

# Content Area Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers' Knowledge and Attitudes Towards English Learners (ELs)



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## ❖ Purpose:

Present research is designed to uncover the attitudes and knowledge of content area pre-service and in-service teachers about teaching English Learners (ELs). The federal government requires that each school with at least one EL provide extra support in order to alleviate the achievement gap between ELs and non-ELs. In the state of WI, there are over 50,000 ELs, and the Eau Claire Area School District has over 500 ELs (Census, 2010).

## ❖ Literature Review:

- Content area teachers demonstrate positive attitudes toward ELs and interests in serving ELs. However, a discrepancy exists between “interests/attitudes” and “skills/knowledge.” For example, although some teachers are aware of the inappropriate assessment tools and achievement gaps between ELs and non-ELs, they are not trained to develop assessment tools for ELs nor to modify lessons according to students’ language levels (Karabenick & Noda, 2004).
- The majority of content area teachers in the K-12 setting express a concern for lack of professional development for teaching ELs (Wirt et. al., 2002).
- Policies for pre-service teachers on training of ELs vary from state to state. Arizona, California, Florida and New York require pre-service teachers to obtain a separate certification while fifteen states do not require any EL-related trainings (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008).

## ❖ Methods and Procedures:

A survey was designed to assess both pre-service and in-service teachers’ knowledge, attitudes and skills about teaching ELs. A Qualtrics survey was distributed to pre-service and in-service teachers currently enrolled at the UWEC. Responses from pre-service teachers who minor in TESOL and current TESOL teachers were excluded from the analysis.

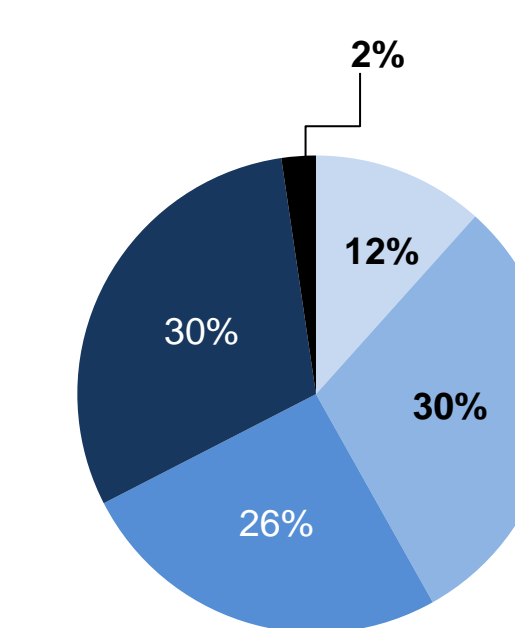
- Forty-five respondents (fifty-five percent pre-service teachers and forty-five percent in-service teachers)
- Seventy percent of participants have worked with an EL in various settings
- Thirty percent have not worked with an EL in any setting.

### References:

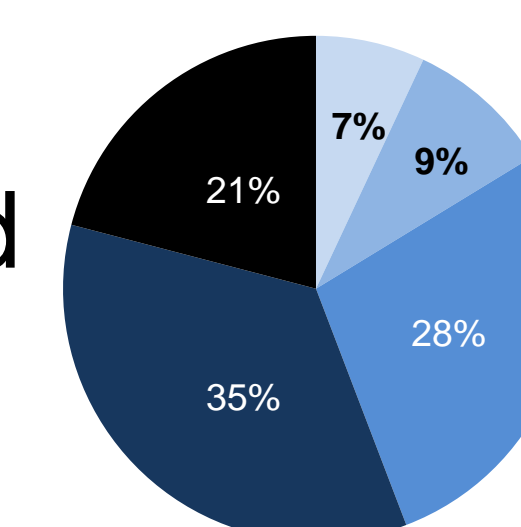
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## ❖ Findings:

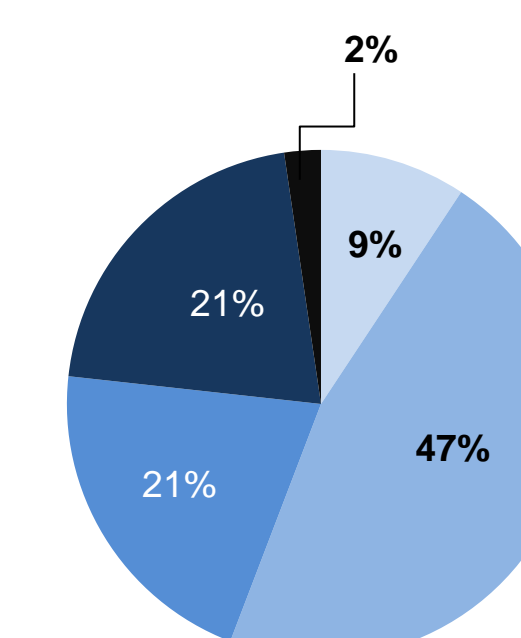
1. “I am confident to provide quality education to my English Learners (ELs)”



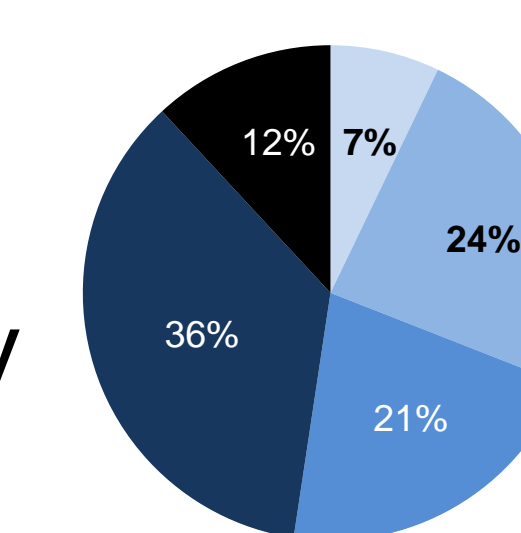
2. “My undergraduate program has well prepared me to work with ELs effectively”



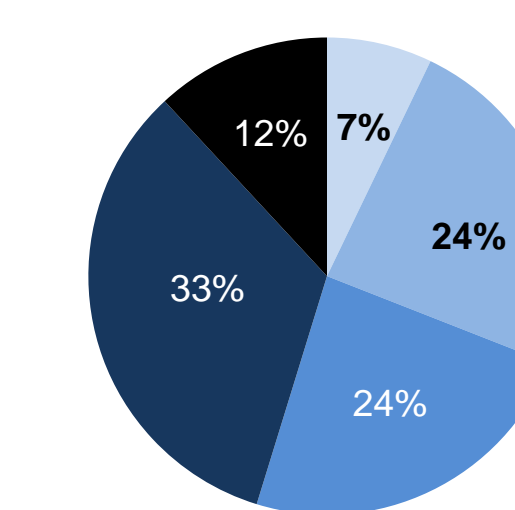
3. “I am able to adapt lessons to meet the linguistic needs of ELs”



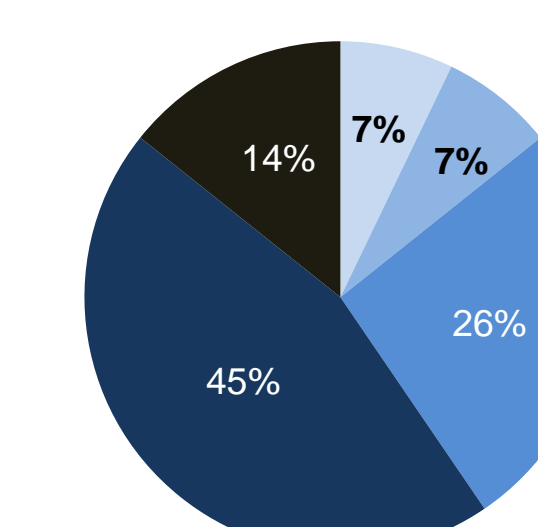
4. “I am trained to use strategies that lower the affective filter for ELs in my classroom”



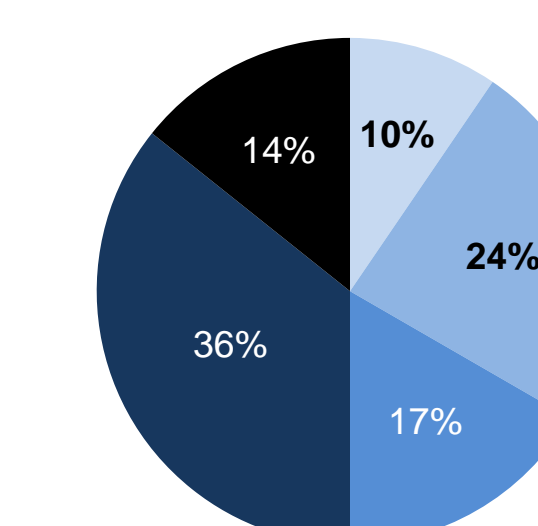
5. “I am trained to assess ELs’ content knowledge effectively”



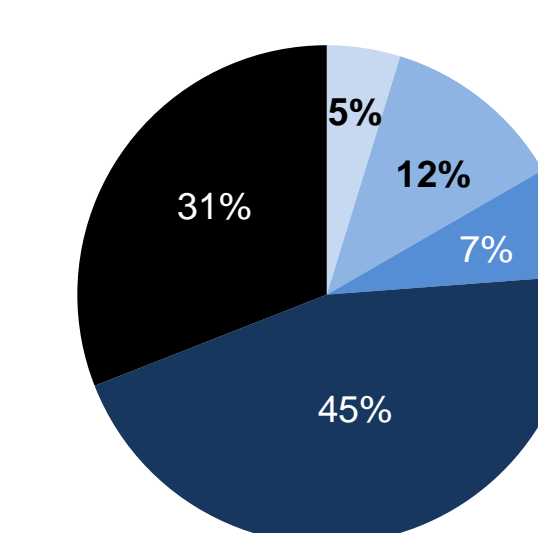
6. “I am trained to assess ELs’ English language knowledge effectively”



7. “I can explain various educational policies for ELs”



8. “I am trained to incorporate World-Class Instruction Design and Assessment (WIDA) standards into my lessons for ELs”



## ❖ Discussion and Implications:

While participants show positive attitudes towards ELs, they can rarely demonstrate specific knowledge and skills to work with ELs effectively. Their responses to the questions regarding educational policies (50% disagree or strongly disagree, chart #7), assessment tools (59% disagree or strongly disagree, chart #6) and WIDA standards (76% disagree or strongly disagree, chart #8) illustrate lack of knowledge. They also acknowledge lack of trainings regarding ELs in their undergraduate program (56% disagree or strongly disagree, chart #2).

There is a clear and urgent need for better training programs and a comprehensive policy that provide in-service and pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge to work with ELs in the mainstream classroom. In spite of the desire to serve ELs academically, socially and emotionally, teachers lack the training to do so. One of the ways to provide pre-service teachers training is to add one required course about teaching ELs in the curriculum while EL-related topics are integrated into all teacher education courses. For in-service teachers, more meaningful and frequent professional development opportunities should be available.

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