

Teacher Perceptions of English Language Learners in Physical Education

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### **Abstract**

The purpose for this synthesis project is to examine the perceptions of physical education teachers toward English Language Learners. ERIC, SPORTDiscus, and Taylor & Francis Social Science and Humanities Library online databases accessed through the SUNY Brockport Online Library, and Google Scholar were used to obtain the critical mass of research. The search included key terms including “English Language Learners in physical education”, “ELL physical education”, perceptions of ELL in physical education”, and others, along with certain criteria of inclusion allowed for 11 articles to be used for the critical mass of research. The studies reviewed within the critical mass yielded factors that create barriers and facilitators for instruction of ELLs. Barriers included communication troubles, teacher preparedness, and cultural dissonance while pairing, demonstrations, inclusion of culture, help from colleagues, and changes to teaching methods were considered facilitators. Recommendations included eliminating barriers, creating an inclusive classroom, improving communication, more effective teacher preparedness, and utilization of best practices. While previous research notes language and cultural disparities are a cause of negative perceptions of ELL students, further research is needed to determine whether physical educators are properly equipped to successfully instruct ELLs without bias.

*Keywords:* [English Language Learners, ELLs, physical education, teacher perceptions, facilitators, barriers, cultural dissonance]

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## **Teacher Perceptions of English Language Learners in Physical Education**

English Language Learners (ELLs) are one of the fastest-growing student population in the United States today (Wei, 2021). In 2010, 10% of students in the United States were ELLs, or children with limited English proficiency who require specialized academic education (Santillan et al., 2015). The number of ELLs enrolled in K-12 public schools in the United States increased from 4.2 million to 4.5 million between 2013 and 2014 (Sato et al., 2019). Another study forecasts the number of Hispanics alone in the United States who speak English as a second language will increase by 167 percent by 2050, from 49.7 million to 132.8 million (Samalot-Rivera et al., 2018). This unique group of students has been met with many challenges as they try to navigate American-style education. Language and linguistic differences, communication struggles, traumatic past experiences, cultural differences, and exclusion are all barriers needed to be overcome (Sato & Hodge, 2016). Similarly, teachers in the United States, especially those in large cities, have been inundated with groups of ELLs without much training or advice on how to best serve these students, which presents challenges as well. An even more unique situation is how these students can be successful in their physical education classes.

In the United States teachers must go through many different tests to prove that they are ready to teach the diverse population that resides in our country. For example, in New York State it was found there are now requirements that all potential teaching candidates are required within their teacher education programs to have language acquisition and literacy development by native English speakers and students who are ELLs (NYSED, 2022). In Florida, physical education teachers, like all other preservice

teachers, must complete three credit hours of ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) training. Physical education teachers can choose between three credit hours or 18 hours of in-service professional development (Clancy & Hruska, 2005). However, this was not the case only a short time ago. Thus, it is likely that many physical education teachers currently in the field have had little to no training on how to include ELLs in class. As a result, most physical education teacher training programs do not place a strong emphasis on the instructional abilities required to address and meet the language requirements of ELLs (Gomez & Jimenez-Silva, 2012). According to data from the 2020-2021 school year, there were 240,035 students receiving services and another 81,655 students who previously required ELL services in New York State public schools (NYSED, 2022). First year teachers may not know the challenges they may face, as well as challenges their student counterparts may face as well.

Cultural dissonance plays a very large part in our current society. People do not like feeling uncomfortable, yet ELLs do not have much of a choice when attending school in the United States. Sato and Hodge (2016) looked to explore the ways physical education teachers can positively impact students who are learning the English language. Not only do ELLs have a language barrier, but they also may be faced with rules, games, or actions and sounds they are not familiar with. This can cause feelings of anxiety, sadness, and withdrawal. One finding from Sato and Hodge (2016) was that some ELL students have experienced trauma. Some students' lives were still impacted by incidents that occurred before they arrived in this country. Students' unpleasant emotional responses were generated by loud noises (echoes in the gym) and sometimes everyday moving things such as a ball. Similarly, physical education teachers may not be aware of

other cultures' ways of playing a game, what games are played in that culture, or what the cultural norms are around playing games with others. Technical vocabulary comes into play very often in physical education. One example of this is with vocabulary in the game of baseball. Students need to know multiple meaning words, such as error, base, out, and bat. These words have one meaning in physical education, but another meaning in different subject areas (Santillan et al., 2015).

It is critical for teachers and coaches to discover which instructional actions are in need of modification, or need to be eradicated from their daily routines that discourage ELL students from participating in physical education. Additionally, what actions they need to yield or carry on that are positive and encourage skill and language acquisition for this population. There is some, but not a great deal of research on the topic of ELL student's involvement in physical education. However, the research that has been conducted to date can provide guidance to physical educators.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose for this synthesis project is to examine the perceptions of physical education teachers towards ELLs. Although ELLs create a pedagogical challenges for physical education instruction, this synthesis looks to explore how to facilitate instruction that breaks down such barriers to create a positive learning experience for all students.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following operational definitions are used in this paper:

1. English Language Learners – “Students whose first language is not English and who are in the process of learning English” (Gomez & Jimenez-Silva, 2012).

2. Communication – How, in what forms, instructional content is delivered to students of the research population.
3. Perceptions – Stereotypes, expectations, and experiences of how teachers position their own values and activities, demonstrating that teachers have a conscious perspective on reality. Teachers' perceptions influence how they carry out their roles, assignments, and responsibilities in the classroom (Sato, et al., 2018).
4. Cultural Dissonance - Cultural gaps between the ELLs and teachers that often occur because of different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Sato & Hodge, 2016).

### **Assumptions**

An abundance of assumptions can be made about the literature reviewed for my critical mass. One assumption is that all studies included in the critical mass were done ethically, and justly. All questionnaires used were answered truthfully, and all interviews conducted had honest responses. Another assumption was that all data that was formed was a result of valid tests. Interviews from articles in the critical mass were transcribed and coded based on key words. These data used are assumed valid.

### **Delimitations**

Some delimitations that were faced while compiling the critical mass were the copiousness of articles which were resulted from the “ELL Physical Education” search. Because of this, certain criteria were used to find articles to form the critical mass. This criteria will be mentioned further in the methods chapter of this synthesis project.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this synthesis project are in chapter 4.

## **Scope of Synthesis**

Utilizing a critical mass of literature on this topic, I will explore the perceptions of teaching ELL students in physical education. I will shed light on negative connotations associated with ELLs and opinions of physical education teachers towards the ELL student population. This material will inform current, and future physical education teachers on how to meet the social and instructional needs of the ELL population they will encounter, and also how to strive for a more diverse and culturally responsive physical education curriculum. The literature reviewed will focus on physical education classes in the K-12 school setting. I focused my search for research studies to include analysis on barriers for teachers of ELLs in physical education as well as solutions or suggestions for pedagogical improvements.

## **Summary**

English Language Learners are a vast population of students that present certain challenges to teachers in the physical education setting. With many Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) programs offering little to no training with ELLs, and professional development opportunities at a minimum, there remains a gap between teacher preparedness and ELL learning in physical education classes. It is important to identify what physical education teacher's experiences and perceptions are, along with which instruction strategies serve as facilitators of learning for ELL students, and how to overcome language and cultural barriers that may be encountered.

## Chapter 2 Methods

### Search Procedures

I used online databases accessed through the SUNY Brockport Online Library to search for articles to obtain a critical mass of papers on my topic. By utilizing the databases ERIC, SPORTDiscus, and Taylor & Francis Social Science and Humanities Library, and Google Scholar I was able to obtain articles specific to my synthetic project. The first search term, “English Language Learners in physical education”, returned 57,833 results, indicating a wide diversity of articles. Substituting the abbreviation of “ELL physical education”, narrowed the spectrum to 17,990 results. To further results, I refined the search beyond Drake Library, searched for only peer reviewed articles, open access, and articles that were in the databases mentioned above.

After the preliminary search, key terms were used to culminate the remainder of my critical mass of articles. Additionally, the terms “ESL physical education”, “perceptions of ELL in physical education”, “experiences with ELL physical education”, “opinions of ELL physical education”, “bilingual physical education”, “multicultural physical education”, “linguistics physical education”, and “physical education language acquisition” were used for the search. An ancestral search was conducted by using the “find sources citing this” and “find sources cited in this” feature in the results. These results rendered a common author, Takahiro Sato. Using search term “Takahiro Sato” yielded 10,948 results, “Takahiro Sato physical education” generated 600 results, and “Takahiro Sato physical education ELL” produced 8 results. One final search that was done was using ‘Google Scholar’, utilizing the same terms above. Any articles that I felt fit the description of my project, were then cross-searched using the databases. This

yielded minimal results that were not already found in previous searches, however some articles were used for background information.

### **Criteria for Inclusion**

Due to the massive amounts of articles that resulted from my searches, the next step was to choose the articles to use for my critical mass. The articles chosen were those that were published in peer-reviewed publications or journals. By doing this, I cast aside any biases or opinion pieces that may have been used in magazine or newspaper articles. Next, each study used was specific to grade levels kindergarten through twelfth grade, representing all grade levels found in elementary and secondary education. Since this study is about ELLs, or speakers of another language whose native language is not English, I looked for articles that were specific to the United States. Finally, I looked for articles that expressed the opinions, positions, and perceptions of teachers of ELL students. These articles focused on experiences the teachers had with teaching ELL students that provided details about said experiences as well as provided facilitators and barriers for instruction. Two dissertations were selected to be included in the critical mass. These exceptions were made because one dissertation was published in a journal in Spanish, and the dissertation is the English version. The other dissertation is being used because the author is a contributing author for another article included in the critical mass. Both of these dissertations fulfill all of the other criteria for inclusion stated above. The critical mass was narrowed to 11 articles.

### **Data Analysis**

Once I acquired the critical mass for my synthesis, I created an article grid to organize the critical information from each article (see Appendix A). This grid provides a

summary of participants, methodologies, results, and discussions of the studies selected. As the included articles were compared and contrasted, various themes were apparent. A coding table (see Appendix B) was created to compare significant findings from all of the studies included in the article grid. This article grid and coding table were used to form my results.

## **Chapter 3 Results**

This chapter provides a synthesis of findings that were found in the critical mass of literature that explored teacher perceptions of ELLs in physical education. Two main themes emerged within the research: (1) barriers for instruction and (2) facilitators for instruction. Three sub-themes emerged from barriers of instruction: (1) communication, (2) teacher preparation, and (3) cultural dissonance. Many of the findings from the studies can be viewed negatively from the perspectives of teachers. However, some of the sub-themes do offer a positive scope on ELLs.

### **Barriers for Instruction**

One of the two main themes of ELLs in physical education was barriers of instruction. These barriers are organized into sub-themes which include communication, teacher preparedness, and cultural dissonance.

#### ***Communication***

Communication was a barrier of instruction sub-theme that was common among the critical mass. This barrier was found at both the elementary and secondary level. Sato et al. (2019) looked to describe and explain experiences and pedagogical practices of teaching ELLs of physical education teachers in elementary physical education programs, the six physical education instructors faced a variety of difficulties when instructing ELL elementary school students. Furthermore, it was also found that the ELLs had a hard time communicating with teachers and students in both verbal and written forms. The ELLs were perceived by the participants as either silent or quiet students. The teachers struggled to identify ELLs' particular needs and simultaneously branded ELLs as troublemakers. They struggled with how to break down communication obstacles,

socially integrate ELLs, and reduce racial stereotypes brought on by exclusion or isolation of ELLs from local kids (Sato et al., 2019). Additionally, Sato and Hodge (2016) explored certain physical education teachers' positioned their pedagogies as difficult while instructing ELLs in elementary school. The six participating physical education teachers felt that language barriers, cultural, and religious differences created discord between ELLs and their families, which were major contributors to their struggles (Sato & Hodge, 2016). The ELL's language disparities resulted in challenges with vocabulary and comprehension, in particular with regards to motor activities, resulting in teacher frustrations with ELL students.

At the secondary level, Sato and colleagues (2022) examined secondary physical education teachers' positioning of ELLs and of themselves as teachers of ELLs. The authors found that 100% of participants had difficulty teaching ELLs in physical education while also teaching them standard and social English language. Moreover, it was found that when teachers tried to communicate with ELLs, they lacked proficiency in the ability to communicate in an ethnolinguistic manner. As a result of this deficiency, the only interactions with their ELLs in their physical education classes were their attempts of corrective feedback and interventions (Sato et al., 2022).

Communication barriers were often caused by language differences between physical education teachers and ELL students. Sato and Hodge (2016) found that ELLs' language differences at the elementary level manifested as learning difficulties, and that ELLs frequently struggled with speaking, writing, and reading. First-hand accounts from this study stated that due to language disparities, ELLs found it particularly difficult to comprehend content-specific terminology related to motor skills. The learning and

problem-solving processes and styles of ELLs are not compatible with physical education principles and activities. The physical education teachers explained that certain motor skills, such as skipping and galloping, were not taught in some of the ELLs culture and, therefore, were never learned. Because of this, ELLs were perceived as showing lack of interest in class content. Language difficulties were also found in a case study that explored the experiences and teaching practices of K–12 physical education teachers of ELLs (Delk, 2015). The author found that 100% of participants felt inability to speak the student's language, which led to a barrier of instruction. The participants felt that relaying information to ELLs were almost impossible by speaking alone.

Bernstein and Lysniak (2017) examined physical education teachers' beliefs and implementation of competitive activities for middle school multicultural student populations and found communication and language barriers with their study as well. The physical education teachers in this study were fully aware of student diversity. They acknowledged that a majority of the ELLs did not speak or understand English and that students came from various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of the students were experiencing American activities for the first time. Teachers saw this as a challenge for ELL students to fit in because they were unfamiliar with the English language and culture.

Baldwin (2015) looked to analyze and explore the experiences of eight first-year physical education teachers who have taught African refugee students. This study suggested that language barriers and self-confidence proved to be a critical issue that all of the beginning teachers identified as needing to be improved in the schools where they were teaching. It was found that the substantial amount of non-English speaking

backgrounds that many of the refugee kids brought to the schools made it was challenging for teachers to maintain any practical feeling of accomplishment. This led to low self-efficacy for the first year teachers participating in the study because of the need to frequently adapt instruction to accommodate language disparities. All of the new teachers recognized communication as a crucial problem that needed to be resolved in the schools where they were working (Baldwin, 2015). Overall, the participants thought that this was an area where they had let themselves down significantly, whether it was communication with their coworkers, their students, or parents. Sanchez et al. (2018) found in a similar study that examined the opinions of primary education physical education teachers concerning bilingual physical education, it was found that just about half, 53.3 percent of teachers, felt the way that physical education is currently taught can clearly be taught bilingually. Additionally, 56.6% of physical educator teachers felt integrating a foreign language into physical education will increase students' motivation to learn the language (Sanchez et al., 2018).

In another study, Flory and McCaughtry (2011) examined teachers' and students' perspectives on culturally relevant physical education in diverse urban settings. Fifty-three physical education teachers were interviewed and observed over a four year period, and during the time for this study, it was noted that levels of English proficiency in schools and the languages spoken in these communities were extremely diverse. In fact, in one particular school, over 40 distinct languages were spoken by students. Consequently, many students struggled with interpreting teacher expressions, phrases, and directions. Flory and McCaughtry (2011) also discovered that many students lived with relatives who spoke even less English. Thus, family structure could also have an

impact on ELL students since many may only learn languages during class time. The students were not able to bring home content learned in physical education and apply it with their home life because their relatives also had very low English proficiency, and English was very rarely used in family settings (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011).

### ***Teacher Preparedness***

When it came to teaching ELLs, how prepared teachers were for ELL instruction was another sub-theme that was a common barrier for instruction in the critical mass of research. Burden and colleagues (2012) looked to analyze physical education teacher views about the application of concepts and content reflecting social justice pedagogies in preparing teacher candidates, half of the participants stated they struggled to come up with effective strategies to deal with pupils who were designated as ELLs. Moreover, it was noted that teachers were challenged to accommodate the growing number of languages spoken in the K–12 schools as a whole in the curriculum (Burden et al., 2012). According to 66.7% of teachers in a study by Sanchez et al. (2018), bilingualism, or the ability to speak two languages, is not a qualification that English and physical education teachers share. Additionally, 80% of the teachers indicated that universities are doing little to nothing to prepare physical education students, or future teachers, to teach bilingually. This finding suggests that physical education teachers are not getting enough training, or are not equipped, to teach ELLs. Teachers in another study felt disappointed that not all ELLs performed to their standards and expectations in the classroom (Sato & Hodge, 2016). These teachers put in extra time and effort to help the ELLs succeed academically in physical education. The failure of the ELLs to live up to the teachers' expectations annoyed all six participants when teaching the ELLs. The teachers feel they

failed to break the communication barriers and openly admitted they could not prepare every single lesson plan in a way that would prevent confusion and misunderstandings.

### ***Cultural Dissonance***

Because of such a vast difference in cultures, languages, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds between the physical education teachers and ELLs, cultural dissonance was a sub-theme of barriers of instruction discovered from the critical mass. According to the study by Burden et al. (2012), 100% of participating teachers admitted that they frequently neglected to incorporate culturally relevant or responsive ideas and content into their lessons. A lack of instructors and students of color, according to half of them, was to blame for this negligence. The participants in Sato and Hodge's (2016) study found the lack of cultural relevancy in their lessons would inadvertently exclude the ELLs.

Reflections by physical education teachers about their teaching experiences indicated they found it challenging to strike a balance between their roles as supportive teachers of their ELLs and corrective instructors (Sato et al., 2022). Because of this, the ELLs were afraid to make mistakes with skills and would avoid eye contact if mistakes were made. Consequently, the ELLs were often made targets of ridicule by local students when corrections were made. Sato et al. (2019) noted one participant anticipated that her ELL students would participate in the academic learning process, form friendly relationships with their classmates, and demonstrate intrinsic motivation and learning interests throughout the classes. However, this was not the case. The teacher reflected that because the ELLs were unable to acknowledge and react to the power dynamics of the students and teacher relationship, they became irate when unable to build their own

secure and comfortable learning environment (Sato et al., 2019). Additionally, the teachers discovered that a large number of ELLs did not comprehend the idea of sharing equipment with others. Sharing was not a part of many refugee ELLs' survival skills in their home countries since they had been traumatized by past life experiences, such as war-related trauma or life-threatening experiences. The negative experiences were all due to the divide in cultural norms.

Some of the ELLs previous life experiences led to events in class the teachers were not privy to. According to Sato and Hodge (2016) five of the six participating teacher believed that numerous ELLs were terrified of the voice echoes, noises, and lights in the gym caused by students and staff. This was especially crucial because several ELLs were refugees who had previously experienced life-threatening persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, or political beliefs (Sato & Hodge, 2016). One specific teacher mentioned that after some research, her ELL student was showing common signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In the same study, cultural dissonance was noted due to normal cultural behavior of the ELLs. The authors also found that cultural dissonance was occurring in instances where the ELLs felt they were behaving appropriately, according to their cultural norms and upbringing, but the teachers interpreted the behaviors as inappropriate. ELLs were deemed to be misbehaving by acting the way they are used to in their native cultures. Delk (2015) also found that having limited knowledge about the student's background created a barrier. Teachers were unable to predict cultural norms without pre-existing knowledge.

Country of origin and gender played a role in cultural dissonance as well. Sato and Hodge (2016) stated the physical education teachers found that parents of male ELLs

from Middle Eastern countries prefer male teachers over female teachers. Parents of Middle Eastern female ELLs prefer that their daughters do not participate at all in physical education courses regardless of the gender of the physical education teacher (Sato & Hodge, 2016). The parents didn't want them to adopt or incorporate American gender norms into their lives. Because of these gender norms, female ELL social behaviors were seen as inappropriate. During Ramadan, one teacher withheld her Muslim ELLs from participating because the students were fasting. This teacher felt uncomfortable, and didn't think it was safe.

Stereotyping was another outcome from the cultural dissonance found in certain studies. In one study, a teacher mentioned that she racially stereotyped her African ELLs because they share the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds as African American youngsters and thought they would exhibit aggressive and violent behaviors (Sato et al., 2019). Previous experiences also played a role in the stereotyping. In this same study, a separate participating teacher revealed she had stereotyped expected behaviors based on previous interactions with other ELL students of the same race or culture and did not make an effort to give each ELL student a chance to display their individual behavior (Sato et al., 2019). It wasn't only the teachers stereotyping the ELLs, it was the local students as well. One teacher was worried that her students would not respect their ELLs diversity, create their own race-based stereotypes of the ELLs, and create a larger gap in social inclusion and isolation (Sato, et al., 2019).

### **Facilitators for Instruction**

The second main theme from the critical mass of research was facilitators for instruction. Even though all participants in the studies had varying experiences, many

were able to break down some barrier(s) for instruction. These methods allowed for teachers to facilitate their lessons and improve instructional techniques for their ELL students.

Some of the physical education teachers actually learned from the ELLs. Learning key phrases in the ELLs native languages allowed for better communication and instruction (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). Hansen-Thomas and Cavagnetto (2010) conducted a case study investigating teachers' attitudes toward ELLs at three middle schools in Texas, New York, and Pennsylvania and found that there were positive experiences with ELLs in physical education. It was stated that in Pennsylvania, the majority of ELL students were highly successful in their content area. ELL success was due to lesson modifications, being paired with partner helpers, using visual aids, and having individualized instruction (Hansen-Thomas & Cavagnetto, 2010). Bernstein and Lysniak (2017) suggested some teachers felt the implementation of competitive activities for middle school multicultural student populations brought upon ELL social inclusion by the content being instructed. Even though communication and language barriers existed, and some children may not be familiar with the activities, teachers felt it was important for all students to engage in activities in order to foster a sense of community. By incorporating a sport education model and having all the students participate in various rotations during a basketball class, whether as players, officials, coaches, or observers, a sense of community was created (Bernstein & Lysniak, 2017). This led to a positive experience for all the students and teachers alike. One fear from this study was bullying; however, this did not materialize. The authors stated that teachers thought that by

establishing a philosophy of mutual respect, teasing and bullying might be curbed. It was noted that the teachers' classes were free of any incidents of bullying and teasing.

Some teachers felt that working with ELLs enabled them to explore new, different viewpoints that resulted in innovative teaching methods. Teachers were able to turn negative experiences into positives. Sato and colleagues (2019) found that when five of the participating female teachers first began teaching ELLs, parents of students from Middle Eastern nations made derogatory remarks about them. The teachers became aware that their lessons and activities were not beneficial and pertinent enough to their ELLs because of the parents' feedback. This was not the only study where participants altered their teaching strategies. Teachers in Baldwin's (2015) study claimed that they made deliberate changes to their teaching methods and goals in order to make them more consistent to meet the needs of ELLs (Baldwin, 2015). This study suggests many of these teachers were able to look forward to a second year in the same school with a certain amount of optimism, even though it might be necessary to change their early intents and plans of what would work in the classroom with their students.

Pairing, or allowing the students to work with a partner, allowed for improved instruction. Hansen-Thomas and Cavagnetto (2010) noted that teachers believed that changes in learning strategies had something to do with ELL's success. The use of visual aids and having assistance in pairs were mentioned as reasons why ELLs were successful. Delk (2015) also found that working in peers was the most effective strategy for instruction with the ELL population, especially with students who were bilingual and could communicate with their partners. Furthermore, Iannacchino and Samalot-Rivera (2022) explored to find out what physical education teachers are currently doing to

accommodate ELL students. It was found 98% of the participating physical education teachers found social interaction to be an effective strategy (Iannacchino & Samalot-Rivera, 2022). Working with partners or with groups was a benefit for ELL students. In a different study, one teacher emphasized skill development and station-based peer teaching with pupils, which led to peer encouragement and wove interpersonal skills into the curriculum (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011). This same teacher avoided competitive activities altogether.

Conversely, another study indicated that competitive activities were a great facilitator for instruction and inclusion of ELLs because the teachers strongly felt that competitive activities are part of American culture (Bernstein & Lysniak, 2017). Demonstrations played an important role for instruction in this study. Students who might not understand English and have no prior experience with the skills may struggle without a model. Because of this, students are frequently given demonstrations and repetitions of the skills by their teachers. The teachers wanted to ensure that the students knew how to play the sport they were participating in (Bernstein & Lysniak, 2017). Delk (2015) also found that 100% of participants deemed demonstrations to be an effective facilitator because visualization of skills is vital in physical education. Effective demonstrations proved to be effective with a guide to model skills being learned.

Another facilitator was using the student culture and background as a way for inclusion and communication. At the secondary level, Sato and colleagues (2022) found it was effective to employ social language and fundamental communication techniques, by using key terms in both the ELL native language and English, which were easier to understand and familiar to ELLs. This also made it easier for ELLs and local students to

communicate (Sato et al., 2022). Iannacchino and Samalot-Rivera (2022) found that 58% of participating teachers felt using visual aids with the ELL students' native language to be an effective instructional strategy. Additionally, Delk (2015) found 50% of participants effectively infused native language in some form. At the elementary level, some of the physical education teachers sought help. It was discovered that one physical education teacher adopted the use of a token reward system, from the special education teacher. This method was useful for understanding the backgrounds of the students (Sato et al., 2019). In this instance, it took several years, but this method was how she was able to build relationships with her ELL population. She was able to connect the rewards to their culture because the rewards were of student personal interest. Communication was utilized a different way in a separate study. Flory and McCaughtry (2011) found that teachers would communicate with their ELL population by using demonstrations, other students who were bilingual and peer tutors, and posters and visualizations in the students native languages.

### **Summary**

Studies have shown that there are many factors that create barriers and facilitators for physical education teachers instructing ELL student populations. These barriers for instruction include communication, teacher preparedness, and cultural dissonance. Facilitators for instruction included pairing, demonstrations, including student culture, help from colleagues, and changes to teaching methods. Ultimately, these factors influence the perceptions in a positive or negative light. In the upcoming chapter, I will discuss how physical education teachers can utilize the results from the critical mass to

improve experiences with ELL students. Limitations will also be discussed as well as directions for future research.

## **Chapter 4 Discussion**

This synthesis project examined perceptions of teachers of ELLs in physical education. When examining the results, it is clear that physical education teachers and ELLs have ample barriers to overcome. These barriers result from varying experiences of physical education teachers towards ELLs. Physical education teachers, ELLs, and local students are functioning at a time when diversity and cultural responsiveness is a focal point for inclusive classrooms. The information found in the critical mass of articles leads to suggestions for physical educators on how to better facilitate instruction that can be inclusive to the ELL population and lead to more positive experiences by all.

### **Inclusive Classroom Setting**

First and foremost, creating an inclusive classroom setting is imperative for ELLs to be successful. The classroom setting should eliminate all cultural dissonance and stereotyping of ELLs and their cultures. This responsibility falls with the physical education teacher to build a sense of community that includes ELL students. To advance inclusive practices in physical education, teachers must create strong partnerships with schools, ELLs, their parents or guardians, religious organizations as well as local immigration agencies to learn more about their possible war-related traumas. Advocating for race and ethnicity awareness techniques in sport and physical activity contexts should be incorporated and infused into a multi-cultural curriculum to reduce race-based stereotypes in physical education classes. By engaging in relationship-building activities and chances for networking with ELLs, physical education teachers can support and encourage their local students' development of and observance to multi-cultural

diversities (Bernstein & Lysniak, 2017; Sato et al., 2019; Sato et al., 2022; Sato & Hodge, 2016).

Although it may be difficult, establishing the sense of community in the classroom, and at a home, would be a good starting point for a physical education teacher to begin working on an inclusive class setting and could be used as an indication of cultural responsiveness and awareness. For example, physical education teachers may not be aware of other cultures' ways of playing a game, what games are played in that culture, or what the cultural norms are around playing games with others. Teachers could create a multi-cultural curriculum by including sports and background history of activities ELLs are familiar with. Students who have a background in a subject will learn more about that subject and will also learn more English since the English they hear in class will be more understandable. Furthermore, English learning students will gain more value from a curriculum that includes culture (Krashan, 2014). This is an important component of creating a multi-cultural curriculum to alleviate cultural dissonance, stereotyping, and cultural gaps, which were specifically noted in several studies (Burden et al., 2012; Sato et al., 2019; Sato et al., 2022; Sato & Hodge, 2016). All stakeholders in class, including paraprofessionals and local students, can benefit from cultural inclusion.

### **Improved Communication**

Perhaps the largest barrier which influenced perceptions of physical education teachers and their ELLs was language differences and communication struggles (Baldwin, 2015; Flory & McCaughtry, 2011; Sanchez et al., 2018; Sato et al., 2019; Sato et al., 2022; Sato & Hodge, 2016). To address this large spread issue, there were several recommendations that physical education teachers should consider when moving forward

to address any needs of ELLs. It is imperative for physical education teachers to improve technical vocabulary for locomotor (e.g., run, walk, skip, jump) and manipulative skills (e.g., throw, kick, catch) and label these words in both English and their native languages. All students, including ELLs, may be required to participate in games and activities using a restricted number of terms from their native or ethnolinguistic languages (e.g., pass, dribble, shot). Students can instruct one another on how to properly enunciate certain terms (Sato & et al., 2022; Sato & Hodge, 2016). By utilizing all students, the teachers can then set attainable social short-term goals for improvement.

Physical education teachers and local students' perceptions of ELLs' social and academic competence were established by their own expectations (Sato et al., 2022). Teacher communication and language perceptions of ELLs are developed by how their own teaching practices are used towards local students when language and communication is not a factor. Because of this, it is recommended that teachers help ELLs identify their own learning style and perhaps develop the ability to comprehend the language and actions of the school community. Physical education teachers should concentrate on intercultural language and communicative teaching that stresses ethnolinguistically relevant pedagogy. An example of this would be to build a connection between the students, the communities they come from, and the school community they are learning in.

Holding school districts or individual schools accountable is one final recommendation for improving communication and language difficulties. School districts should look to recruit and appoint culturally and linguistically diverse physical education teachers (Iannacchino & Samalot-Rivera, 2022; Sanchez et al., 2018; Sato et al., 2012;

Sato & Hodge, 2016). Having teachers with the appropriate linguistic and methodological backgrounds is especially important because this element has a significant impact on language and content learning. If the school district is culturally and linguistically diverse in nature, school districts should factor in teachers who are bilingual into account in the hiring process.

### **Effective Preparation**

Across several studies, educators firmly believe that all children should display their learning achievements both academically and socially. When physical education teachers' expectations of ELLs were not met, frustrations and irritability became prevalent. On many occasions, ELLs rejected or disagreed with the expectations that the teachers made of them based on their academic standards, thus causing a sense of defiance. This made the ELLs come across as trouble makers (Sato et al., 2022; Sato & Hodge, 2016). One common discussion from these studies were that the teachers were inadequately trained and underprepared to instruct ELLs. It is crucial that educators understand how languages, specifically additional languages, are acquired in order to fully understand how to teach ELL students. School districts must provide and mandate workshops for physical education teachers on cultural and behavioral scaffolding. In addition to a network system that enables all teachers in the school districts to access this information, professional development opportunities offered by school districts should emphasize on how to use ELL cultural background and demographic information in their courses and units. Workshops should also focus on metacognitive development so teachers and ELLs can monitor, evaluate, and make changes to their own teaching and

learning behaviors (Delk, 2015; Iannacchino & Samalot-Rivera, 2022; Rizzuto, 2017; Sato et al., 2022; Sato & Hodge, 2016).

An argument can be made that this lack of preparation can happen before a physical education teacher is employed by a school district. Lack of training can be seen in physical education teacher education (PETE) programs, which leads to a lack of readiness for future teaching professionals to instruct ELLs (Baldwin, 2015; Burden et al., 2012; Delk, 2015; Iannacchino & Samalot-Rivera, 2022; Sato et al., 2022). Early field experiences for preservice teachers in diverse settings should be required by PETE programs. Increasing teacher candidates' exposure to various educational environments will help improve their cultural competency. Fieldwork in urban schools may help aspiring teachers become immersed in other cultures and help with gaining experiences working with ELLs. This experience may help to decrease their unfavorable perceptions of multicultural students. Inadequate support can be seen in not only pre-service teachers, but first-year physical education teachers as well. First-year physical education teachers are learning on the job without the immediate help or support of others, especially if they are the only physical education teacher at their school.

### **Best Practices for Instruction**

Lastly, teachers may consider utilizing best practices for ELLs in physical education classes. It was noted that when using pairing, peer tutoring, and collaborative efforts, there was a success for ELLs. They improved in understanding curricula, overcoming language barriers, and promoting inclusion through verbal interaction and collaboration (Delk, 2015; Hansen-Thomas & Cavagnetto, 2010; Sato & Hodge, 2016). By facilitating collaboration and modifying instruction, teachers were able to support

learning of ELL students. In some instances, bilingual students and paraprofessionals were able to serve as translators between ELLs and teachers in urban school settings.

However, verbal interactions are not enough. Several studies (Bernstein & Lysniak, 2017; Delk, 2015; Flory & McCaughtry, 2011) noted how demonstrations played an enormous role in facilitating instruction of ELL students. When verbal directions are hard to understand for ELLs, watching others demonstrate and model activities properly can lead to skill acquisition. In a content area such as physical education when a majority of content is psychomotor, correct physical movement is important for safety and skill acquisition. At the elementary level, motor skills are essential for creating a physically literate individual. At the secondary level, correct utilization of skills is important if students are unfamiliar due to cultural gaps. Breaking down the skill and using teacher and peer demonstrations could lead to greater effort and participation by ELL students.

Aside from demonstrations, visual aids proved to be an important facilitator of instruction for ELL students. Physical educators could display an educational film for visual and auditory purposes prior to hands-on application of a new skill, allowing for ELLs to practice listening skills. Using the additional ELL abilities of reading and speaking, posters with learning cues might be discussed and referred to after the film to improve the teaching of the skill. Any time an ELL's native language can be included is highly recommended (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011; Iannacchino & Samalot-Rivera, 2022; Nguyen & Watanabe, 2013; Santillan et al., 2015; Sato & Burge-Hall, 2010). When there is a language barrier, it is crucial to use the student's first language to explain topics. This should be done by using visual aids, such as posters, for posting learning objectives in the

ELLs native languages along with English. Teachers and student can also learn key phrases in the ELLs native languages. For example, all students can learn to shake hands and say "thank you", "good game", or "great job" in each other's native language at the end of games and activities.

### **Limitations**

The critical mass of research on teacher perception of ELL students in physical education is limited at this time. While it is possible that increasing rates of ELLs integrated into American schools may increase research in this area, the current body of literature is small. Additionally, many of the research studies used small sample sizes of teachers. Thus, results of the critical mass may not be generalizable to the larger population of physical education teachers. Furthermore, most of the research was conducted using interviews and questionnaires at the end of school years. These methods required teacher to recall their experiences, which may not accurately reflect their experiences. It is worth noting that there was no indication of how many ELL students the teachers had in their classes. Experiences can differ for teachers depending on how many students were enrolled in their classes. Finally, there is very limited research for middle school ELL students. Because of this, a majority of the critical mass is geared to early elementary and high school grade levels.

### **Implications for Future Research**

After rigorous examination of the critical mass of literature for this synthesis project, and its limitations, additional research must be completed in order to investigate this topic successfully. As ELL numbers increase into the future as they are projected, further research is needed to determine whether physical educators are properly equipped

to successfully instruct ELLs without bias. For example, are language and communication barriers too much to overcome? Does cultural dissonance lead to bias stereotypes? Are physical education teachers able and willing to make changes to curriculum, attend workshops, and take pursuit of better pedagogical practices for certain population of students? Follow up studies can be conducted to investigate if recommended strategies positively or negatively affect ELL instruction. Moreover, both urban and rural school settings should be investigated to examine differences in teacher perceptions of ELLs students based on geographic location.

Another area that can be developed for research is levels of ELL participation and motivation in physical activity, physical education, and sport. This might yield some information about ELLs view and engage in American physical education and sport programs. Exploring this further may help to better understand ELL preference for activities in physical education and physical activity settings.

## **Conclusion**

Studies have indicated that physical education teachers indeed have barriers and facilitators when it comes to instruction of ELLs, which both negatively and positively affect perceptions of ELLs. The research examined in this synthesis project appears to point a series of barriers that interfere with successful instruction; however, facilitators do exist which does lead to successful instruction. Recommendations from research include creating an inclusive environment, improving communication, increasing physical education teacher preparation for teaching ELLs, and utilizing best practices for instruction. Given the limited literature in this area, there is a need for more research to

better understand how barriers and facilitators of instruction shape teacher perceptions of ELLs.

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## Appendix A: Synthesis Article Grid

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Methods &amp; Procedures</b>	<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
Sato, T., Walton- Fisette, J., & Kim, I. (2019)	Elementary physical educators’ positioning in teaching English language learners	European Physical Education Review	To describe and explain experiences and pedagogical practices (about teaching ELLs) of PE teachers in elementary PE programs	Six Physical Education teachers participated in survey questionnaires, face- to-face interviews and follow-up e- mails.	A constant comparative method was used to interpret the data	The findings indicate that these six PE teachers experienced a range of challenges when teaching Elementary-aged ELLs in PE. Their struggles centered on how to include ELLs socially, overcome communication barriers, and minimize race- based stereotypes caused by exclusion or isolation between ELLs and local students.	PE teachers should discuss expectations with ELLs’ classmates and encourage interaction among all students. School districts must offer and require cultural and behavioral scaffolding workshops for PE teachers. school districts must recruit and hire culturally diverse PE teachers and infuse race, ethnicity, and sport and physical activity awareness approaches that minimize race-based stereotypes in PE

<p>Sato, T., Miller, R., &amp; Delk, D. (2022)</p>	<p>Secondary Physical Educators' Positioning of Teaching English Language Learners at Urban Schools</p>	<p>Urban Education</p>	<p>To describe and explain certain secondary PE teachers' positioning of ELLs and of themselves as teachers of ELLs.</p>	<p>8 Physical Education teachers (6 female, 2 male) participated in questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and email follow-ups</p>	<p>A constant comparative method was used to interpret the data</p>	<p>Teachers experienced struggles in helping their ELLs to learn standard and social English language. Participants felt that their corrective feedback and interventions were the only opportunities to interact with their ELLs in PE classes. Participants felt that the ELLs showed active learning when they created collective or team positioning with other ELLs. Described that the participants felt that they need professional development opportunities to better teach ELLs.</p>	<p>School districts should provide professional development in how to utilize students' background and demographic information in their lessons and units, as well as a network system that allows all teachers in the school districts to access such information. PE teachers should emphasize "guided interaction," in which teachers and students structure lessons and work together to understand what they read, and speak collaboratively about academic concepts of texts. PE teachers need to develop perceptual cues that include their ELLs' needs,</p>
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							<p>involvement, instructional strategies, and skills performance rather than only providing corrective feedback of ELLs' skill performance and behaviors. PE teachers should encourage and help their local students develop and maintain attitudes of multicultural openness through relationship-building initiatives and opportunities for networking with ELLs. Physical education teacher education (PETE) programs should require early field experiences for preservice teachers</p>
Delk, D. (2015)	An Examination of the Practices	(Dissertation) N/A	The purpose of this exploratory collective case	Teacher observations and in-depth	Qualitative data analysis was used	100% of participants deemed	Increased support from ELL teacher and more

	and Experiences of Physical Education Teachers of English Language Learners		study was to: 1) explore the experiences and teaching practices of K–12 physical education (PE) teachers of English Language Learners; 2) to examine the factors that impact the teaching behaviors and goals of PE teachers of ELLs; and 3) to explore the perceived needs for PE teachers to effectively teach ELLs	interviews of four participants		demonstrations to be an effective facilitator. 50% infuse native language in some form. 75% need more knowledge of second language acquisition techniques to assist ELLs. 100% of participants felt inability to speak language, and limited knowledge of student background lead to a barriers of instruction	opportunities for professional development
Sato, T. & Hodge, S.R. (2016)	Elementary Physical Education Teachers' Experiences in Teaching	Education and Urban Society	The purpose of this study was to describe and explain certain elementary PE	6 PE teachers, using in-depth interviewing, questionnaires, and email follow-ups	Descriptive–qualitative analysis was used in this study.	It was found that ELLs commonly had difficulty speaking, writing, and reading in class. The ELLs	PE teachers should know how to label academic language discourse items in both English and the ELLs' native

	English Language Learners		teachers' views about teaching ELLs			language differences created learning difficulties. ELLs showed evidence of trauma. The existence of cultural dissonance between the culture of the ELLs and their families, and that of the PE programs and American schools.	languages. School districts must value the importance of cultural scaffolding workshops that focus on metacognition development. PE teachers should communicate with the parents, friends, and local immigration services and collect information about the ELLs' war-related trauma. PE teachers should handle conflicts between the ELLs and their peers in PE, the teachers may need to frame this as both individual and class problems. Peer tutoring is a strategy whereby ELLs practice academic tasks, continue opportunities for verbal interaction,
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							and gain reward for correct academic responses. PE teachers need to develop effective collaboration among schools, the ELLs, their parents, and religious groups to move toward inclusive practices in PE. School districts must aggressively recruit culturally and linguistically diverse PE teachers.
Iannacchino, C. & Samalot-Rivera, A. (2022)	Physical Educators Teachers Perceptions when Teaching English Language Learners (ELL)	Lecturas: Educación Física y Deportes (Readings: Physical Education and Sports)	To find out what teachers are currently doing to accommodate ELL students, their confidence in instructing ELL students, and what issues need to be addressed in order to	53 physical education teachers completed an electronic questionnaire consisting of Likert scale and open ended responses	Frequency counts and qualitative data analysis was used	90% could effectively communicate with their ELL students in some manner, but not always verbally, 10%) felt they could not communicate with their ELLs. 58% found using visual aids to be an effective instructional strategy. 20%	The need for teacher preparation programs to provide their teacher candidates with more knowledge and strategies on how to effectively include ELL students. Knowing students ethnic background, costumes and preferences is very important

			improve the physical education experience for these student			found using native music and culture in lessons to be ineffective. 2% found using social interaction to be ineffective.	
Baldwin, C.F. (2015)	First-Year Physical Education Teachers' Experiences With Teaching African Refugee Students	SAGE Open	To analyze and explore the experiences of eight first-year physical education teachers who have taught African refugee students.	In-depth interviews were conducted with the new beginning teachers at the end of their first full year of teaching. Multiple open ended questions were used. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.	Inductive reasoning was used for analysis	Communication proved to be a critical issue that all of the beginning teachers identified as needing to be improved in the schools where they were teaching. It was difficult to sustain any such practical sense of accomplishment due to the high degree of non-English speaking backgrounds that many of the refugee students brought to the schools.	
Flory, S. & McCaughtry, N.	Culturally Relevant Physical	Research Quarterly for	To understand teachers' and	Observations and interviews of 53 physical education	Constant comparison and	It was found cultural relevance, language barriers,	

(2011)	Education in Urban Schools	Exercise and Sport	students' perspectives on CRPE in diverse urban settings. In particular to Identify: 1) how teachers understood community dynamics, 2) how community dynamics influenced education according to teachers and students, and 3) the ways in which teachers and students believed that teachers reflected cultural knowledge	teachers over a four year span	inductive analysis was used	and communication of ESL students existed. Pairing and using key terms in native language were effective strategies.	
Hansen-Thomas, H. & Cavagnetto, A.	What Do Mainstream Middle School	Bilingual Research Journal	To investigate teachers' attitudes toward English	118 teachers at three U.S. middle schools in Texas,	Descriptive statistics and qualitative	It was found most ELL students are relatively successful. Success	

(2010)	Teachers Think About Their English Language Learners? A Tri-State Case Study		Language Learners (ELLs) at three middle schools in Texas, New York, and Pennsylvania	New York, and Pennsylvania competed two-page open-ended questionnaire and Likert scale questions	data analysis was used	was due to modifications and use of learning strategies: being paired with helpers, use of visual aids, and having individualized instruction were commonly cited responses as to why ELLs were successful in content-area classes.	
Sánchez, G., Roca, J., Mompeán, S., & Smith, R. (2018)	Bilingual Physical Education in English. Opinion and Qualification of PE Teachers of Primary Education	SPORT TK-EuroAmerican Journal of Sport Sciences	The purpose of this research is to survey the opinions of Primary Education PE Teachers concerning bilingual PE.	30 individuals, all with the Teacher Diploma in Primary Physical Education. 30 item five point Likert scale questionnaire was used. The study was conducted with a quantitative, non-experimental, transversal and descriptive design.	Descriptive statistical analysis was used	It was found that 70% of the teachers believe that is quite or very important for bilingual instruction. 53.3% of teachers believe that current instruction in PE can be clearly adapted in a bilingual manner. 60% of participants feel that they have	

						little or very little knowledge about bilingual methodologies and their implementation.	
Bernstein, E. & Lysniak, U. (2017)	Teachers' Beliefs and Implementation of Competitive Activities for Multicultural Students	Urban Education	This study examined Physical education teachers' beliefs and implementation of competitive activities for middle school multicultural student populations.	9 middle school physical education teachers participated using observations, two semi-structured interviews, and post-observation informal interviews	A constant comparative method was used to analyze all data	The teachers believed that competitive activities were an important part of American culture. They were aware that many of the students were being exposed to these activities for the first time as they understood that the students were multicultural, of different races, nationalities, and social economic backgrounds. The teachers were aware that some students may not understand the English language, so demonstrations	

						played a key role in instruction. Teachers felt building a community it was necessary to have all students participate, even if students may be unfamiliar with the activities.	
Burden, J., Hodge, S.R., & Harrison, L. (2012)	Teacher Educators' Views about Social Justice Pedagogies In Physical Education Teacher Education	Journal of Curriculum and Teaching	The purpose of this study was to analyze PETE teacher educators' views about the application of concepts and content reflecting social justice pedagogies in preparing teacher candidates	Eight participants used open-ended interviews and survey responses	Descriptive-qualitative analysis was used	5 of 8 participants stressed that exposure to diverse settings was a very important factor for improving teacher candidates' preparedness. 2 of 8 participants said it is important to provide teacher candidates with culturally relevant language cues to facilitate their communication with ESL students	

Appendix B: Thematic Coding Table

Article	Barriers for Instruction	Communication	Teacher Preparedness	Cultural Dissonance	Facilitators for Instruction
Sato, T., Walton-Fisette, J., & Kim, I. (2019)	X	X		X	X
Sato, T., Miller, R., & Delk, D. (2022)	X	X			X
Sato, T. & Hodge, S.R. (2016)	X	X	X	X	
Baldwin, C.F. (2015)	X	X			
Delk, D. (2015)	X	X		X	X
Sánchez, G., Roca, J., Mompeán, S., & Smith, R. (2018)		X			
Bernstein, E. & Lysniak, U. (2017)	X	X			X
Burden, J., Hodge, S.R., & Harrison, L. (2012)			X	X	
Hansen-Thomas, H. & Cavagnetto, A. (2010)					X
Flory, S. & McCaughtry, N. (2011)		X	X		X
Iannacchino, C. & Samalot-Rivera, A. (2022)					X

