

Preparing Future School Counselors to Work with English Language Learners

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Preparing Future School Counselors to Work with English Language Learners

Abstract

English Language Learners (ELLs) are one of the fastest growing student groups in the United States, yet school counselors often feel unprepared to address their unique needs. To better prepare school counselors to work with ELLs, counselor educators can integrate experiential learning activities that are grounded practice. Yet, little is known about the types of work experiences school counselors encounter when working with ELL students. This phenomenological study described the experiences of eight, first year school counselors who work with ELLs. Findings inform the types of training scenarios counselor educators can use to prepare school counselors-in-training (SCIT) to work with ELL students within the context of schools.

Keywords

School Counselor Preparation, English Language Learners, Phenomenological Study

Within U.S. schools, English language Learners (ELLs) are one of the fastest growing student groups (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). ELLs face challenges related to learning a new language, academic gaps, low self-esteem, and school adjustment difficulties (Pagan-Rivera, 2014; Shi & Watkinson, 2019). ELLs also experience psychological distress related to family separation, cultural discrimination, and adjusting to a new culture (Pagan-Rivera, 2014; Roche & Kuperminc, 2012). School counselors are uniquely positioned to meet the diverse needs of ELLs (Cook, 2015) and ELL students have benefited from school counseling services (Cook et al., 2012; Crawford & Valle, 2016; Park-Taylor et al., 2007; Shi & Steen, 2010; Shi & Steen, 2012; Steen et al., 2018). Yet, despite being well positioned (ASCA, 2021), school counselors report not having the requisite training or adequate tools to work with this student group (Schwallie-Giddis et al., 2004; Shi & Watkinson, 2019).

While CACREP has identified multicultural counseling outcomes to guide counselor preparation, how those outcomes are demonstrated by school counselors-in-training (SCIT) are less prescriptive and left to the discretion of the faculty within a counselor education program (CACREP, 2020). To best prepare SCIT to work with diverse student groups, there is a call within the profession for counselor educators to integrate real world scenarios to facilitate skill acquisition (Barna, 2020). Specifically, Barna (2020) calls counselor educators to prepare SCIT to work with diverse student groups by having them apply concepts learned in class to real world issues as part of class assignments or in-class experiences. Currently, there is a lack of research on teaching pedagogy to inform counselor educators on how to prepare SCIT to work with ELLs. Further, there is a general lack of research that reveals the types of situations school counselors encounter when working with ELL students. To offer counselor educators real-world training scenarios in preparing school counselors to work with ELLs, this phenomenological study describes the

experiences of eight first-year school counselors to identify the contextual realities they face when working with ELL students. Findings inform the types of training scenarios counselor educators could use to prepare SCIT to work with ELL students within the context of schools.

Literature Review

School Counselor Self-Efficacy

Researchers have investigated school counselors' self-efficacy working with ELL populations (Constantine & Gushue, 2003; Johnson et al., 2016). According to Johnson et al. (2016), school counselors generally perceived themselves to be competent or very competent to work with ELL students. However, upon further examination Johnson et al. (2016) concluded that school counselors' perceptions of competence could be impacted by demographic and past work experiences with ELLs and their families. Specifically, Black school counselors reported higher self-efficacy level than their White counterparts. Also, school counselors in the South and Western regions, and those with medium and large ELL populations on their caseload, had higher self-efficacy scores than counselors in the Midwest region and those with smaller ELL caseloads. Further, school counselors who spoke two or more languages, and who had personal experiences with ELLs, rated their self-efficacy higher than those who spoke only one language and had no personal experiences. While school counselors may perceive themselves to be multicultural competent to work with ELLs (Johnson et al., 2016; Shen & Lowinger, 2007), their perceptions of being multiculturally competent did not result in culturally competent skills or advocacy (Constantine & Gushue, 2003; Paredes, 2010; Shi & Watkinson, 2019). Perceptions from ELL students also confirmed the lack of competence or effectiveness of their school counselors. For example, Vela-Gude and colleagues (2009) found in their study that ELL students perceived their school counselors as unavailable and only accessible early in the school year to discuss scheduling.

The study also found that some ELL students perceived their counselors to be discriminatory and held lower academic and career expectations for them. Hence, general perceptions of one's self-efficacy to work with ELL students may not be enough to engage in the actions that best support this unique student group. As a result, counselor educators must ensure that they are preparing SCIT to work with ELL students within their training programs to engage in culturally competent practices.

Multicultural Counseling Competency Preparation

Developing cultural competency is a process (Sue & Sue, 2013) and requires not only exposure to different cultural practices but experiences that encourage deep reflection and application of skills (Cook et al., 2016). When examining multicultural counseling preparation, Dameron et al. (2020) investigated whether differences in perceived multicultural competency existed among school counselors who received a single multicultural counseling course, a multicultural counseling course plus an infused multicultural curriculum (multicultural outcomes identified in multiple courses throughout program), a multiculturally infused curriculum alone, or no multicultural training during their graduate program. Results of the investigation revealed that participants who received an infused multicultural curriculum, with or without a single multicultural course, had significantly higher mean scores on both knowledge and awareness than participants who had only one multicultural course (Dameron et al., 2020). Similarly, Laota (2019) examined the lived experiences of counselors who worked with refugee populations and noted that participants reported that one multicultural counseling course did not adequately prepare them to work with refugees. As a result of their findings, both Dameron et al. (2020) and Laota (2019) recommended that counselor education programs infuse multicultural outcomes throughout the

curriculum and encouraged the use of process-focused activities (e.g., service-learning, field placements and experiential activities) to increase multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills.

Field experiences can facilitate the development of multicultural competence (Burnham et al., 2009; Cook et al., 2016). Burnham et al. (2009) conducted a descriptive study that examined the experiences of nine SCIT who collaborated with ELL teachers to implement classroom lessons for ethnically and culturally diverse student groups as part of their Introduction to School Counseling course. Burnham et al. (2009) noted that as a result of the experience, participants reported having a strong desire to reach all students, gained an awareness of the challenges in working with ELLs, and learned that classroom lessons needed to be contextually relevant to meet the unique needs of ELL students. Similarly, Cook et al. (2016) examined the experiences of SCIT who worked with students from low-income backgrounds during practicum to understand how being exposed to intentional reflective practices fostered cultural competency. Cook and colleagues (2016) found that participants were able to express an understanding of the role that race, racism, and power played in perpetuating inequitable practices, and were able to articulate the actions they could take to be change agents. While field experiences supported cultural competence development, Laota (2019) argued that field experiences alone might not present opportunities for counselors to work with non-English speaking populations and recommended that counselor educators take a more intentional approach to preparing counselors-in-training to work with ELLs.

To intentionally prepare SCIT to work with ELL students, counselor education programs can utilize experiential teaching methods to facilitate multicultural competence outside of field experiences. For example, Melamed and colleagues (2020) recommended the use of case vignettes and critical self-reflection exercises to help SCIT unpack the complexities associated with

sociocultural identities within the counseling relationship. Barna (2020) offered another framework for integrating experiential learning into school counseling graduate coursework. This framework stems from Kolb (1984)'s components of experiential learning which included providing SCIT with a concrete experience (e.g., role play, case scenario), opportunity for personal reflection, application to real world situations, and guided practice. Utilizing this framework, Barna illustrated how counselor educators might integrate experiential-based assignments to simulate real world work experiences. In the above examples, authentic work experiences were used to ground the experimental learning opportunities. To enable counselor educators to integrate intentional and experiential learning experiences related to ELL students, counselor educators need authentic case examples and real-life scenarios for SCIT to address.

Counselor educators can infuse experiential learning experiences into their course requirements to best prepare SCIT to work with ELL students. However, there is a scarcity of research on the types of situations school counselors encounter when working with this student group. Our study provides a contextual lens for how first-year school counselors work with ELL students and their families to inform real-world training scenarios. Our study is guided by the following research question: What are the lived experiences of first-year school counselors who work with ELL students?

Methods

We used phenomenological research methodology to describe the lived experiences of eight first-year school counselors who worked with ELL students. Phenomenological research is used when the researchers strive to understand how participants experience a certain phenomenon to better inform practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). We engaged in phenomenological research study because we wanted to gain insight into how first-year school counselors made meaning of

their work experiences with ELL students. We targeted first-year school counselors to identify situations that SCIT might encounter early in their school counseling careers.

Data Collection

Since the purpose of this study was to describe lived experiences of first-year school counselors, we employed purposeful and snowball sampling to recruit participants who met the following criteria: (a) were certified or licensed professional school counselors, (b) were in their first year of practice and (c) worked with ELL students. We utilized an alumni listserv from the lead researchers' university and an email was sent to 49 alumni who graduated between 2018 and 2019. The recruitment email introduced alumni to the study, identified the selection criteria, and invited them to participate if they met the criteria and/or nominate a colleague. In the recruitment email, recruits were told that participation was voluntary and that no negative consequences would result if they decided not to participate. Further, any school counselor who was nominated by a colleague, and wanted to participate in the study, were asked to contact the second author. Seven alumni responded to the invitation, met the criteria, and agreed to participate in the interview. One of the participants nominated a colleague who met the criteria, which resulted in a total of eight participants. All participants signed an informed consent. Eight, semi-structured interviews were conducted and held virtually on Zoom. All interviews were facilitated by the first two authors, recorded, and transcribed. Interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes and were guided by the following interview questions: Describe your experiences working with ELL students? Describe how your school supports the work you do with ELL students. Prior to recruiting participants, the IRB Board at the authors' university approved this study.

Participants

Participants identified as female (62.5%, $n = 5$) and male (37.5%, $n = 3$) and reported their ethnicity as Hispanic (50%, $n = 4$) and White (50%, $n = 4$). All participants were in their first year as a school counselor in a public school located within the Northeastern Region of the United States. All participants were certified school counselors and belonged to at least one professional counseling association. Thirty-seven percent ($n = 3$) identified as National Certified Counselors (NCC) and 62.5% ($n = 5$) were bi-lingual, speaking fluent English and Spanish. Twenty-five percent ($n = 2$) of participants worked in an elementary school, 12.5% ($n = 1$) at a middle school, and 62.5% ($n = 5$) worked at a high school. The number of ELLs on their caseload ranged from 20 – 348, with an average of 182.

Reflexibility Statement

The first and second authors are both associate professors employed in a CACREP accredited school counseling program situated within a Jesuit private university in the mid-Atlantic region, with an average of 10 years of teaching experience within a counselor education master's program geared towards preparing school counselors. The first author was employed as an elementary school counselor for 14 years before entering academia and has extensive research experience on immigrant student populations. The first author identified as a White, cisgender female whose grandparents immigrated to the United States and was influenced by their immigration story. The second author was an Asian American, cisgender female who spoke English as a second language and immigrated to the U.S. in her mid-twenties and has been conducting research on immigrant and ELL students for over 10 years. At the time of conducting this study, the third and fourth authors were graduate students in the same school counseling program as the lead researchers and assisted with the data analysis. The third author identified as

a White, cisgender female. The fourth author is a mixed-race, Asian American, queer, cisgender female who completed her master's thesis on how school counselors can support multiracial students.

Due to our previous research experience, we were influenced by certain assumptions about the work. First, we believed that school counselors were often underprepared to work with ELL students and that language barriers often created challenges for school counselors who only spoke English. Second, we believed that ELL students often felt disconnected from most adults at school and had unique needs due to their immigration histories. Next, we believed counselor education programs could do more to prepare SCIT to work with ELL students and their families. Lastly, we ascribed to a social constructivist framework where it is important to understand how participants make meaning of their own reality.

Data Analysis

Sundler et al. (2019) argued the merits of using thematic analysis in descriptive phenomenology studies because thematic analysis takes a descriptive approach to the examination of participants' lived experiences. As such, we analyzed the data using Braun and Clarke (2006)'s six-phase guide to thematic analysis: (a) familiarizing ourselves with the data; (b) generating initial codes; (c) searching for Themes; (d) reviewing themes; (e) defining and naming the themes; and (f) creating the report. Additionally, we followed an inductive approach to our analysis, linking themes back to the data.

During the analysis process, all four authors met regularly until the analysis was completed. First, all the authors reviewed all the transcripts, familiarizing themselves with the data and creating notes to track initial thoughts and impressions. Next, we met as a team to share first impressions and bracket our assumptions and biases while also creating a timeline for when initial

coding of the first transcript would be completed. Initial coding of the first transcript was done independently. After completing the initial coding, all researchers shared their codes and the team discussed discrepancies until consensus was reached and a codebook was created. The codes created were applied to other transcripts and the research team met to compare codes across transcripts. Interrater agreement was reached, and codes were grouped into themes. The research team compared themes back to the original data set and discarded themes that lacked sufficient data. Themes were further refined to provide a rich description.

Trustworthiness

We followed strategies provided by Lincoln and Guba (2000) to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research. First, we used member checking to enhance *credibility*. We presented the preliminary findings to all of our participants to obtain their feedback as a means to “judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261). Participants reported that the findings represented their experiences. None of the participants had any additional comments to add. Second, *transferability* was enhanced by providing thick descriptions of data collection procedure and the contextual information collected in this study. Third, to ensure *dependability*, we engaged in regular discussions among research team on the data, analysis procedure, themes, disconfirming evidence, and biases (Cornish et al., 2014). Lastly, *confirmability* was ensured by recording unique and interesting topics, thoughts about coding, discussions of code changes, and sharing researchers’ positions and backgrounds (Klopper, 2008).

Findings

During the time of this study schools transitioned to online learning in response to COVID. Thus, our participants’ experiences working with ELL students and their families were contextualized within this timeframe and included the challenges of educating ELLs virtually.

Analysis of the data uncovered three main themes that spoke to the types of situations school counselors encountered when working with ELL students and their families: 1) Scope of Work, 2) Addressing Systemic Challenges, and 3) Limited English. Scope of work included two sub-themes: extension of the role and academic support and counseling. Addressing systemic challenges consisted of two sub-themes: tension and advocacy limitations. Limited English consisted of two sub-themes: language barrier and use of translators.

Scope of Work

Extension of the role

Participants reported that working with ELL students and their families often required them to work outside of what they perceived was their traditional role. As one participant explained, “you become a lot more than a school counselor, you become a case manager...with our English Language Learners, you know, you just can’t have one role. You have multiple roles to meet the various needs that they have.” Describing the case manager aspect of the job, this participant went on to say, “you have to support the child and the family at the same time, with food and rental assistance, and immigration support, and it’s just a whole wide range of supports that you provide to English Language Learners.” Identifying and connecting families to resources was further described by another counselor,

when we’ve been out [due to COVID] it’s been trying to get families the technology they need, trying to get families internet, a lot of them don’t have internet resources, so then I try to find Comcast or Verizon’s translated versions of things and sending those out to families.

Another mentioned the need to support a family whose mom lost employment, “Mom lost her job with the COVID situation, but she couldn’t qualify for unemployment, she could not get another

job because she's undocumented. Yeah, and so that added another layer. I'm trying to offer her help.” Additionally, school counselors helped ELL students acclimate to U.S. schools as described by one participant,

I fully realize it's not necessarily our scope of work...you have to sort of take that on and it takes a little bit longer. They don't understand lockers, they don't understand that they get a computer, they don't understand the rotation of classes – an A day, B day – and all that stuff. So, um, it's really just kind of breaking it down for them. The lunch – free and reduced lunch – and just tackle all of the different things.

Lastly, bilingual participants served as translators within their schools. As one participant noted, “the misconception is that I'm the front office translator... They'll try to pull me in [to help them translate] ...they are doing it for things they're not supposed to.”

Academic Support and Counseling

School counselors also acknowledged the need to provide academic support, noting that teachers are not prepared to support ELLs. As one school counselor shared, “teachers in general should be prepared for supporting ELL students in their classrooms even if it's only one or two students and sometimes ELLs feel really isolated, like they're not supported.” Another shared that teachers often contact the school counselor to provide additional support, “Teachers are contacting me, saying we're not able to engage with him. So, I do social/emotional check-ins with him ... it just seems like the odds are stacked against them.”

In addition to providing academic support, participants acknowledge that ELL students would benefit from having access to counseling services to address acculturation and past traumas. As one counselor mentioned,

I feel like some of my kids are prone to being pulled into two different directions, like you know, because lots of their parents come from other countries, but they are sort of caught in between American culture and the culture of their home country.

Another shared,

I do see a lot of trauma particularly related to them [ELL students] being exposed to violence or having a close family member be deported. I've had students who have experienced family separation, and so that can be very hard for them being separated from a parent or a sibling or having a parent or a sibling pass away in their home country and them not being able to visit or being there to support their family.

Another counselor mentioned, "just the trauma that they experienced on their journey and how difficult life is and how they're really on their own and they just needed somebody to speak with. A lot of anger issues."

Addressing Systemic Challenges

Tension

Participants experienced tension when faced with school policies or practices they believed were not in the best interest of ELL students. Participants noted a "one size fits all approach" to educating students, where policies did not acknowledge the cultural differences of students who have recently immigrated into the U.S. As one counselor mentioned,

Yeah, most of my newcomers are older, they'll come in at 16 years old and be placed at the 9th grade. And they also have very limited education, so they could be 16 years old, but their highest level of education is 4th grade. You can imagine how much that sets them back. I have several seniors who are 21 years old, and that's the oldest they can be before they have to graduate.

The participant went on to say,

if they can't afford college...the next best thing they can do is make a living for their families..., how can you argue with that? So, let's meet them where they are. And yeah, the English teachers are not going to be happy. The administration is going to be upset, because the graduation rates are low, but what are you going to do?

Similarly, another participant shared her struggles with meeting county expectations,

I think the things that I bump against are systemic. Understanding that our English language learning population, that their parents have multiple jobs, that their main concern is to put a roof over their head. But then the county is asking you to make sure that they're logging in, or to make sure that they're participating. For me it's like, how do I support and advocate for them and validate what they're going through and at the same time, follow the guidelines the county is setting, because a lot of the kids are not able to participate in the same way as other kids. And so, how do I mesh those two things, what the county's asking you to do because you're required to, and what you know is best for the family... expectations placed on them from the county. They're not realistic.

Another counselor shared tension she experienced when speaking Spanish during instruction.

I've had one time where I infused a little bit of Spanish into my lesson, and they [coworkers] were like, 'no, English is the language of instruction'... just having to kind of navigate those things, that you receive criticism for and how you can best support kids... how do I mesh those two things, what the county's asking you to do because you're required, and what you know is best for the family.

Another counselor shared that he experienced tension when he was expected to adhere to an informal school policy where only the director of the ELL program could work with ELL students.

As this participant reported,

the director of the program is very territorial, and this person doesn't like when I speak with any of the ELL students ...if I bring one of those students into my office it will eventually get back to the department chair and then she gets mad at me, and then goes to the principal.

Advocacy Limitations

School counselors were unclear how to advocate for change and felt tension when faced with systemic policies they believed disadvantaged their ELL students. A school counselor shared, we feel limited, at least personally ...I'm not able to advocate outside of my building or the buildings that I work at, and you leave it up to the principal to advocate for you. But you don't know, once it's in their hands, you don't know what's really happening. So, I think for me, when I think about support, I think that there's a level of change that has to happen from the top down, because we're the ones doing the work, and we understand kids and what they're going through. But I don't think there's always that support from the top.

Another counselor added,

You want to go and set the world on fire in a good way, but how can we be leaders, and still have the difficult conversations, especially with other leaders in the building. And understand who those leaders are and how to work with each different type of personality in order to get things done.

Another shared,

[advocacy] is very difficult to do during the school [year]. So is there a more efficient way. Are there more ways for us to advocate for ourselves? Are there more ways for us to reach out to build stronger connections?

Limited English

Language Differences

Language differences were identified by school counselors as a challenge when working with ELL students because it made communication difficult and limited ELL students' access to instruction or services. As one counselor shared,

some of the challenges that I've run across is language barrier. I speak Spanish. And that works well with the Spanish speaking population. But I have probably a quarter of my students - a little over a quarter of them are not Spanish speaking.

Another participant confirmed that language differences made communication difficult. As he stated, "if I see a student in the hallway, and I believe that they're an ELL, I'll struggle with the language barrier." Additionally, school counselors noted that ELLs with limited English struggled academically due to language differences, leaving some students to feel overwhelmed or isolated.

As one counselor mentioned,

Those with limited English proficiency face the most challenge in terms of being successful in school. The greatest challenge is that they tend to have the lowest attendance rates and also just being able to communicate with others...they are a very low ESOL level...they feel very isolated. They have a lot of difficulty understanding the teacher and they'll give up very easily because it's so overwhelming and challenging for them.

Language differences also made connecting ELL students and their families to resources more complicated, requiring additional time. Complications arose when parents or guardians were unable to read or write, speak English, and/or there was a lack of documentation. As one counselor described,

Very difficult. Someone to accept them. I called so many times I stay after school until 6 or 7pm. Yeah, working with the mom translating her needs and desires [to the agency worker] and sometimes even coaching her [the mom] because they wouldn't speak to me as I'm not the parent of the student.

She further added,

We have some parents that don't speak or write in English or in Spanish [not able to read or write] so with those parents you treat them with dignity. You have to hold their hand a lot and support them a lot because that's another challenge that they face, but you have them come in, you fill out forms with them over the phone, you get their verbal permission if you can.

Another participant confirmed the difficulty of obtaining resources for ELL families due to limited English proficiency,

I referred [a student] to an external resource in collaboration with the mom, myself, the student and our assistant principal ...the difficulty came in when one of the parents did not speak English, so at that moment when the parent does not speak English, I am their number one advocate. I fill in that role. So that takes additional time.

Use of Translators

To assist English-monolingual staff to work with students and families who are not fluent in English, schools enlisted the help of translators. Participants, who were monolingual or did

not speak the primary language of the ELL student, relied on translators to assist them during counseling sessions. As one participant noted, “I mean I don’t speak another language, so that in and of itself is an issue, so I have to rely on our bilingual facilitator.”

Further, participants expressed a discomfort using translators during counseling sessions due to the confidential nature of the sessions. As one participant explained “I have to speak about some pretty confidential things with these families [in counseling session], [the translator] communicates to them in a way they’ll understand...I feel our interpreters do a lot of heavy stuff that we’re trained to deal with [as counselors] but maybe they aren’t trained to deal with.”

Another participant mentioned that it was hard on families to have an outside interpreter taking part in counseling meetings when confidential information was shared. As she stated,

it’s hard because you’re playing telephone...I’m saying something to the translator who’s then saying it to the parent, sometimes it’s awkward, sometimes the parents are uncomfortable because they [interpreters] are hearing things that are private and personal. Yeah, I feel like it would be easier if I knew another language, if I knew Spanish ...we have a couple of students who are Vietnamese or/and Korean, but they have a much higher proficiency, but it’s hard. It’s hard for me.

Discussion

This study described first-year school counselors’ experiences working with ELL students. While it is well documented that ELLs have unique needs that differ from other student groups (Cook, 2015; Laota, 2019; Menken, 2010; Steen et al., 2018), this study adds to the literature by highlighting the nature of the work and contextual challenges that school counselors face when working with ELLs and their families. For one, participants spoke about the priority given to securing community resources and helping ELL students acclimate themselves to U.S. schools.

While ASCA (2012) acknowledged making referrals as an appropriate work activity for school counselors, participants believed that linking ELL families to community resources exceeded role expectations due to the amount of time they spent connecting families to these resources. Specifically, participants reported that ELL families needed help securing technology, employment, and medical assistance. An exorbitated amount of time was spent on referral services when families were not fluent in English, or if the adults could not read and write. Hence, it could be important to prepare SCIT on how to coordinate with local social workers or community agencies who may be better positioned to obtain resources for ELLs and their families. If collaborative and interdisciplinary partnerships were not possible, SCIT could become familiar with local resources to help ELL families meet their basic needs.

Our findings also highlighted the role bilingual school counselors play as translators that positioned them to complete administrative tasks (e.g., registration) that were housed outside of the school counselor's role. While ASCA (2012) addressed non-counselor related tasks in the ASCA National Model, this study hints at the possibility that bilingual school counselors could be required to be the school's translator, positioning them to be heavily involved in registration and other tasks where translators are necessary. Being positioned as the school's translator could prove difficult if interpreting for others takes precedent over the work school counselors need to perform. Hence, school counselors who are bilingual will need to set boundaries to protect their role as a school counselor.

This study also described the tensions school counselors experienced when adhering to school policies that were not aligned with the needs of their ELL students. While participants recognized school policies that did not benefit ELL students, they lacked the best way to advocate for them. Similar to what we found, Dollarhide et al. (2008) noted that first-year school counselors

who participated in their year-long qualitative study also felt inadequate to advocate for change within their schools. Mullen et al. (2019) concurred and noted that school counselors generally lacked the skills to address issues of social justice. Counselor educators can prepare SCIT to work with ELLs by focusing on leadership and advocacy skills to drive systemic change within contextually relevant training scenarios.

Participants acknowledged that language differences presented a challenge when working with ELLs with limited English proficiency. The challenges were identified as the length of time it took to obtain outside resources, academic achievement, and communication. Similarly, the qualitative findings in Shi and Watkinson's (2019) mixed-method study identified language differences as being a major obstacle to school counselors working with ELL students in their building and noted that language had an impact on ELL students' academic achievement. To foster better communication, our participants utilized translators so that ELL students had access to counseling services and were able to obtain necessary information. However, participants expressed concerns with using untrained translators during counseling sessions due to its confidential nature. Gartley and Due's (2017) study noted similar concerns among counselors and highlighted that their participants believed untrained translators could breach confidentiality. Yet, despite these concerns, Gartley and Due stressed the valuable contributions that translators had on the therapeutic alliance. Understanding the value of including translators in counseling sessions, school counselors should become familiar with how to prepare translators to engage in counseling sessions.

Training Scenarios

Our findings informed the following training scenarios to include real world situations when preparing SCIT to work with ELLs. Drawing from Barna's (2020) framework for integrating

experiential learning into school counseling graduate coursework, counselor educators can use the training scenarios to generate SCIT's personal reflection and application to real world situations. To develop skills, counselor educators should facilitate discussions among their students to generate new insights and stimulate learning. Counselor educators can decide on where to best incorporate the scenarios within their core curriculum.

Training Scenario 1: Brokering Resources

You are a middle school counselor who has recently started working with a six grade student and his family. The family recently immigrated into the United States and speaks limited English. The family is seeking medical assistance and legal services. To help the family obtain these resources, you decide to partner with a local agency who works with immigrant and refugee families.

1. Interview a community agency that works with immigrant and refugee families to understand the services they provide and opportunities for school/community partnerships. Summarize the results of that interview.
2. Since you have many ELL families on your caseload, generate a plan for how you will partner with this outside agency to connect ELL families to available resources.
3. Identify the ethical implications when working with outside agencies.

Training Scenario 2: Advocacy

You are a second-year high school counselor. Several of the ELL students on your caseload want to financially support their families and have no intention of going to college, and some are contemplating dropping out of high school. Upon further examination, you discover that many of these students are older than the other students in their grade, have experienced interrupted

education, and are currently struggling academically. Your school is putting pressure on you to have all ELL students complete their college applications to meet district-wide expectations.

1. Using a micropolitical perspective from Oehrtman and Dollarhide (2021)'s study, identify how policies related to college education, as the only postsecondary option, are being perpetuated within a school.
2. Identify and examine strategies to advocate on behalf of ELL students who do not want to pursue higher education or earn a high school degree.

Training Scenario 3: Translators

You are an elementary school counselor working with an ELL student who has limited English proficiency. Not able to speak to the student in her native language, you enlist the help of a translator. The translator is the school's lead secretary and primarily assists the principal. The translator has no formal training in counseling and no training as a translator.

1. Prior to bringing this translator into a counseling session, what other sources of translation (i.e., google translate) could you secure? List the benefits and limitations of each translation source.
2. In the case that no other translation sources are available in your school or the district, what can you do to prepare the translator to work with ELL students and their families in a counseling session?
3. What can you do to advocate at the district level so that all translators are required to be trained to work in counseling sessions?

Limitations and Future Research

This study described the lived experiences of first-year professional school counselors who work with ELL students and their families. As such, our intent was not to generalize the findings

but rather to describe shared experiences and offer training scenarios that reflected authentic work experiences of school counselors who support ELL students. While the intention is not to generalize, it is important to note that the perspectives shared are from first-year school counselors who were all employed in schools located in the Northeast Region of the United States and mostly attended one, CACREP program at a private university. As a result, the findings may not be representative of all first-year school counselors' experiences or include all possible work situations. Additionally, this study did not disaggregate school counselors in terms of ethnicity and languages spoken. Aggregating school counselors' experiences may not allow for maximum understanding of the nuanced ways in which some subgroups of school counselors experience the work with ELLs. SCIT's responses to these training scenarios should be contextualized to account for SCIT's personal experiences and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. While most of the participants were graduates of the lead authors' university, the interview focused on current work experiences with ELLs and not on how well the university prepared them to work with ELLs. As such, we believe participants were forthcoming in describing their experiences as school counselors. Lastly, the study was conducted during COVID when schools were mostly online and their work experiences with ELLs could have been limited due to lack of opportunity.

To address some of these limitations and build on this original work, future research could examine different school counselor groups (e.g., non-CACREP trained, more years of experience, former ELLs, different regions of the United States) to generate new insights and particularized training scenarios. Lastly, future research could investigate the impact that these authentic training scenarios have on facilitating SCIT's readiness to work with ELLs.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study described the experiences of first-year professional school counselors who worked with ELL students and their families. Findings highlighted the scope of work that positioned school counselors to extend their role to meet the needs of ELL students and their families, while also recognizing the need to provide academic and counseling services. Additionally, participants experienced pressure to adhere to current educational policies or practices that did not meet the needs of their ELL students, especially those who entered the United States in their later adolescents. Further, this study highlighted the need for SCIT to prepare translators to work in counseling sessions to help ELL students and their family members feel more comfortable sharing confidential information. Drawing from these findings, training scenarios were created to prepare SCIT to address real-world issues school counselors encounter when working with ELLs. Through the use these experiential learning opportunities, SCIT can gain new insight and receive the mentoring and support to better serve ELLs within their school communities.

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