the participants to fit their schedule, instructional reality, and students' academic needs.

Moreover, bias is an unavoidable element of the qualitative research methodology: "Qualitative researchers are involved in their research, and their experiences inform their research" (Fregeau & Leier, 2016, p. 70). As such, a note is warranted about my own background as it pertains to this study: I am a bilingual speaker (Spanish and English) and a prior ESOL student in high school, and I have worked as an ESOL educator for over 6 years. My experiences have influenced the choice to study this topic, and informed both the research approach and interpretation of the data. The research was also informed by my experiences with the impact self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges have in his daily instruction. Although the study could have been expanded to explore additional instructional strengths and challenges of ESOL educators in urban high schools, the main purpose was to address the impact self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges have for this particular population of teachers.

The study was 15 weeks long, beginning when participants were selected and extending to the moment data was gathered and findings were shared with the participants. Due to the time constraint, only one observation per teacher was feasible. Hence, the findings on the ESOL teachers' self-perceived instructional strengths, as compared with the observations, have opportunity for expansion. Including more observations in this study could have resulted in identifying more instructional strengths in each educator. However, evaluating self-perceived instructional strengths in daily instruction can be expanded into further research that specifically addresses that topic. Similarly, due to time constraints, teachers did not have the opportunity to reflect and share their thoughts about the real implications and impact this type of study will have in their daily practices. Further research could address the change in

instructional behavior educators have after reflecting on their self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the instructional experiences of ESOL teachers in an urban high school. As such, the central research question for this study was "What are the self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges of ESOL educators in an urban public high school?" The self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges for each participant were identified in the study. Action plans were created to overcome self-perceived instructional challenges and observations were conducted to evaluate the participants' self-perceived instructional strengths. The study indicates that the ESOL teachers' self-perception, whether for instructional strengths or challenges, impacts their teaching practices and shapes their classroom environment. This finding aligns with Badura's (1977) theory regarding the impact of self-perception on the teaching practices and instructional approaches educators use in the classroom. Furthermore, five common themes surfaced as findings that illustrate the participants' real professional and instructional challenges in today's classrooms.

The primary suggestion for the educational community, based on the findings and experiences while conducting this research, is to expand the current literature on the impact self-perceived instructional strengths and challenges have on ESOL teachers' daily professional and instructional practices. Research can also expand the current literature on how action plans to overcome self-perceived instructional challenges promote educators' resilience and motivation. This study had many limitations, but one of the most significant limitations was the number of participants. As such, it is important for future

research studies on this topic to examine a larger population of participants to compare findings. In addition, researchers could address specific strengths and challenges for NNESTs within a research context similar to this study. Lastly, future research should also focus on how professional development shapes and contributes to the teaching practices of ESOL educators in urban school settings.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me something you consider to be an instructional strength in your teaching practices.
2. Tell me something you consider to be an instructional challenge in your teaching practices.
3. What three words would you use to describe your teaching practices with English as a second language students? - great, why _____? (repeat with each word)
4. Tell me about a time when a lesson you presented enabled ESOL students to learn.
5. Tell me about a time when a lesson you presented caused struggles for ESOL students
6. If you had to choose one thing that you do well in working with ESOL students, what would that be? Why?
7. If you had to choose one thing that is a challenge for you in working with ESOL students, what would that be? Why?
8. How would you explain your experience teaching ESOL in an urban high school?
9. Did the action plan to overcome your instructional challenge prove successful? Why or why not?
10. How was this study beneficial for you personally and as a department? What did you learn from this study about you and your colleagues in the ESOL department?

APPENDIX B
OBSERVATION LOG

Informal Observation/Learning Walk Form*

Teacher Name _____	Class _____	
Date _____	Period _____	Peer Observer: _____

Objective:

Warm-up:

I Saw	I Wonder	Other Thoughts

*This is an informal observation and is not evaluative.