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Impact of Differentiation on Long-Term Emergent Bilingual Outcomes

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IMPACT OF DIFFERENTIATION ON LONG-TERM EMERGENT BILINGUAL OUTCOMES

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Abstract

The No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015 mandated reforms for English Learners in K–12 schools across the nation. This led to a focus on language development and instruction for emergent bilinguals. This dissertation uses the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle to implement interventions for long-term emergent bilinguals in general education classes. The study aims to refine the cycle and impact system changes for improvement. Emergent bilinguals are identified through state-approved English language proficiency exams. Students scoring less than proficient are labeled as limited English proficient/emergent bilingual and offered English as a Second Language program experiences until they reach proficiency. The term "Limited English Proficient" does not provide a clear picture of these students' situations or needs. Additionally, some students may not meet reclassification criteria, leading to frustration and continued participation in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. The lack of focused academic language instruction in high school settings contributes to an increasing number of long-term emergent bilinguals. At a large 6A high school in Texas, 86% of Limited English Proficient students are long-term emergent bilinguals who have not met language proficiency standards for reclassification and English as a Second Language program exit. This study examines the relationship between differentiation in general education classrooms and language development in long-term emergent bilinguals.

Keywords: differentiation, emergent bilingual, long-term emergent bilingual, general education, reclassification, language proficiency

Chapter I: The Problem of Practice

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act required districts and schools to report on student-level data in addition to overall performance data that was previously required. This highlighted deficiencies in performance for subgroups such as special education, limited English proficient (also known as emergent bilingual, and previously known as language learners, English learners, and English language learners in Texas), economically disadvantaged and ethnic groups. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act further mandated reform, "states must establish long-term goals for achievement and identify persistently failing schools for targeted or comprehensive reforms" (Parsi, 2016, p. 1). "ESSA [Every Student Succeeds Act] includes a number of new requirements for the education of English Learners [EL], including standardized criteria for identifying EL students and inclusion of English proficiency as a measurement of school quality" (Migration Policy Institute, 2022, para. 2). For individual districts and schools, this translated to looking specifically at language development and instruction for emergent bilinguals. This led to a dissection of data and a closer look into the makeup of this subgroup of emergent bilinguals which proved to be dynamic. Students had been in the U.S. for varying amounts of time, exposed to different amounts of English, received inconsistent types of language support and programming, not to mention the age ranges and grade levels. Kim (2019) states:

> Long-term emergent bilinguals: (a) are often bilingual in social settings but have limited literacy skills in both their home language and English, (b) have significant gaps in academic background knowledge, and (c) have experienced inconsistent schooling due to incoherent language programs within a school and across schools they have attended or frequent moves between the United States and their country of origin. (p. 3133)

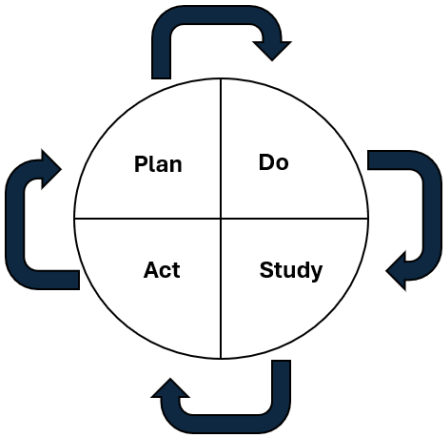
The all-encompassing terms of Limited English Proficient (LEP) and emergent bilingual do not provide a clear picture of these students' situations or needs.

Improvement Science

This is an Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice. The plan-do-study-act or PDSA cycle is used to assess and implement small-scale changes and evaluate them for improvement (Langley et al., 2009, p. 1). Following the PDSA cycle, the four parts include planning the intervention (plan), incorporating the intervention (do), reviewing the information gathered (study) after incorporating the intervention, and finally, making decisions in adjustments or developments (act) to start the next phase with the planning process (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2017, p. 469). As depicted in Figure 1.1, the PDSA cycle is ongoing, supporting a continuous improvement model. Once one rotation has been completed, the Act portion of the model is intended to guide planning for the next rotation. Learning from the data continues to refine the cycle and impact system changes that result in improvement (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2017, p. 469).

Figure 1.1

PDSA Cycle



This dissertation follows a two-phase nature in that two rotations of the PDSA cycle will be implemented. Phase one focuses on the current model and systems in place to support long-term emergent bilinguals in general education classes. Phase two will implement interventions based on the information gathered in the first rotation and evaluate their impact for future adjustments and research.

Background of the Problem

"Texas is home to over 1 million emergent bilingual students … that's 20% of all students in Texas public schools" (Kring Villanueva, 2021). Emergent bilinguals are identified through state-approved English language proficiency exams for English learners (Tex. Edu. Code **§** 89.1226). Students enrolling in a Texas school who indicate any language other than English on the required Home Language Survey are given the exam to assess potential language support needs. Students scoring less than proficient are indicated as limited English proficient/emergent bilingual and offered English as a Second Language program participation until they reach proficiency. "Oral proficiency takes 3 to 5 years to develop, and academic English proficiency can take 4 to 7 years" (Hakuta et al., 2000, p. 13). A review of research on reclassification reinforces this timeline but varies from state-to-state based on reclassification law (Thompson, 2017; Umansky & Reardon, 2014). Some research shows meeting the language proficiency expectations for reclassification could take longer (Artigliere, 2019, p. 4). Reclassification, defined in Texas Education Code §89.1203, is "the process by which the language proficiency assessment committee determines that an English learner has met the appropriate criteria to be classified as non-LEP [limited English proficient]" (p. 1). Clark-Gareca et al. (2019) outlined "six steps of EL [English Learner] identification, service provision and eventual reclassification or exit":

1. EL [English learner] screening,

2. Initial proficiency testing,

3. Assignment of services,

4. Annual proficiency testing,

5. Analysis of scores, and

6. Exit and monitoring. (pp. 5-6)

In their review of current research, Clark-Gareca et al. (2019) discussed how moving through the steps is different for different students. Some students move directly through and others "loop through a subsequence of Steps 3, 4, and 5 several times before reaching a proficient level of English" which creates "frustration toward learning English and, more generally, toward school as a whole" (p. 6). Students not meeting reclassification criteria continue in the English as a Second Language program though they score at higher language proficiency levels.

In the high school setting, we often see students who have developed oral language in their years in elementary bilingual education or English as a Second Language classrooms but not academic language. "It seems likely that one factor leading to long-term ELs [English learner/emergent bilingual] is a lack of focused AL [academic language] instruction to move students beyond intermediate level" (Ranney, 2012, p. 567). Students who quickly moved from Beginner level language proficiency to Intermediate or higher in sheltered instruction classrooms, become stagnant when they move to general education classrooms. The "Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) is an approach that attends to English language learners' needs to master academic content material while acquiring advanced English language proficiency" (Koura & Zahran, 2017, p. 705). Goldenberg and Coleman (2010) discuss emergent bilingual needs in the classroom saying educators "must be more directive, structuring explicit language learning opportunities to develop vocabulary, syntax, and other aspects of how the English language functions, combined with ample opportunities for practice and meaningful use

of the language" (p. 72). These are necessary and typical structures exercised in the sheltered instruction setting as described by Echevarria and Vogt (2010) in *Using the SIOP Model to Improve Literacy for English Learners*. "Sheltered instruction is key to programs for English learners [EL/EB], providing content area instruction at grade level in English with comprehensible input methods" (Thomas, 2019, p. 4). The level of support provided in the sheltered instruction classroom where emergent bilinguals show growth and success should be available in general education classrooms throughout a student's school day.

Research highlighting ways to support emergent bilinguals often discuss language learner strategies, scaffolds, and supports to assist with language development (Baecher, 2011; Cohen, 2011; Echevarria & Short, 2010; Echevarria & Vogt, 2010; Facella et al., 2005; Gibson, 2016; Gulubba et al., 2019; Johnson, 2018; Mills et al., 2014; Robinson-Kooi, 2020; Subban, 2006). What is missing is the connection between practice and student success pertaining to language proficiency in general education classrooms for long-term emergent bilinguals.

Problem of Practice

Eighty-six percent of Limited English Proficient students at a large 6A high school in Texas are long-term emergent bilinguals who have been enrolled in a U.S. school for six or more years but have not met language proficiency standards for reclassification as English language proficient and English as a Second Language program exit. At this research site, eighty-four or seventy-three percent of those long-term emergent bilinguals are scoring Advanced or Advanced High on the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), an annual standardized exam for language proficiency. Typically, these students are assumed to receive services within general education classrooms allowing room in the sheltered instruction classrooms for those emergent bilinguals scoring at the Beginner or Intermediate levels on TELPAS who need more intensive language support. If in a general education class as opposed

to a sheltered instruction class, long-term emergent bilinguals must receive language support from their general education teacher. If not provided in their regularly scheduled classroom, students needing additional language support would need to be pulled from classes missing valuable academic content learning opportunities.

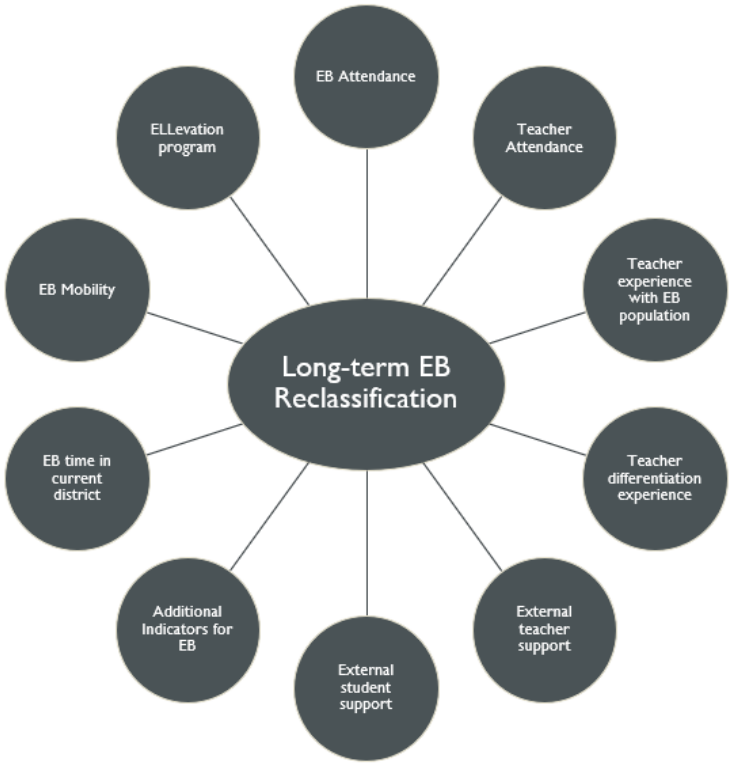
The concern encompasses the lack of growth and development from long-term emergent bilinguals who are not receiving direct language support in any classes. When these students are not assigned sheltered instruction classes due to their high scores on TELPAS, it is often assumed they are proficient, though they have not scored high enough to exit English as a Second Language programs and be considered proficient by the state of Texas. To improve language support and continue to grow long-term emergent bilingual's English language skills to higher levels of proficiency, teachers in general education classrooms should provide similar individualized language supports to those provided in the sheltered instruction classrooms. This allows for continued development of the English language moving long-term emergent bilinguals to score higher on TELPAS and, as a result, exit the English as a Second Language program.

Purpose of the Study

This study evaluates and determines the relationship between differentiation in general education classrooms and language development in long-term emergent bilinguals. Many emergent bilinguals remain in the English as a Second Language program longer than intended as determined by the state. As an English as a Second Language Interventionist and Coordinator for six years, I observed sheltered instruction classrooms in core content classes at the high school level.

Figure 1.2

Factors Impacting Long-term Emergent Bilingual Reclassification



In comparing the sheltered instruction courses with the general education courses, I noticed differences in classroom structures and the level of language support integrated with the content. The discrepancies originally seemed obvious as one is a “sheltered” classroom and one is general education. However, a sizable percentage of the English as a Second Language population in the school were not actually enrolled in a sheltered instruction classroom. In the current setting, only 18% of emergent bilinguals are in a sheltered instruction classroom. This means 82% of the emergent bilingual population is not. These emergent bilinguals are often scoring at the Advanced or Advanced High level in language proficiency testing and due to limited course sections or their growth in oral language, they are not provided that same support in any general education classroom throughout their school day, though further social and academic language support is necessary. Emergent bilinguals are struggling in mainstream classrooms due to the

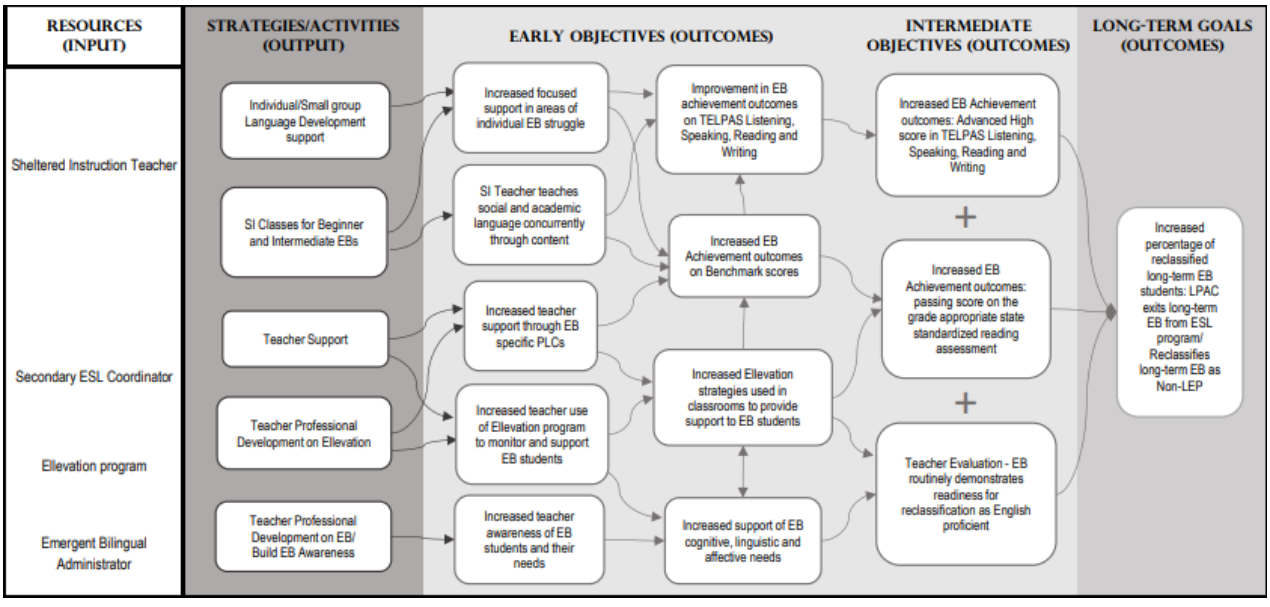
lack of support or variations in the kinds of support they were accustomed to receiving in sheltered instruction classrooms.

The System

Many factors contribute to emergent bilinguals not reclassifying within six years of identification. Many of the factors identified in Figure 1.2 are outside the scope of direct impact regarding this study, however, recognizing the numerous influences on long-term emergent bilingual success should encourage teachers and administrators to focus on areas that could have the most impact. Emergent bilingual mobility, emergent bilingual attendance, teacher experience with the emergent bilingual population, and teacher differentiation experience all encompass aspects of the school community and school culture. Training teachers to be prepared to support students in their classrooms must be part of a school system's culture and expectations.

Figure 1.3

Input, Output, and Outcomes Model



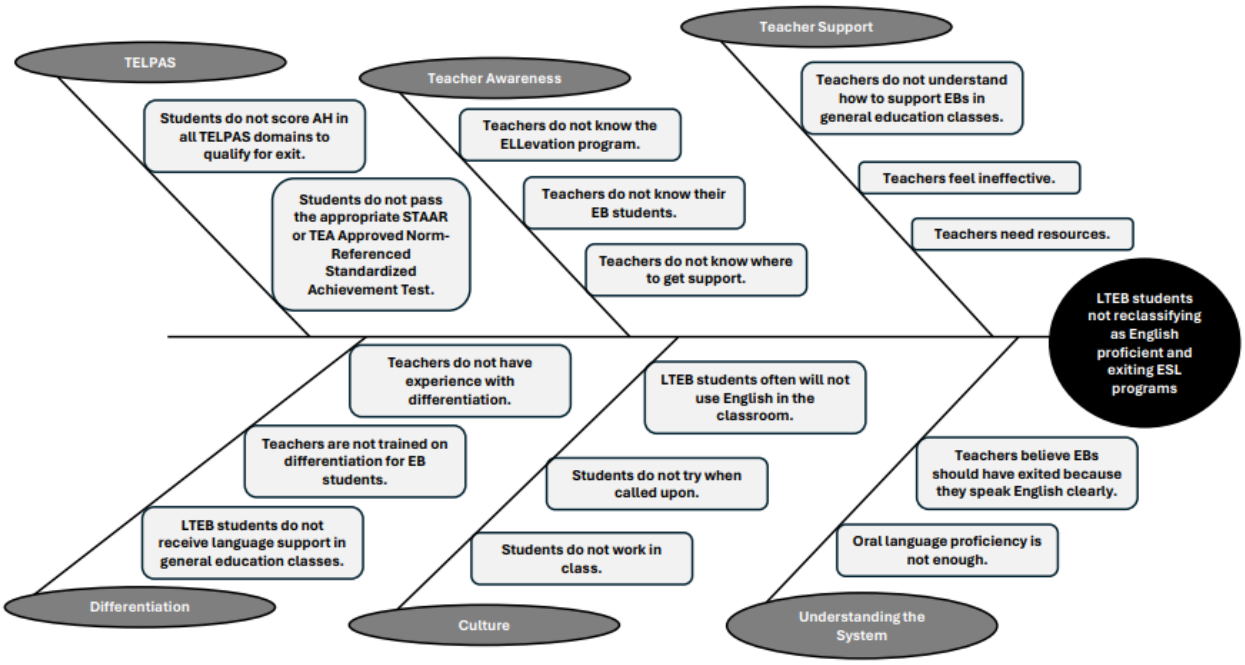
When teachers are supported, they are equipped to then support their students. Figure 1.3 outlines a system to support emergent bilinguals in reaching reclassification. Long-term emergent bilingual reclassification impacts school accountability and influences school community perceptions through school ratings. In supporting the needs of various student groups such as long-term emergent bilinguals, the campus can build community both inside and outside the school building.

Root Cause Analysis

According to Hinnant-Crawford (2020), "Root Cause Analysis (RCA) is a process used to clearly define problems of practice" (p. 49). Hinnant-Crawford (2020) emphasizes the importance of examining beneath the surface, "at the 'roots' of the tree" to identify the true cause of the problem (p. 49). A fishbone diagram was used to identify causes for long-term emergent bilinguals not successfully reclassifying. Involving stakeholders at various levels of the organization can benefit this process. Campus administrators, teachers, counselors, and instructional support staff worked together to complete the diagram. Because school systems are social systems, they are more complex (Slameto, 2016, p. 61). "For this reason, it is often impossible to isolate a single root cause, and often it is possible to identify several causes that in combination bring about a symptom...by dissolving any one of the multiple root causes, the symptoms can be reduced or even eliminated" (Slameto, 2016, p. 61). This diagram revealed several areas to consider including teacher support and awareness, teacher understanding of the system and of differentiation, as well as the culture and expectations for reclassification. Looking at one area can be difficult and narrowing down to one reason seems impossible. When we look at the Driver Diagram in Figure 1.5, we can refocus our efforts by aligning the root cause with the primary drivers.

Figure 1.4

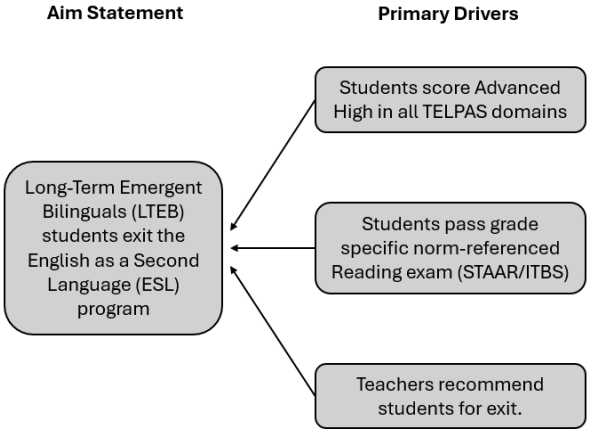
Fishbone Diagram



"A driver diagram explicitly maps out a path toward an intended outcome" (Worsfold, 2021, p. 57). The aim statement states the goal. "The primary driver identifies 'what or where' to launch improvement efforts and represents a prediction about an area of influence that is high-leverage and instrumental to enacting a change" (Worsfold, 2021, p. 58). In linking the information from the Fishbone Diagram and the primary drivers from the Driver Diagram in Figure 1.5, a theme emerges around student support. This study will focus on how to improve student support by improving teacher support through professional development and classroom support.

Figure 1.5

Driver Diagram



Positionality

Positionality shares the researcher's position in relation to the research. According to Bourke (2014), "positionality represents a space in which objectivism and subjectivism meet...We can strive to remain objective but must be ever mindful of our subjectivities" (p. 3). For this study, the researcher is a white, middle class, female with twenty-one years of experience in education. The researcher has worked with emergent bilinguals in various capacities for eleven years. Within the eleven years, the researcher has six years of experience working directly in English as a Second Language as an interventionist and coordinator, eleven years working with TELPAS testing, six years as a Language Proficiency Assessment Committee liaison, and three years as a Language Proficiency Assessment Committee administrator. The researcher believes relationships drive student success and recognizes the importance of meeting the affective, linguistic, and cognitive needs of emergent bilinguals. The researcher is an Assistant Principal whose role included serving as the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee administrator, State Testing Coordinator (including TELPAS), and

English as a Second Language program administrator. Therefore, the qualitative aspect of this research could be impacted by the researcher's leadership roles and influence.

Theory of Change

Sheltered instruction classrooms use language strategies and differentiation regularly to support the diverse needs of their emergent bilinguals. Students in sheltered instruction classrooms build language quickly due to the support provided. Once students advance out of the sheltered instruction environment to the general education setting, typically their language development slows or stagnates. Building awareness of emergent bilinguals and providing professional development with ongoing support for teachers could increase emergent bilingual support in the general education classroom. These initiatives along with individualized language support could provide for continued language development alongside content learning leading to English as a Second Language program exit and emergent bilingual reclassification.

Research Questions

- How does differentiation in general education classrooms impact long-term emergent bilingual language proficiency as indicated by TELPAS?
- How does differentiation impact long-term emergent bilingual reclassification rates?
- What are the characteristics of effective differentiation that positively impact long-term emergent bilingual reclassification rates?
- What are the characteristics of effective differentiation that positively impact long-term emergent bilingual reclassification rates?

This study will be examining differentiation in the sheltered instruction English course and general education English courses. One would expect to see improved language acquisition in

rooms frequently implementing differentiation to support emergent bilinguals, leading to reclassification for long-term emergent bilinguals.

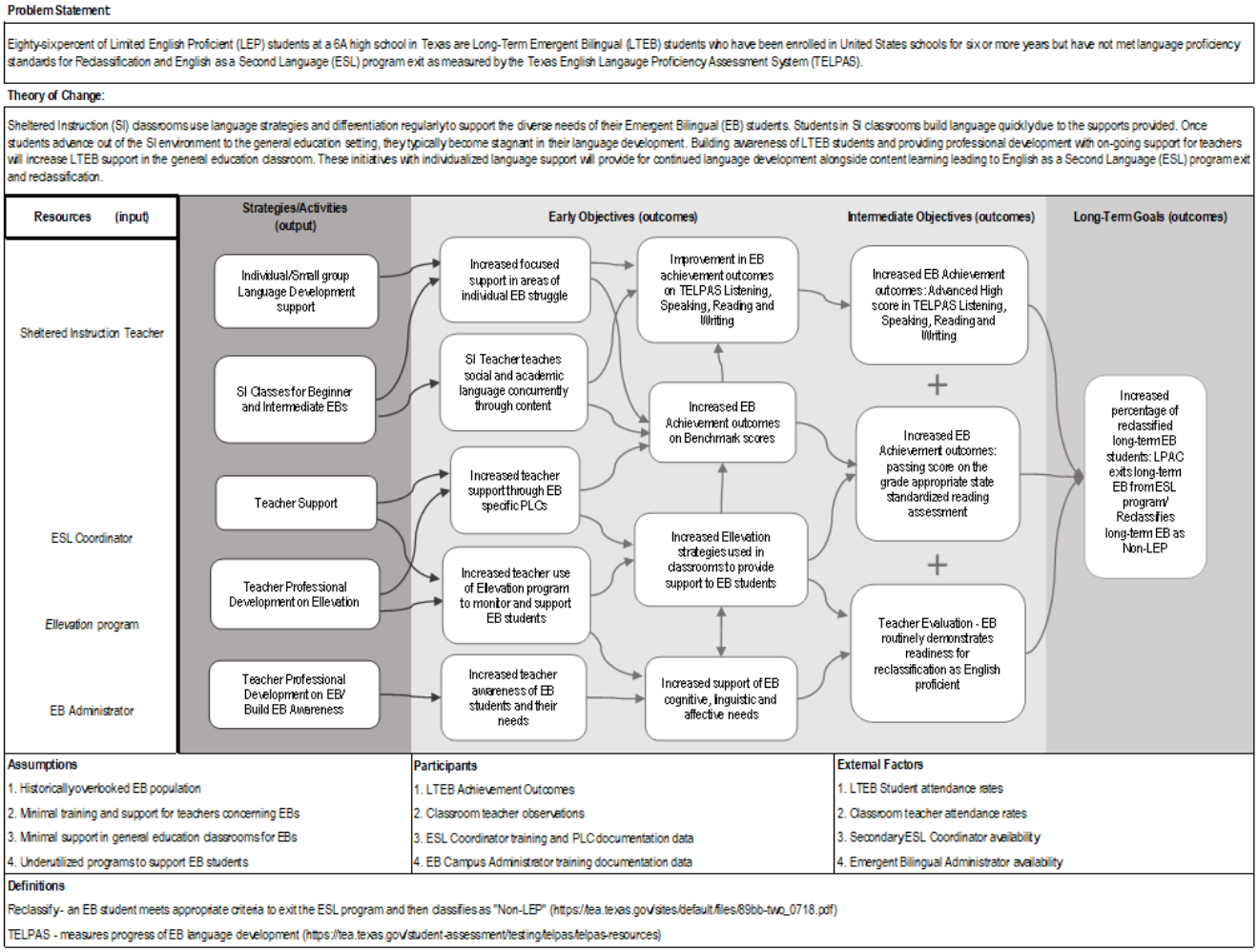
Evaluation Plan

Background

In the sheltered instruction classrooms, differentiation is a necessity to reach the varied learning styles, language proficiency levels, and abilities in the specialized classroom. "Differentiation is a philosophy of teaching rooted in deep respect for students, acknowledgment of their differences, and the drive to help all students thrive" (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019, p. 1). Tomlinson (2001) says, "differentiation can show us how to teach the same standard to a range of learners by employing a variety of teaching and learning modes" (p. 4). Baecher (2011) says, "the connection between differentiation and sheltering is that sheltering is an overarching array of techniques from which teachers wishing to differentiate instruction for ELLs [English Language Learners], currently [referred to as] EBs [in the state of Texas] at varying levels of English proficiency may draw" (p. 67). Knowing language development in the sheltered instruction classroom progresses rapidly and language development in the general education classes often becomes static, it is important to consider the role differentiation plays in each setting. "Although differentiated instruction has gained a lot of attention in practice and research, not much is known about the status of the empirical evidence and its benefits for enhancing student achievement in secondary education" (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019, p. 1). Differentiation is a key aspect of the sheltered instruction classroom. In a study examining the effectiveness of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model, Koura and Zahran (2017) found significant improvement in teaching skills and student English proficiency in the experiment group implementing SIOP strategies (p. 712).

Figure 1.6

Long-Term Emergent Bilinguals and Reclassification Logic Model



To better support our emergent bilinguals towards reclassification, it is important to recognize the differences in classroom experiences for students shifting from sheltered instruction classrooms to general education classrooms and the impact it has on their language development as they progress.

Intermediate and Long-Term Goals

The goal of this study is to identify the relationship between differentiation in general education classrooms and language development of long-term emergent bilinguals. As

referenced from the 2022 Emergent Bilingual/English Learner Reclassification Criteria Chart (Texas Education Agency, 2022) and documented in the Long-Term Emergent Bilinguals and Reclassification Logic Model (Figure 1.6), to qualify for exit, an emergent bilingual must meet three requirements: a) score Advanced High in all four TELPAS domains: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing; b) pass the grade appropriate state standardized reading assessment; and c) routinely demonstrate readiness for reclassification as English proficient as indicated through teacher evaluation. The long-term goal is to improve language development in long-term emergent bilinguals allowing them to meet English proficiency criteria for reclassification.

Assumptions and Justifications

This research comes with several assumptions. Historically, the emergent bilingual population is overlooked in general education classrooms due to larger class sizes. Most students are native English speakers leading teachers to cater lessons to those students in the majority. A second assumption, in conjunction with teaching to the majority, general education teachers have received minimal training on sheltered strategies or differentiation to be comfortable or knowledgeable on how to support emergent bilinguals in their classrooms. Training of this nature is typically provided for sheltered instruction classroom teachers. Based on the first two assumptions, the third assumption is that emergent bilinguals receive minimal language support in general education classrooms. The fourth assumption involves the recent district implementation of support programs. Teachers do not use the program as a resource to support classroom practice for emergent bilinguals. The program has proven underutilized due to the minimal training on program usage and misunderstood purpose of being a home for individual emergent bilingual data and teacher resources.

Figure 1.7

Questions, Indicators, and Targets Chart

Term	Logic Model Components	Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Targets
Early/ Short-term Objectives	Increased focused support in areas of individual EB struggle	• To what extent do teachers provide focused support in areas of identified struggle?	• Evidence of need identified in lesson plans • Evidence of support in Walkthrough data	• By December, 50% of teachers will be providing focused support for EB student learning • By February, 75% of teachers will be providing focused support for EB student learning
	Sheltered Instruction Teacher teaches social and academic language concurrently through content	• To what extent do Sheltered Instruction teachers teach social and academic language concurrently through content?	• Evidence identified in lesson plans • Evidence of teaching in Walkthrough data	• By October, 100% of weekly Sheltered Instruction teacher lesson plans reflect social and academic language activities • By October, 100% of Sheltered Instruction teacher walkthroughs will reflect social and academic language activities
	Increased teacher support through EB specific PLCs	• To what extent do teachers receive support through EB specific PLCs?	PLC agendas	• By October, 100% of EB PLC agendas will include one or more of the following: data, best practices, strategies, student work analysis, peer walkthroughs, collaboration, coaching, classroom support, program support
	Increased teacher use of *Ellevation* program to monitor and support EB students	• To what extent do teachers use the *Ellevation* program to support EB student needs?	• 6-week monitoring forms completed on time	• By September, 100% of teachers will access monitoring forms in *Ellevation* • By November, 100% of Monitoring forms completed consistently each 6 weeks throughout the school year
	Increased teacher awareness of EB students and their needs	• Did teachers learn to identify EB students?	• Teacher access to *Ellevation*	• By September, 100% of teacher accounts will be set up in *Ellevation*
	Improvement in EB achievement outcomes on TELPAS Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing	• To what extent did students improve their composite score on TELPAS? • Did students improve in all domains equally?	• #, % Composite score improvement on TELPAS • #, % improvement in each domain	• By December, 20% of students will show improvement in TELPAS composite scores • By May, 80% of students will improve in one or more domains
	Increased EB Achievement outcomes on Benchmark scores	• To what extent did student benchmark scores improve?	• #, % Benchmark score improvement	• By December, 50% of students will show improvement in Benchmark scores • By May, 80% of students will show improvement in Benchmark scores
	Increased *Ellevation* strategies used in classrooms to provide support to EB students	• To what extent are teachers incorporating *Ellevation* strategies?	• Teacher lesson plans	• By January, 50% of weekly teacher lesson plans reflect EB support with *Ellevation* strategies
	Increased support of EB cognitive, linguistic, and affective needs	• To what extent are teachers recognizing and supporting student needs?	• Teachers recognizing and documenting support evidenced by 6-week monitoring forms	• By December, 100% of 6-week monitoring forms will have notes discussing supports for individual students
Intermediate Objectives	Increased EB Achievement outcomes: Advanced High in TELPAS Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing	• Did EB students score Advanced High in all four domains of TELPAS?	• Annual TELPAS scores	• By May, 5% of EB students will score Advanced High in all four domains of TELPAS
	Increased EB Achievement outcomes: passing score on the grade appropriate state standardized reading assessment	• Did EB students pass the grade appropriate state standardized reading assessment?	• Annual state standardized reading assessments: STAAR English II EOC for 10th, IOWA assessment for 11th and 12th	• By May, 80% of EB students will pass the state standardized reading assessment for their grade level
	Teacher Evaluation – EB routinely demonstrates readiness for reclassification as English proficient	• To what extent do students routinely demonstrate readiness for reclassification as English proficient?	• Emergent Bilingual/English Learner Reclassification Rubric Teacher Documentation form	• By May, 100% of EBs meeting all other reclassification criteria will routinely demonstrate readiness for reclassification as indicated by their teachers
Long-term Objectives	Increased percentage of reclassified long-term EB students: LPAC exits long-term EB from ESL program/reclassifies long-term EB as Non-LEP	• To what extent do EB students qualify for program exit? • In what ways do EB students grow in language development if they do not qualify for exit?	• #, % EB exits in the current year • TELPAS Scores	• By May, 5% of EB students will exit the ESL program as indicated in the End-of-Year LPAC documentation • By May, 100% of EB students will show growth in TELPAS

Interventions

The interventions implemented include additional support and training for classroom teachers on emergent bilinguals, focused *ELLevation* program training, and professional development and coaching aimed at using sheltered instruction strategies. *ELLevation* (2022) is a program used by the district to aggregate and disaggregate data for the emergent bilingual population and provides resources and strategies to support classroom lessons and impact instruction. The Logic Model (Figure 1.6) outlines current expectations, but student outcomes do not support the logic. Increasing support to teachers and targeting training to meet the needs of the expectations, allows for follow-up and follow-through to identify effective and ineffective classroom practices. Looking at the Questions, Indicators, and Targets Chart (Figure 1.7), it is evident that much of the work done in the Logic Model relies on teacher and staff cooperation. Effective interventions will lead to increased classroom support for emergent bilinguals. Tracking the data throughout the research will reveal breakdowns in the system and provide evidence of the impact of providing sheltered strategies and differentiation in general education classrooms for long-term emergent bilinguals.

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Chapter 2: Review of Scholarly and Professional Knowledge

Language development through sheltered instruction and differentiation has its roots in the work of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky's Social Interactionist Theory (1934) explains the necessity for social interaction on learning. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) extends to the zone of proximal development describing what the learner can do on their own and what they can do with support. The idea that a student can acquire language when supported is outlined in Stephen

Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition and Input Hypothesis. A clearer understanding of emergent bilinguals through the clarification of definitions and key terms helps contextualize accountability and current practices.

Social Interactionist theory (Sociocultural Theory)

Psychologist Lev Vygotsky proposed the Social Interactionist Theory (SIT) in 1934 (McLeod, 2020; Mehmood et al., 2021). "Vygotsky...developed it as an alternative to individualistic information processing theories of cognition and learning" (Althobaiti, 2014, p. 952). Language development is a social process in that practicing with others helps the learner identify language rules and appropriate use of the language both socially and academically. With a strong emphasis on the social aspect necessary for learning, Vygotsky believed "social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition" (Kincheloe & Horn, 2007, p. 149). Social interaction impacts emergent bilingual cognitive development by shaping how they perceive, process, and practice new information. "Cognitive development is a socially mediated process in which children acquire their cultural values, beliefs and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society" (McLeod, 2020, para. 5). Emergent bilinguals develop language by internalizing what is seen, heard, and shared in social interaction and communication.

Pathan et al. (2018) state, "Vygotsky is very important in second language learning because he introduced the concept of language learning in social interaction" (p. 232). Social interaction helps emergent bilinguals understand the cultural context of language through language use and social norms. Vygotsky (1978) stated, "human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (p. 88). Social interaction also helps emergent bilinguals develop conversational skills, broaden their vocabulary, and build a better understanding of language structures. Vygotsky's

'sociocultural theory' suggests that social interaction leads to continuous changes in children's thought and behavior" (Kincheloe & Horn, 2007, p. 241). In their research on using social interactionist techniques in language classrooms, Mehmood et al. (2021) compared two groups, one receiving traditional pedagogical methods and one experimental group receiving the same methods as well as social interactionist techniques. Mehmood et al. (2021) found "the social interactionist approach proved to be fruitful in harboring the necessary skills in effective communication of second language" (pp. 1246-1247). They found "students demonstrated remarkable performance which clearly indicated the effectiveness of SIT" (Mehmood et al., 2021, p. 1247). Interacting with others through language proves to advance language development as theorized by Vygotsky (1934). "It may be right to state that socio cultural theory is a theory of educational framework wherein the cognitive development of the child is promoted" (Pathan et al., 2018, p. 233). Social interaction plays a critical role in language development.

Zone of Proximal Development

Within his Sociocultural theory (1978), Vygotsky developed the zone of proximal development (ZPD). He stated, "an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). These zones are established when teachers push students beyond their comfort zones, moving from what they can currently do to realizing their learning potential. The zone of proximal development is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by the independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). "ZPDs are zones or spaces that

scaffold learners to higher-knowledge plateaus with the capacity to be custom designed to suit the needs of the individual" (Kincheloe & Horn, 2007, p. 217).

Based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), Wertsch (1979) described the progression through the zone of proximal development for a child from other-regulation (initial stages of learning) in social learning to self-regulation (advanced stages of learning) in four levels:

> 1) Child may fail to interpret adults' utterances in terms of the task situation.
> 2) Child will be able to respond to specific questions and commands of the adult in connection with the task in a limited way due to the lack of understanding.
> 3) Child will be able to follow quite nonexplicit directives (e.g., hints) …the child has taken over some of the responsibility for regulating his/her own activity; and
> 4) Child carries out the task without any strategic assistance from the adult. (p. 77)

Wertsch (1979) noted "the first three levels in this framework are all in the zone of proximal development" (p. 77). The zone of proximal development can be imagined through the concept of a target with a center and two rings where the center of the target represents the bullseye or what the student can do independently, the outer most ring represents what the student cannot do even with guidance, and the middle ring represents the zone of proximal development or what the student can do with guidance (Williams, 2020). Inside the zone of proximal development is where teachers have flexibility to provide the necessary individualized support for their students. Kincheloe and Horn (2007) explained "they can be orchestrated to address individual needs" (p. 217). Krashen (1982) asserted that "we acquire [language]…only when we understand language

that contains structure that is 'a little beyond' where we are now" alluding to the zone of proximal development (p. 21).

Theory of Second Language Acquisition and Input Hypothesis

"Most importantly, language use, the notion of ZPD, peer interaction and learning as a mediated process are Vygotsky's influential thoughts used and practiced in SLL [Second Language Learning], SLA [Second Language Acquisition]" (Pathan et al., 2018, p. 235). Krashen takes the Sociocultural Theory and the zone of proximal development one step further by describing how to support students in their language acquisition. "Real language acquisition develops slowly, and speaking skills emerge significantly later than listening skills, even when conditions are perfect" (Krashen, 1982, p. 7). "Instead of an instructor stringing five or six sentences together in a beginning classroom, the instructor might engage learners in the content of meaning-making all along the way" (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021, p. 298).

Through his Input Hypothesis, Krashen (1982) described the concept of $i + 1$ where i represents current competence and $+ 1$ represents the next level (pp. 20-21). Referring to the target analogy for the zone of proximal development, second language acquisition and the Input Hypothesis can be visualized in a comparable manner using stair steps. The first step where the learner starts, is i (current competence), and the next step up represents $i + 1$ (the next level). Subsequent steps also represent $i + 1$ until the learner acquires the knowledge at their current step. Once the learner acquires the content, they step up changing the step from $i + 1$ to i because once mastered, it then represents current competence. Each step transforms as the learner acquires language climbing the learning ladder. "We acquire by understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond our current level of competence ($i + 1$)" (Krashen, 1982, p. 21). The $i + 1$ stage of the stair step can be compared to zone of proximal development in that it is at that time that learners are challenged. It is in the "next level" ($i + 1$) stage where support,

including social support, is crucial. A "main task of the teacher is to provide non-linguistic means of encouraging comprehension…providing extra-linguistic support in the form of realia and pictures for beginning classes is not a frill, but a very important part of the tools the teacher has to encourage language acquisition" (Krashen, 1982, p. 66). Over forty years, research has continued to support Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition and Input Hypothesis (Jegerski, 2021; Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021; Loschky, 1994; Patrick, 2019; White, 1987; Wulff, 2021).

Emergent Bilinguals

Legal and Operational Definitions

Texas passed Senate Bill 2066 changing the language to describe students learning a second or subsequent language(s). The term emergent bilingual replaced former titles English Language Learner (ELL) and English Learner (EL) with the goal of placing a positive connotation on the growth these students make as opposed to the negative implication that the terms "limited," or "learning" emit. According to González-Howard and Suárez (2021), the term is "supporting students' learning without depositing or replacing knowledge or ways of communicating" (p.751). Emergent bilinguals become bilingual (or multilingual), learning to function in two (or more) languages socially and academically. Long-term emergent bilinguals, formerly described as long-term English learners (LTELs), or long-term English Language Learners (LTELLs) are emergent bilinguals who have not reclassified within the anticipated period. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) says, "States and LEAs [Local Education Agency] may consider ELs [emergent bilinguals] who have not attained English language proficiency after five years as long-term ELs" (p. 38). The government also recognizes, "These students may require additional supports in order to achieve English language proficiency" (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 38). Districts, schools, and educators should address the

needs of all students and acknowledge long-term emergent bilinguals as a subpopulation that have unique learning needs which include language development.

In the school setting, emergent bilinguals are often recognized solely on indictors in district or campus databases indicating which students belong to which programs. There is no operational definition increasing the inconsistencies across states and the assumptions made by educators choosing not to research each of their students. “So that individual states and districts have a better framework for creating and monitoring their own programs, there is a need for more specificity with respect to operational definitions (e.g., ELL, R-FEP), particularly within the non-regulatory guidance released by the Office of Civil Rights” (Ragan & Lesaux, 2006, p. 21). Wolf et al. (2008) says “although many new ELP [English language proficiency] assessments and states’ ELP standards have attempted to include the features of academic English, a comprehensive, operationalized definition of academic English proficiency has yet to be developed” (p. 17).

Reclassification

Reclassification is the distinction for emergent bilinguals who have demonstrated English proficiency (TEC **§** 89.1203). Reclassifying, commonly referred to as “exiting,” is taken from the concept that students “exit” the ESL program they no longer qualify for based on their new non-limited English proficient designation. To reclassify in Texas at the high school level, emergent bilinguals must score Advanced High on the annual Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) in each domain: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. They must also pass the state standardized reading assessment based on their grade level without using language accommodations (TEC **§** 89.1226). For ninth grade, that assessment is the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) End of Course (EOC) for English I. For tenth grade, the assessment is the STAAR EOC English II. For eleventh and

twelfth grade, that exam is a Texas Education Agency (TEA) Norm-Referenced Standardized Achievement Test for Reading and Language (TEC § 39.023). Emergent bilinguals must score at a specific level to qualify for reclassification dependent on the grade level exam. The third aspect needed for reclassification is the subjective teacher evaluation. Teacher input is considered based on a rubric identifying receptive skill and expressive skill support needs and the recommendation indicating the student "routinely demonstrates the readiness for reclassification as English proficient" found in the Emergent Bilingual/English Learner Reclassification Rubric Teacher Documentation form (Emergent Bilingual/English Learner Reclassification Criteria Chart, 2022).

Long-Term Emergent Bilinguals

There is an assumption that the reclassification of emergent bilinguals to English proficient means they are capable of being successful in general education classrooms without language support, alternatively implying they need language support in general education classrooms as emergent bilinguals. A similar assumption stands for emergent bilinguals who are no longer enrolled in sheltered instruction or English as a Second Language classes. These emergent bilinguals have not reclassified but have progressed past the initial learning phase, typically into an Advanced or Advanced High proficiency level moving them out of sheltered instruction classrooms into mainstream or general education classrooms as they continue their language journey to bilingual or multilingualism. Students who may reach those Advanced or Advanced High proficiency levels in younger grades (reaching higher proficiency levels without exiting prior to high school), also known as long-term emergent bilinguals, may sit in large general education classrooms overlooked as to the extent of language support needed to be successful. "In mainstream classrooms, long-term EBs are with English proficient students, and teachers often are unaware that they have long-term EBs in their classes" (Kim, 2019, p. 3134). Kim (2019) also noted long-term emergent bilinguals might not be able to access the content

without instructions and materials intended to address their significant academic literacy gaps (p. 3134). As noted by Burke et al. (2016), (cited from Roberts et al., 2010; Stevens et al., 2000), emergent bilinguals are not a homogenous group (p. 1332). Based on their research, other factors play into the amount of time it takes for an emergent bilingual to attain reclassification. Simply recognizing an emergent bilingual's status is just the beginning. Adjusting teaching and classroom activities to support language learners helps move them to reclassification attaining bilingualism or multilingualism.

Sheltered Instruction

"The practice of integrating language development with techniques to make curricular topics more comprehensible to ELLs [English Language Learners, currently referred to as emergent bilinguals in the state of Texas] is generally known as sheltered instruction in the United States…" (Short et al., 2012, p. 335). In the sheltered instruction (SI) classroom model, "sheltering techniques are whole-class (not individualized) teacher adaptations designed to make content accessible to ELLs, as well as provide instruction in English language skills, and involve an array of discourse, textual, task, and environment decisions" (Baecher, 2011, p. 65). In current practice, the goals of sheltered instruction are twofold: (1) to provide access to the core curriculum by teaching in a way that is meaningful and understandable for English learners, and (2) to develop English language proficiency, especially academic English, through sheltered lessons (Echevarria & Short, 2010, p. 310). The intent "is to equip [emergent bilingual] students with academic literacy skills across the curriculum and the genre knowledge necessary for them to succeed academically" (Song, 2006, p. 421). "SI often provides the bridge to the mainstream and the amount of sheltered instruction provided should increase as students move towards the transition out of these programs" (Echevarria & Short, 2000, p. 6). Sheltered support should

continue once emergent bilinguals advance out of sheltered instruction classrooms into general education classes to continue supporting language development and content learning.

Differentiation

Definition

Differentiation in name is simply creating different opportunities for individuals or groups to access the content. “Tomlinson (2005), a leading expert in this field, defines differentiated instruction as a philosophy of teaching that is based on the premise that students learn best when their teachers accommodate the differences in their readiness levels, interests and learning profiles” (Subban, 2006, p. 940). Turner et al (2017) says “to better understand differentiated instruction, one needs to understand how students learn” (p. 491). The research on differentiation is significant and emphasizes the need to provide support in the classroom to ensure all students' success. “It is the goal of differentiated instruction (DI) to reach out to each student and approach the lesson in a way that fits their learning styles, interests, abilities, or multiple intelligences” (Lawson et al., 2017, p. 31). Comparable definitions of differentiation note the diverse needs of students. The newer aspect of this thinking lies in the recognition that a student is more than their academic profile. Teachers can support students academically when they consider other factors such as building relationships, varying activities based on student abilities or using realia based on student interests.

Supporting Individual Learners

Research has presented a different view of the type of support that can better assist bilingual and multilingual students in general education classrooms. “The attribute we call individuality is constructed in relation” (Noddings, 2008, p. 167). It is important to recognize each student’s individuality and build relationships through their language. Hornberger (2002) discussed relationships recognized in her previous work on the continua of biliteracy

(Hornberger, 1989), emphasizing that language exists on a spectrum, varying by learners and is not fixed in one place (pp. 17-18). From this knowledge, we understand that individual students differ within a classroom, and their educational and linguistic needs also vary among them. Once teachers understand their students' individual needs, planning and implementing those strategies becomes easier leading to the next important aspect of differentiated instruction. Smale-Jacobse et al. (2019) explained that "high quality differentiated instruction is based on the frequent assessment of learning needs and flexible adaptations to meet those needs" (p. 3). "Within a DI model, formative, and summative assessment . . . are used to frequently monitor student progress and to inform instruction" (Park & Datnow, 2017, p. 286). Teachers should be prepared to review data, monitor student progress, and adjust strategies to promote student learning. Differentiation for emergent bilinguals should be a three-step process:

1. Knowing the students and understanding their needs for the classroom and content.
2. Implementing strategies based on data to support individual learners.
3. Monitor and adjust as students grow in both language and content.

Teachers should recognize that differentiated instruction is a process and does not happen without planning and commitment.

"To respond to the expressed needs of students—and not just to those inferred from the formal curriculum—teachers must acquire a broad expanse of knowledge, one that goes well beyond the limits of narrow subject-matter expertise" (Noddings, 2008, p. 167). Other strategies like grouping and scaffolding that encourage communication also build language (Gulubba et al., 2019, p. 1035). Educators must recognize language learners are not necessarily in the same place developmentally or have the same experiences just because they may be the same age, in the same class, or from the same country (Robinson-Kooi, 2020, p. 23). This is true of any aspect of

any student or students' learning. Emergent bilinguals have the additional language learning aspect to consider in their language development and content learning. Teachers must apply this knowledge and provide support in the classroom to help long-term emergent bilinguals develop language leading to reclassification.

Emergent Bilingual Specific Training for Teachers

Often, research links differentiation to students with disabilities. This could be the result of a lack of focused training. Brown and Endo (2017) found teachers in their study lumped emergent bilinguals with students with special needs when lesson planning for support (p. 381). Brown and Endo (2017) stated that "there are specific strategies available to meet different academic needs" and "the imprecise use of the term 'differentiation' unintentionally excludes or marginalizes ELLs" (p. 381). Though there is research available connecting differentiation to emergent bilinguals, research focuses on what strategies work, how to implement them effectively, and an argument for more training to support teachers in the classroom. "To respond effectively after listening to a wide range of student needs, teachers must be life-long learners, and they must continually strive for competence" (Noddings, 2008, p. 167). As mentioned by Frankling et al. (2017), "it is important to acknowledge that the provision of professional development alone does not result in significant, sustained change in teacher practice" (p. 73). Johnson (2018) reported in her study of instructional scaffolding that "although [teachers] chose particular scaffolds primarily because they knew them to be effective, factors in the instructional context influenced whether and how they used them" (p. 123). Johnson (2018) later noted "teachers also chose some planned scaffolds over others because the materials or equipment that they required were readily accessible…" (p. 124). This only emphasizes, as does Marks et al. (2021), that not only training, but then ongoing support is imperative to assist teachers in differentiation (p. 6). Support, resources, and practice are all crucial to impact the use of

differentiation in the classroom. Teachers need focused differentiation training, follow-up, follow-through, and ongoing modeling and mentoring.

Accountability

Emergent bilinguals in general education English classrooms are not performing at the same level or making the same educational gains as their non-emergent bilingual peers. Being a diversified group within the emergent bilingual indicator, defining success using one label can be unclear. As of 2019, emergent bilinguals account for 10.4 percent of enrollment (5,025,995 students) in U.S. schools, showing a steady increase since 2000 when it was 8.1 percent with 3,793,764 students (Digest of Education Statistics, 2021a). In Texas, the 2019 enrollment was 19.6 percent (1,021,540 students) up from 14.1 percent (570, 453 students) in 2000 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2021a). Districts and schools cannot ignore or marginalize this growing population. “One area in which state and federal governments have taken a more active policymaking role is in efforts aimed at standardization of policies and procedures designed to monitor the academic performance of ELs” (Mavrogordato & White, 2017, p. 281). However, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has provided limited guidance outside of reporting measures leaving districts and schools to fend for themselves. Connecting policy with current practices within the subgroups is essential. To truly effect change, systems put in place by various states and local education agencies will need to be studied for continuous improvement to support this growing population.

Understanding the Emergent Bilingual Umbrella

There are several aspects to this group that make it dynamic and potentially exceptionally challenging. There are emergent bilinguals with disabilities, first year emergent bilinguals, and long-term emergent bilinguals that fall into this category that need special attention to be supported appropriately. This clarification is not to exclude the remaining members of the

emergent bilingual population, including students identified as emergent bilingual, within two to five years in the country. This highlights the potential for confusion and difficulty in working with and providing appropriate educational opportunities for the diverse emergent bilingual population.

Emergent Bilinguals with Disabilities

Emergent bilinguals with disabilities make up a unique population within itself. These students are dually identified as requiring services for both language development and an identified disability. Students who are dually identified as emergent bilinguals and students with disabilities have unique needs (Applegate, 2018, p. 3). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021b), emergent bilinguals with disabilities made up 12.1 percent of the total emergent bilingual population. “A consistently misunderstood student population, ELLs [emergent bilinguals] are often overrepresented and sometimes underrepresented with disability labels” (Marsh, 2018, p. 3). In data collected, among emergent bilinguals with disabilities, nearly 50 percent had a specific learning disability, compared to nearly 38 percent of students with disabilities who are not emergent bilingual. Similarly, 21 percent of emergent bilinguals with a disability compared to 17 percent of non-emergent bilinguals with a disability, were identified as having a speech or language impairment (Department of Education, 2017). Recognizing the specific needs of each student can be difficult when balancing multiple indicators. In Beyond Compliance: An Approach to Serving English Language Learners with Disabilities, Chelsea Stinson (2018) shared her experience with working with emergent bilinguals with disabilities. Stinson (2018) wrote,

> The greatest challenges my colleagues and I have faced have come from the obligation to meet state regulations regarding instructional time and settings for ELLs [emergent bilinguals] and federal guidelines for students with disabilities.

> These demands often increase students' time spent in restrictive instructional or service-delivery settings instead of ensuring high-quality, inclusive instruction which meets the needs of all students. (p.1)

"All learning disabilities are characterized by marked difficulty in at least one area of academic performance" (Sowell and Sugisaki, 2021, p. 3). In their work, Sowell and Sugisaki (2020) provided evidence that English language teachers received little to no training in accommodating students with learning disabilities. "There is a gap in research and evidence-based practices regarding the confluent relationship between disability-related services, such as provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and components of bilingual and ELL [emergent bilingual] education, including policy and regulations" (Stinson, 2018, pp. 2-8). This leaves room for doubt that this population is receiving the appropriate classroom support to address the dynamic needs of emergent bilinguals with disabilities.

First Year Emergent Bilinguals

First year emergent bilinguals are not included in accountability reporting but need intensive support as they will be counted the following year. Some schools offer newcomer academies intended to focus on language development alongside content for immigrant students. Most students, however, are placed in mainstream classes due to the lack of other options such as a newcomer academy or content English as a Second Language rooms for core contents outside of English. "ELLs [emergent bilinguals] with varying levels of English language proficiency, formal education, and cultural background are making their way into mainstream secondary classes where English is the medium of instruction" (Cardimona, 2018, p. 18). In Supporting English Language Learners Inside the Mathematics Classroom: One Teacher's Unique Perspective Working with Students During Their First Years in America, Fendrick (2018) shares her experience teaching newcomers alone with a lack of curriculum. She shared her challenges

communicating with students speaking eight different languages (Fendrick, 2018, pp. 26-27). Though most classrooms will not encounter this scenario, the concerns are the same with teachers figuring out how to appropriately support first year emergent bilinguals.

Long-term Emergent Bilinguals

Emergent bilinguals who have not achieved English language proficiency within five years are termed "long-term ELs [emergent bilinguals]" according to The U.S. Department of Education (2016, p. 38). "On average, it takes four to seven years for an English learner to effectively acquire academic English proficiency" (Weyer, 2018, p. 1). "These students remain in specialized EL [emergent bilingual] programming, or continue to require English-language support, through middle and high school and are often overlooked by support systems (Hanover Research, 2017, p. 3). "These students have experienced pervasive problems of academic failure, inappropriate referral to special education, high retention, and dropout" (Kim, 2019, p. 3133). According to research by Cashiola and Potter (2021), "almost seven in ten students who began first grade as an English learner in Texas public schools in 2014-15 did not reclassify within five years" (p. 2). "Research has shown that LTEL [long-term emergent bilingual] status corresponds with negative academic outcomes, such as lower test scores, higher risk of drop out, and lower on-time high school graduation rates" (Cashiola & Potter, 2021, p. 1). Two overwhelming statistics pointed out by Cashiola and Potter (2021) document the increase in long-term emergent bilingual (or LTEL as described in their research): "around 24,800 EL students who started first grade in 2000-21 became LTEL – or about 36 percent…more than 72,500 EL students who started first grade in 2014-15 became LTEL – more than 67 percent" (p.1). This group within the emergent bilingual population accentuates the concerns about emergent bilingual success.

Current Policy

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

ESSA was signed by President Obama in 2015 (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Concerning EBs, "under the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, states must annually assess the English language proficiency of ELs [emergent bilinguals], provide reasonable accommodations for them on state assessments, and develop new accountability systems that include long-term goals and measures of progress for ELs" (Department of Education, 2017). Specifics on how to address those points were left to the states and local education agencies. "Laws do not prescribe models, services, practices or actions, leaving it to local education agencies to determine how they will meet federal and state mandates" (Ortiz et al., 2020, p. 246). "Under ESSA, states are expected to include improving English language acquisition as part of the state's accountability plans" (Adler-Greene, 2019, p. 5). President Obama updated aspects of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002) and "took a very 'hands off' approach toward regulating education … [deferring] educational decision making to the states" (Adler-Greene, 2019, p. 1-2).

Current Practice

Disconnect

"In implementing ESSA, the United States government provided schools with a legislation that is inherently disconnected to the way second language acquisition research has reported" (Rivera, 2019, pp. 1-2). In his research on the academic performance of emergent bilinguals and non-emergent bilinguals in a two-year period, Rivera (2019) found that though there was growth in both groups, there was not sufficient time for the emergent bilingual students to acquire academic language proficiency. Rivera (2019) documented, "a two-year period was utilized because of the two-year ELL [emergent bilingual] accountability mark established by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015" (abstract). He later added, "the Every Student

Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, stated, that after two years an ELL [emergent bilingual] student's standardized test scores must become part of a school and school district's accountability formula" (Rivera, 2019, p. 1). Looking ahead, Rivera (2019) stated, "the ancillary analysis conducted … shows that non-ELL [non-emergent bilingual] students outperform ELL students in both subjects (i.e., mathematics and reading) in the hypothetical additional year" (p.117). This research clearly highlighted the disconnect between reporting requirements through ESSA and a practical growth timeline for language acquisition.

Language Acquisition

There are six stages of second language acquisition: (a) pre-production, (b) early production, (c) speech emergent, (d) beginning fluency, (e) intermediate fluency, and (f) advanced fluency (Robertson & Ford, 2008). Robertson and Ford (2008) explained "just as in any other learning situation, it depends on the individual" referring to how long it takes for a language learner to get through the stages (para. 10). According to Benigno et al. (2017), "research has shown that language is a non-linear process and that a combination of individual and contextual factors determines the learning journey and affects the time each individual needs to make progress" (p. 3). Benigno et al. (2017) further discussed the variables that account for the varied timeline: (a) starting proficiency level, (b) motivation of the learner, (c) aptitude, (d) learning strategies, (e) learning context, and (f) age (pp. 4-6). An accepted range for oral proficiency is three to five years and academic language proficiency is four to seven years (Hakuta et al., 2000, p. 13; Thompson, 2017, p. 337). The state of Texas indicates language learners as long-term after five years of indicated emergent bilingual status (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 38).

Reclassification

Estrada and Wang (2018) conducted a study of reclassification patterns across seven cohorts of students over three years in one district and two years in another. The research focused on the percentage of emergent bilinguals meeting reclassification criteria, the percentage not reclassifying, but meeting minimum criteria, and district and school factors facilitating or impeding reclassification (Estrada & Wang, 2018, p. 212). They found that though there were similar processes in many cases, district policies thwarted reclassification as one district followed state minimums while the second district "exceeded them greatly" (Estrada & Wang, 2018, p. 234). "California requires demonstrating English proficiency *and* ELA [English Language Arts] standards achievement *and* teacher evaluation of curriculum mastery" (Estrada & Wang, 2018, p. 236). Teacher evaluations are subjective. Okhremtchouk et al. (2018) stated, "although teachers may have the best intentions when writing these recommendations, this measure is so subjective that a child's re/classification risks being determined by which teacher he or she has" (p. 7). Estrada and Wang (2018) clarify "an EL [emergent bilingual] in one district who garners the mantle of success that reclassification signifies might, in another, enter long-term status and garner the mantle of failure" (p. 236). The discrepancies outlined in this study focus on the state of Texas and emphasize the issue of continuity nationwide.

Future Research

Future research should focus on the subgroups within the emergent bilingual indicator: (a) emergent bilinguals with disabilities, (b) first year emergent bilinguals, and (c) long-term emergent bilinguals in relation to the three areas discussed in current practice:

- the disconnect between ESSA and the language acquisition timeline,
- a deeper study of language acquisition for each group, and
- common or diverse reclassification practices impact on these groups.

A focus on the achievement gap within the subgroups could reveal a clearer picture of the needs of the emergent bilingual population. Rosetta Stone Education (2020) identified five areas that contribute to the emergent bilingual achievement gap: (a) “different profiles aren’t accounted for,” (b) “classrooms aren’t culturally responsive,” (c) “academic language isn’t focused on or fully developed,” (d) “not enough bilingual educators,” and (e) “K-12 teachers lack adequate support” (p. 3). Research coordinating these five areas within the subgroups could simplify or complicate future support systems for emergent bilinguals.

Conclusion

Emergent bilinguals are a heterogeneous group. Emergent bilinguals with disabilities, first year emergent bilinguals and long-term emergent bilinguals each have diverse characteristics and bring distinct components to be considered to the larger umbrella subsumed under the label of emergent bilingual. Current policy does not align with current practice. Research suggests a disconnect between policy timelines and language acquisition timelines including reclassification for emergent bilinguals. State and local education agency policies vary concerning emergent bilinguals resulting in inconsistent systems. The data from inconsistent systems can be skewed at the federal reporting level. In this respect, federal policy is influencing emergent bilingual indicators more than language acquisition research. To better support emergent bilinguals and inform future policy, state and local practice need further study and alignment.

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Abstract

Texas currently has over one million students classified as emergent bilinguals. Long-term emergent bilinguals are often left struggling in general education classrooms, never qualifying for reclassification due to low language proficiency scores on TELPAS. Differentiating instruction to support emergent bilinguals in general education classrooms has been shown to support their content learning and language development. This is supported by Vygotsky's Social Interaction Theory (1934), the zone of proximal development (1978), and Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982). This multiple case study uses a mixed methods triangulation design convergence model to compare teacher perceptions of differentiation and implementation of differentiation in general education English classrooms before and after the intervention. This chapter looks at the initial findings after pre-intervention interviews with teachers and classroom observations. Teachers reported having some training on differentiation, but mostly, explained that they know their students and help them accordingly. All participants reported using differentiation every day. Overall, teachers scored themselves high on comfort levels with differentiation, confidence in aligning differentiation with student needs, and the effectiveness of differentiation in their classroom, but scored mid-range on the difficulty of differentiation implementation. The research revealed teachers using differentiation strategies for whole group instruction rather than individualized support outside of one-on-one teacher support and partner work.

Keywords: differentiation, emergent bilingual, long-term emergent bilingual, general education, reclassification, language proficiency

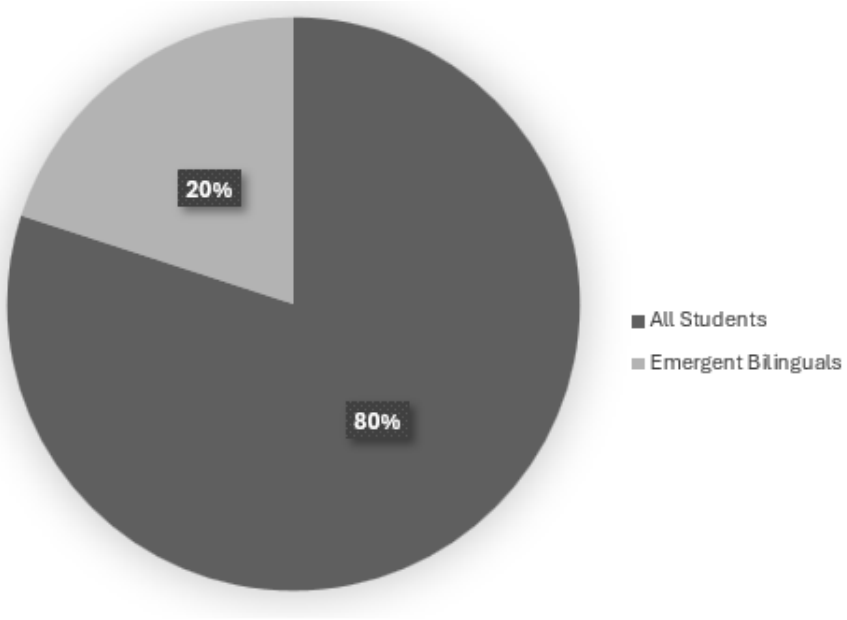
Chapter 3: Evaluation of the Problem of Practice

Introduction

As of 2021, Texas had over one million emergent bilinguals, making up 20 percent of all students in public schools (Kring Villanueva, 2021) (See Figure 3.1.). These students were identified through state-approved English language proficiency exams as required by Texas Education Code § 89.1226. Students who indicated any language other than English on the required Home Language Survey were given the language proficiency exam to assess potential language support needs. Students who scored less than proficient were indicated as limited English proficient/emergent bilingual and offered participation in an English as a Second Language program until they reach proficiency. Oral proficiency takes three to five years to develop, while academic English proficiency can take four to seven years (Hakuta et al., 2000, p. 13).

Figure 3.1

Public School Students in Texas in 2021



Texas Education Code §89.1203 defined reclassification based on the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee's (LPAC) determination that the English learner has met all requirements to exit English as a Second Language programs and reclassify as language proficient or non-Limited English Proficient. Considering the LPAC's decisions are based on specific state reclassification criteria, the continual increase in the number of long-term emergent bilinguals requires further review.

Problem of Practice

The number of emergent bilinguals in Texas has continued to increase. In April of 2021, in the SB 560 Emergent Bilingual Strategic Plan, the Texas Education Agency reported Texas is now "leading the nation in both the total number of EB [emergent bilingual] students serviced and the overall percentage of EB students in the general student population" (p.2). In 2023, the Texas Education Agency released the Enrollment in Texas Public Schools 2022-2023 report showing the number of emergent bilinguals in Texas had grown from 1.1 million to 1.2 million (p. 4). The state did not report on designations within the emergent bilingual population (Limited English Proficient indicator) except for those students new to the country. Teachers regularly welcome students into Texas public schools from diverse backgrounds and they cannot control entries or withdrawals. Attention should focus on the variables that schools and educators can control which is helping students to gain language proficiency within the expected period and thus avoiding the "long-term emergent bilingual" characterization. With language development courses typically reserved for emergent bilinguals at the Beginner and Intermediate levels on the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), students with higher levels of language development are often forgotten in general education classrooms leaving them classified as long-term emergent bilingual without individualized support.

Significance of the Study

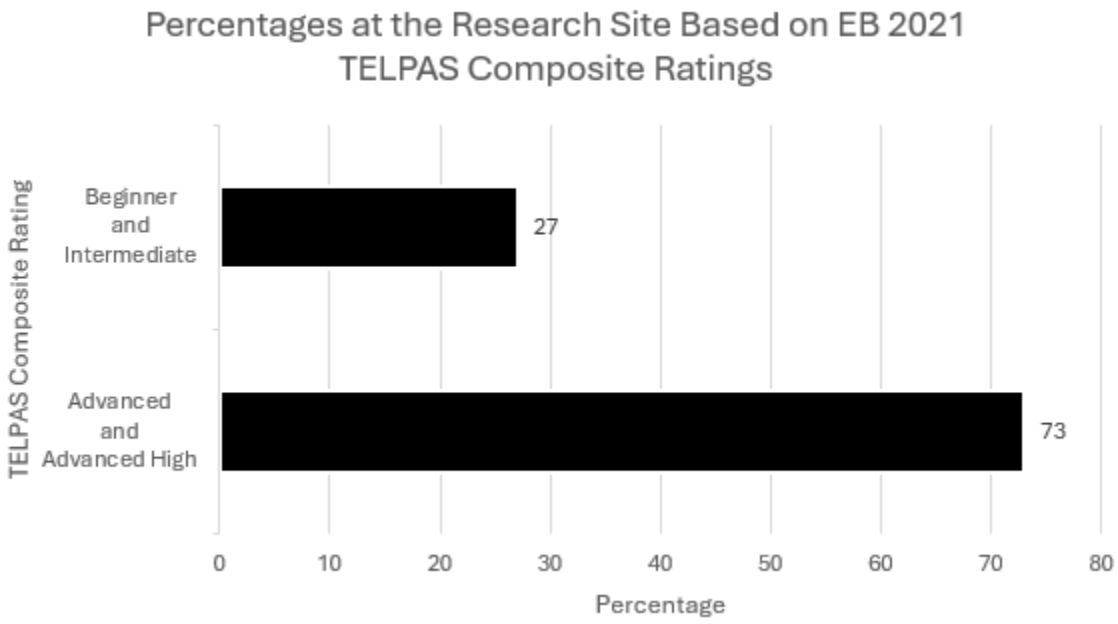
Differentiated instruction (DI) is a teaching philosophy that aims to accommodate students' differences in readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles (Lawson et al., 2017; Subban, 2006). It emphasizes the need for classroom support to ensure all students' success. High-quality differentiated instruction is based on frequent assessment of learning needs and flexible adaptations (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). Differentiation for emergent bilinguals should be a three-step process: knowing the students and understanding their needs for the classroom and content; implementing strategies based on data to support individual learners; and monitoring and adjusting as students grow in both language and content.

Objective

This study examined the use of differentiation in general education classrooms and its impact on language development for long-term emergent bilingual outcomes. At a large 6A high school in Texas, 86 percent of Limited English Proficient students were long-term emergent bilinguals, having attended U.S. schools for six or more years without meeting language proficiency standards for reclassification or exiting English as a Second Language programs. Among these students, 84 or 73 percent (as seen in Figure 3.2) scored Advanced or Advanced High on the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) exam assessing language proficiency. Despite high scores, they still require language support. Concern arose when these students were not assigned to sheltered instruction classes, as they may not receive adequate language support in general education classes, hindering their long-term growth. To address this potential deficit, this study suggested general education teachers need to provide individualized language support akin to that in sheltered instruction classes, fostering English language development and eventual exit from English as a Second Language programs.

Figure 3.2

Percentages at the Research Site Based on EB 2021 TELPAS Composite Ratings



Literature Review

Theories and Concepts

The Social Interactionist Theory, proposed by psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1934), emphasized the role of social interaction in cognitive development and learning. Vygotsky believed that through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable individuals, such as peers or adults, children acquire cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies. This theory suggested that continuous changes in thought and behavior occur through social interaction. Central to Vygotsky's theory was the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD, 1978), which represents the range between a learner's current level of ability and their potential level of development with guidance or collaboration. Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating learning within the ZPD by providing appropriate support tailored to individual

needs. In the context of second language learning, Vygotsky's ideas have been influential. They highlighted the importance of social interaction and peer collaboration in language acquisition.

Additionally, Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) builds upon Vygotsky's theory by emphasizing the significance of comprehensible input slightly beyond the learner's current level of competence. Krashen suggested that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to a language that is slightly more advanced than their current proficiency level ($i + 1$). This incremental progression, like climbing a staircase, allows learners to gradually acquire language skills. Teachers play an essential role in providing support and facilitating comprehension through various means, such as realia and pictures. Vygotsky's Social Interactionist Theory (1934), Zone of Proximal Development (1978), and Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) offered valuable insight into language learning, emphasizing the importance of social interaction, scaffolding, and comprehensible input in facilitating language acquisition and cognitive development.

Emergent Bilinguals

The term emergent bilingual has replaced previous designations of English language learners or English learners in educational contexts in Texas, reflecting a positive connotation on the language growth of these students. Long-term emergent bilinguals are those who have not achieved English proficiency within the anticipated period, requiring additional support. Reclassification is the process by which emergent bilinguals formally demonstrate English proficiency, typically through standardized assessments and teacher evaluations. However, reclassification does not necessarily mean these students no longer need to receive language support. Long-term emergent bilinguals who have not reclassified but have progressed past initial learning phases may be overlooked in general education classrooms, yet they still require significant language support to access content. Kim (2019) found the general education

classroom was a common placement for long-term emergent bilinguals whose teachers do not know they are there and do not understand their needs. Drzymala (2015) also described “English minority students are often placed in mainstream English classes before they are fully proficient in English” (p. 9). English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms provide the transitional support for Beginner and Intermediate level emergent bilinguals. Sheltered instruction, found in English as a Second Language classrooms, is a practice aimed at making curriculum topics comprehensible to emergent bilinguals while developing their English language proficiency. It involves adapting teaching techniques to meet the needs of emergent bilinguals across various subjects. Sheltered instruction serves as a bridge to mainstream education, and support should continue even as emergent bilinguals transition out of ESL classrooms.

Differentiation

Differentiated instruction (DI) is a teaching approach aimed at meeting the diverse needs of learners in the classroom. It involves strategically planning to reach students' individual needs across content, process, and product. Understanding students' abilities, skills, interests, and circumstances is crucial for effective differentiation. Meineke and DeVasto (2020) documented participant struggles with how to differentiate leading to limited variation and reduced frequency. Pozas et al. (2020) also found teachers infrequently using differentiated instruction, further documenting a small sampling of strategies when they do. Teachers must be equipped with training and ongoing support to implement differentiation effectively, especially in addressing the needs of emergent bilinguals. Training should focus on selecting appropriate assessment tools, interpreting results, and providing research-based instruction tailored to support emergent bilinguals in meeting language proficiency and academic goals. Differentiation training empowers teachers to design and implement practices that support the diverse needs of all learners, including emergent bilinguals.

Accountability

Accountability in education policy, both at the federal and state levels, has significant implications for emergent bilinguals. Historically, emergent bilinguals have not performed at the same level as their non-emergent bilingual peers, prompting a growing focus on language education policy. Federal policies such as No Child Left Behind (2001) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) use standardized test scores as a measure of school accountability, which can create disparities in funding allocation and support for emergent bilinguals. Under No Child Left Behind (2001), schools were held accountable for student test scores, however, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) shifted responsibility for monitoring emergent bilingual programs and outcomes to state and local education agencies. This decentralization has led to variations in emergent bilingual programs and supports across the U.S. resulting in concerns that a focus on standardized testing in English may not accurately assess emergent bilingual academic abilities, since these students are still in the process of learning English.

At the local level, districts typically follow legal frameworks that include providing bilingual or English as a Second Language programs, depending on the grade level. At the research site, specific instructional program details are not explicitly outlined, although there are expectations for emergent bilinguals to participate in general education classes and extracurricular activities alongside their English-speaking peers. The research site also mentions training and support for teachers and committee members, emphasizing the importance of ensuring emergent bilinguals receive appropriate instruction and support.

Diversity Within the Emergent Bilingual Indicator

The emergent bilingual population is not homogenous on the national, state, or district level, encompassing various subgroups with distinct needs and challenges. Olsen and Jaramillo (1999) identified three main groups of secondary emergent bilinguals: those new to the U.S. with

adequate formal schooling, those new to the U.S. with limited formal schooling, and long-term English language learners. However, researchers have since highlighted additional variances beyond length of time in the U.S. and formal schooling. Emergent bilinguals with disabilities present unique challenges, as their language and communication abilities may be impacted by their disability. First-year emergent bilinguals require intensive support as educators establish relationships and address their language learning needs. Long-term emergent bilinguals, often overlooked, face significant academic challenges, including academic gaps and high dropout rates. Their linguistic and academic needs differ, with many exhibiting extreme gaps in academic background knowledge. Overall, the diversity within the emergent bilingual indicator underscores the need for individualized support tailored to the unique needs of each emergent bilingual.

Current Practice

Current practices in education regarding emergent bilinguals reflect a shift away from segregating them into language support programs towards providing language support within general education classrooms. The concept seems appropriate when Vygotsky's Social Interactionist Theory (1934) is considered, but students lacking in language will not be able to effectively interact without support. In these situations, the Zone of Proximal Development (1978) and Krashen’s Input Hypothesis (1982) must be considered when planning for language support in the general education classrooms. Successful emergent bilinguals in general education classrooms are supported by teachers who use the zone of proximal development to push students outside of their comfort zones while providing the necessary supports and implement Krashen’s Input Hypothesis (1982) to continue to grow and challenge them once they master each step.

This change to support emergent bilinguals in general education classrooms is accompanied by an increasing expectation for general education teachers to obtain English as a Second Language certification. However, concerns persist regarding the adequacy of teacher training and support in meeting the needs of emergent bilinguals effectively. The implementation of current practices varies depending on factors such as the level of teacher training, availability of English as a Second Language classes, and awareness of the emergent bilingual population within districts and schools. To address these concerns and effectively support emergent bilinguals, educational institutions should focus on administrative strategies such as providing professional development for teachers, academic strategies including specialized courses, family and community-related strategies like responsive family literacy programs, and structural strategies such as varied assessment implementation to monitor student growth. Recognizing the diversity among school districts and emergent bilingual populations, support strategies should be tailored to meet the unique needs of each context.

Research Questions

- How does differentiation in general education classrooms impact long-term emergent bilingual language proficiency as indicated by TELPAS?
- How does differentiation impact long-term emergent bilingual reclassification rates?
- What are the characteristics of effective differentiation that positively impact long-term emergent bilingual reclassification rates?
- Does the implementation of professional development for general education teachers lead to increased TELPAS scores for long-term emergent bilinguals?

Target Population and Participants

Target Population

The target population is tenth through twelfth-grade students classified as long-term emergent bilinguals. Long-term emergent bilinguals at the high school level can be advanced in language development in some or all domains on the Texas English Lanaguage Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), but not to the level to qualify for exit from the English as a Second Language program. Another aspect of this population that hinders exit potential is the failure to pass the required grade-level appropriate State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam or the Texas Education Agency approved norm-referenced standardized achievement test: IOWA (formerly Iowa Test of Basic Skills or ITBS) for eleventh and twelfth grade emergent bilinguals in this district. This population initially qualifies for the study based on participation in the English as a Second Language program for six or more years which is the criteria for being designated as a long-term emergent bilingual. The reason these students remain in the program (failure to pass STAAR/IOWA or score Advanced High on TELPAS) is the focus of this study looking at the impact of differentiation in general education classrooms on emergent bilingual outcomes.

Target Participants

Participants were recruited based on several criteria. They must be current tenth-grade, eleventh-grade, or twelfth-grade English teachers at the research site, have one or more emergent bilinguals in their classes, and be willing to participate in interviews and multiple classroom observations. Additionally, participants were required to sign a consent to participate.

Current Evaluation

A review of current practice at the research site regarding differentiation in high school English classrooms was conducted through interviews and classroom observations. Additional

data were collected through walkthrough forms and lesson plans to link planning with practice. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and reviewed.

Methodology

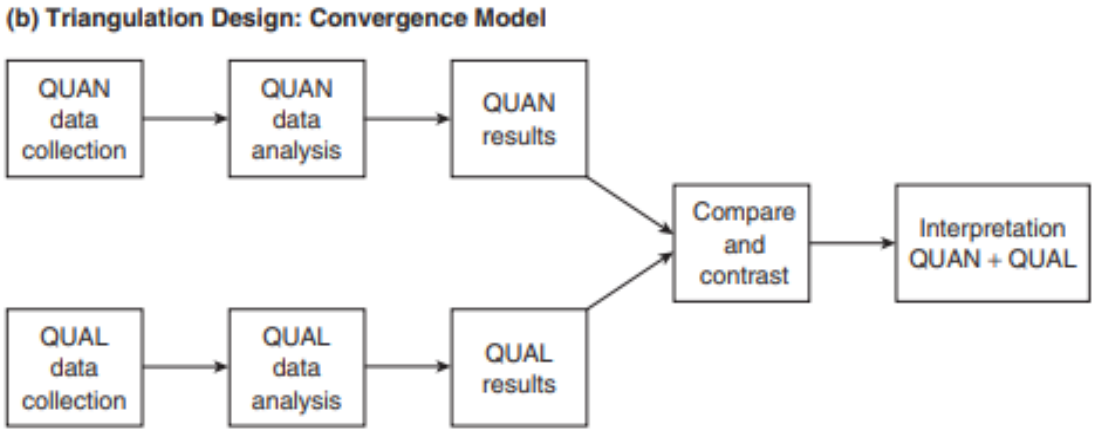
Mixed Methods

This multiple case study used a mixed methods triangulation design convergence model as outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2006, p. 64). “A mixed methods evaluation systematically integrates two or more evaluation methods, potentially at every stage of the evaluation process, usually drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data” (USAID, 2013, p. 1). “MMR [mixed methods research] potentially produces more enhanced understanding than utilizing either quantitative or qualitative methods designs independently” (Caruth, 2013, p. 117). When looking at the impact of differentiation in classrooms, a better understanding of the use and implementation can be understood by looking at both qualitative and quantitative data. The mixed-methods approach is appropriate for this study because the qualitative aspect of differentiation strategies and implementation from the teacher perspective impacts the quantitative data found in observations and student outcomes.

In the convergence model, “the researcher collects and analyzes quantitative and qualitative data separately on the same phenomenon and then the different results are converged (by comparing and contrasting the different results) during the interpretation” as indicated in Figure 3.3 (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006, p. 63-64). This method, also called “convergent parallel” is intended “to simultaneously collect, merge, and use both quantitative and qualitative data” (Caruth, 2013, p. 114). Data is collected within the allotted period, analyzed, and results reported separately. The data points are then compared to identify relationships. The findings are reported in the interpretation. The researcher uses concurrent timing with the two methods of equal weighting merged during the interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006, p. 81-83).

Figure 3.3

Triangulation Design: Convergence Model



Note. This model was produced by Creswell and Plano Clark in 2006, outlining the process for the mixed methods triangulation design convergence model. This image is part of the larger Figure 4.1 outlining various triangulation designs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006, p. 63-64). From "Choosing a Mixed Methods Design" by J. W. Creswell and V. L. Plano Clark, 2006, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, p. 63, Sage Publications.

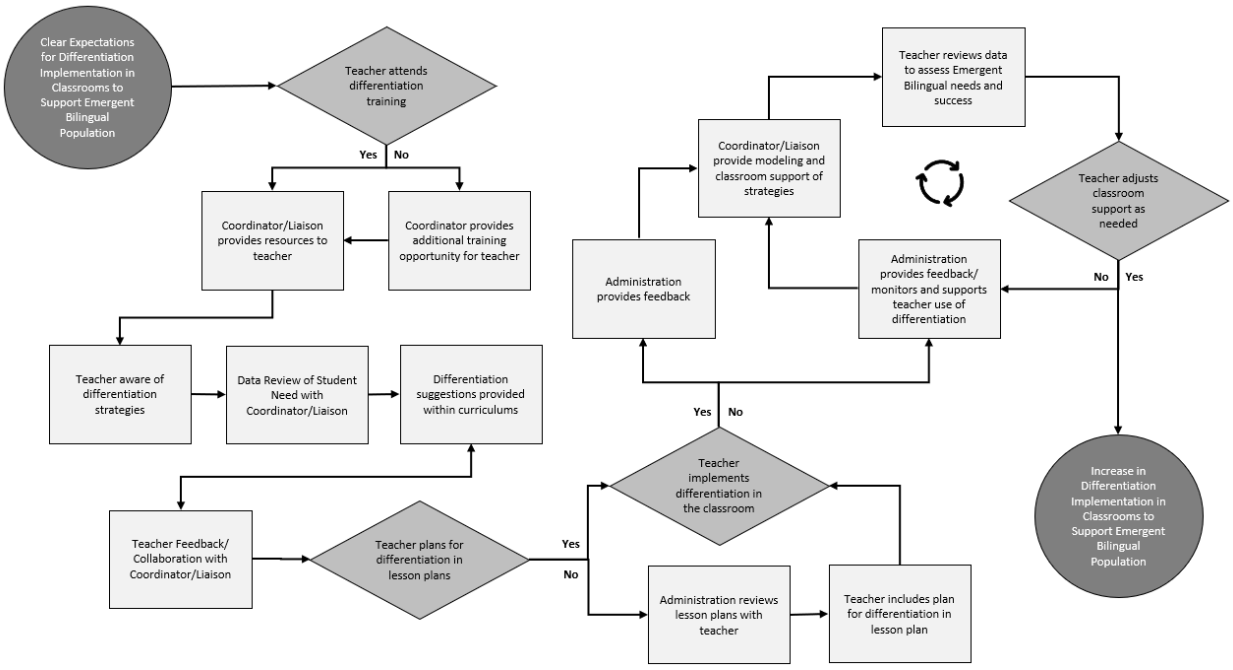
"Mixing methods can complement each other, offer richer insights, and result in more questions of interest for future studies" (Caruth, 2013, p. 120). Regarding this study, the implementation of convergent parallel methodology considered both quantitative and qualitative data on the use and impact of differentiation in classrooms to support long-term emergent bilingual language proficiency development leading to reclassification.

Design-Based Research

"DBR [Design-Based Research] is a methodology designed by and for educators that seeks to increase the impact, transfer, and translation of education research into improved practice" (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012, p. 2). The main difference between design-based research and action research is the concept of iteration. "Design experiments are extended (iterative), interventionist (innovative and design-based), and theory-oriented enterprises whose 'theories' do real work in practical educational contexts" (Freeman & Cameratti, 2019, p. 1015).

Figure 3.4

Differentiation in the Classroom Process Map



"Design-based research is not so much an approach as it is a series of approaches, with the intent of producing new theories, artifacts, and practices that account for and potentially impact learning and teaching in naturalistic settings" (Barab & Squire, 2004, p. 2). "Design practice…usually evolves through the creation and testing of prototypes, iterative refinement and continuous evolution of the design, as it is tested in authentic practice" (Anderson &Shattuck, 2012, p.3).

Upon the evaluation's conclusion, design-based research will be used to try to improve or refine classroom practices that support long-term emergent bilingual language development. Design-based research works through evaluation and iteration to continuously improve practices and allows for implementation and adjustment as needed throughout the process.

"Design-based research can contribute…through rich accounts of instructional interventions and their effects across multiple settings and in multiple areas of instruction" (The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003, p. 8). By studying multiple classroom settings, a clearer picture can be seen of what works and what needs review to better support the long-term emergent bilingual population. A visual representation of the iteration can be seen in Figure 3.4, Differentiation in the Classroom Process Map. As differentiation is implemented in the classroom, feedback, support, data review, and support adjustment create a continuous cycle for improvement as indicated by the circular continuous cycle symbol consisting of three arrows in Figure 3.4.

Participants

Volunteer participants were current high school English teachers at the research site with varying years of service. English teachers in the English as a Second Language (sheltered instruction) classroom and general education English teachers were invited. Participants had emergent bilinguals in one or more of their classes. Five of fifteen invited teachers signed their consent to participate in the study. The participant sample represented the larger population as all contents experience long-term emergent bilinguals in general education classrooms. Self-selection bias was addressed through semi-structured interviews using a set script and unannounced observations to avoid adjustments to planned lessons.

English teachers were selected as the participant sample to allow for comparison of documents and classroom practice to reflect common expectations within one department. Teachers at any grade level at the research site, which houses tenth through twelve grade courses, were invited to participate. English teachers at the research site are required to hold English as a Second Language certification through the Texas Education Agency. Certifications are either English as a Second Language certification or English as a Second Language Supplemental certification. Student outcomes were acquired from varying student data currently collected in the school

setting. The Secondary English as a Second Language Coordinator and English as a Second Language Campus Administrator input were collected through documentation of assigned training schedules and teacher support documentation regularly collected through program support.

Instruments

This multiple case study used mixed methods to research long-term emergent bilingual support in English as a Second Language and general education classrooms. Qualitative data was collected and analyzed from semi-structured teacher interviews (Figure 3.5) and classroom observations using the Classroom Observation Data Collection Sheet (Figure 3.6) for focused observation of differentiation types, activity to supplement, and student response. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow follow-up questioning flexibility and provide opportunities for participants to fully express themselves through their responses. Classroom observations were used to compare teacher perception versus practice. A comparison of teacher perceptions and reality in the classroom helped to explain the frequency and focus of differentiation in the classroom for teachers.

Quantitative data was collected from teacher lesson plans, administrator walkthrough data, PLC (Professional Learning Community) agendas, student outcomes from student language proficiency testing, and reclassification documentation. Other quantitative data included student group six-week grade outcomes, TELPAS scores, STAAR End of Course scores, IOWA assessment scores (when necessary), Emergent Bilingual/English Learner Reclassification Rubric Teacher Documentation forms, and student reclassification documentation information collected for the emergent bilingual population on the campus.

Figure 3.5

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experience with differentiation. (Follow up/clarifying questions: What has your experience been this year? Tell me about training you have had on differentiation.)
2. How often do you differentiate in your classroom?
3. How do you know how to differentiate? (Follow up/clarifying questions: How do you plan for differentiation? What resources do you use?)
4. What strategies do you use to differentiate in your classroom? (Follow up/clarifying questions: How do you decide what strategies to use to support your students? Where do you find strategies to support your students?)
5. Tell me about implementing the strategies you choose. (Follow up/clarifying questions: What does that look like in the classroom for students, for the teacher, for the lesson, for timing, for activities?)
6. Talk about how you know when differentiation was effective. (Follow up/clarifying questions: What happens when differentiation is ineffective? How do students react differently to effective or ineffective differentiation?)
7. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being completely uncomfortable and ten being completely comfortable, how comfortable are you with differentiating your classroom?
8. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being completely insecure and ten being fully confident, how confident are you that the strategies you choose to differentiate are truly aligned with the needs of your students?
9. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being consistently ineffective and ten being consistently effective, how effective do you think differentiation is for students in your classroom?
10. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being the easiest and ten being the hardest, how easy is it to implement differentiation in your classroom?

Texas requires all emergent bilingual progress be reviewed at the end of each school year to assess the best placement and program supports for individual students. These data were reviewed to contribute a deeper understanding of the impact of differentiation in the various classrooms.

Data Collection

Data were collected for two six-week cycle grading periods. A one-on-one semi-structured teacher interview was conducted before the first grading period with the teacher participants to gain an understanding of their attitude toward frequency, selection, planning, implementation, perceived effectiveness, and need for differentiation. The interviews lasted between twenty and thirty minutes per teacher at their convenience in the location of their choice.

Figure 3.6

Classroom Observation Data Collection Sheet

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Course: _____ Period: _____

Strategy Used	Activity Supplemented	Student Response

The location allowed the teacher to feel comfortable and confident in their domain while responding to questions. Interviews were coded using in vivo coding to identify key words in responses and inductive coding to build codes as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to establish "themes, categories, typologies, concepts, tentative hypotheses, and even theory" (p. 17). Two classroom walkthroughs were conducted per teacher. Accompanying lesson plans were reviewed prior to the observations to document the planning and implementation of differentiation within the classroom. One classroom observation was conducted per teacher.

The observations were intended to track differentiation in each classroom looking specifically for differentiation strategy selection, teacher activity supplemented by the selected strategy, and student response. From Merriam & Tisdell (2016), observations fell somewhere between "observer as participant" as "the researcher's observer activities are known to the group; participating in the group is secondary to the role of the information gatherer" and "complete observer" as "the researcher is either hidden from the group or in a completely public setting" (pp.144-145). Both applied to a degree, as students and teachers are accustomed to administrators sitting in classrooms and observing, so researcher presence was not a distractor. In this instance, the teacher knew why the researcher (a specific administrator) observed and had a general idea of what the researcher was looking for (differentiation). Teachers did not have access to, or knowledge of the chart used to conduct observations prior to completion of all data collection. Observations took place during a regularly scheduled school day following an unannounced class period rotation (Figure 3.7) of forty-five minutes. The chart indicated observation periods selected using a random number generator allowing for up to fifteen teachers, though five agreed to participate.

Figure 3.7

Teacher Unannounced Class Period Rotations

Teacher Unannounced Class Period Rotations

Teacher	Observation Class Period
A	5
B	7
C	1
D	3
E	5
F	2
G	6
H	1
I	5
J	4
K	2
L	2
M	8
N	7
O	3

Note. This chart indicates observation periods selected using a random number generator allowing for up to fifteen teachers, the most participants possible should all English teachers agree to participate. Teachers were assigned the next letter available in the order they agree to participate. Based on individual teacher participation, some class period numbers were redrawn to align with the teacher's schedule accounting for conference periods, Professional Learning Community periods, and emergent bilingual enrollment.

Teachers were assigned the next letter available in the order they agreed to participate. Based on individual teacher participation, some class period numbers were redrawn to align with the teacher's schedule accounting for conference periods, Professional Learning Community periods, and emergent bilingual enrollment.

Group grade data were reported. A Student Outcome Data Chart (Figure 3.8) organized these data. Coding included highlighting failing score cells in yellow and indicating grade fluctuations by six weeks averages using red font as grades dropped, black for consistent grades, and green font for grades that improved. The previous year's TELPAS data were accessed from school records in *ELLevation* (the program used to monitor emergent bilingual data) and added to the Student Outcome Data Table. TELPAS scores from the current year were included once released by the state. Further coding of the Student Outcome Data Table included dropped, unchanged, or improved language proficiency scores on TELPAS indicated by red, orange, and green cells, respectively. STAAR scores were collected once released.

The STAAR test counted as the state standardized reading assessment required for student reclassification as indicated on the Emergent Bilingual/English Learner Reclassification Criteria Chart (2022) for grade ten and for grades eleven and twelve, the IOWA exam counted as the reading assessment.

Figure 3.8

Student Outcome Data Chart

Student Outcome Data

	Six-Week Cycle Grades		Previous Year TELPAS Scores					Current Year TELPAS Scores					Grade Appropriate Reading Assessment		
Student #	1	2	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Composite	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Composite	STAAR/IOWA	Score	LPAC Decision

The End-of-year LPAC (Language Proficiency Assessment Committee) documentation was collected once finalized. Teacher lesson plans were reviewed every six weeks during the weeks of walkthroughs and observations to compare planning and implementation data. Professional Learning Community agendas were reviewed each semester to document training and support. See Figure 3.9 for a Timeline of Data Collection.

Figure 3.9

Timeline of Data Collection

I. Before Observations
    a. Teacher Interviews

II. Six-Week Cycle 1
    a. Teacher Walkthroughs/Lesson Plan review (1 per teacher)
    b. Classroom Observations by Teacher/Lesson Plan review (1 per teacher)
    c. Six-week grades

III. Six-Week Cycle 2
    a. Teacher Walkthroughs/Lesson Plan review (1 per teacher)
    b. Classroom Observations by Teacher/Lesson Plan review (1 per teacher)
    c. Six-week grades

IV. End of Year Data
    a. Current year STAAR scores
    b. Current year TELPAS scores
    c. PLC agendas review

Data Management Plan

The district did not have an Institutional Review Board process, though a mentor was assigned, and letter of agreement was issued to allow the research. The university Institutional Review Boards process was utilized. Volunteer participants were coded as Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, and Teacher E, based on the order they signed their consent to participate. This system extended to the number of volunteer participants. Participant data were maintained by the researcher using One Drive. A district administrator provided the researcher with de-identified data. The researcher was the only person with access to the One Drive.

Results

Teacher interviews were conducted using ten interview questions in Figure 3.5. Questions one through six evoked qualitative responses.

Figure 3.10

Qualitative Participant Responses Before Intervention Implementation

Question		Participant Reponses Summary					Overview of Findings
Number	Topic	A	B	C	D	E	
1	Experience with Differentiation	Some training every year, experience working with EB students	Some training every year, experience working with EB students	Some training every year, experience working with EB students	Some training every year, experience working with EB students	Some training every year, experience working with EB students	* 5/5 Some training * 5/5 Knowledge based on experience
2	Frequency of Differentiation in Your Classroom	Every Day	Every Day	Every Day	Every Day	Every Day	* 5/5 Every Day
3	How do you know how to Differentiate	Know the students needs, does not plan for differentiation, responds in class as needed	Every student benefits from differentiation	Documentation from departments, knowing the students	Experience and practice	Knowing the students	* 4/5 Experience/knowing the students
4	Strategies Used to Differentiate	Shortened assignments, extend learning, read aloud, modeling, partner support, from ELLevation	Preteach vocabulary, copy of class notes, outline of notes, review, different strategies work for different lessons, have plans out ready for students at start of lesson, big binder of strategies	Close reading, note taking, drawing in lieu of writing, from YouTube, Teachers Pay Teachers,	Pre reading, vocabulary, notes, KWL chart, use background knowledge, pictures	Visual aids, technology, PBL, group work, modeling, reteach, shortened assignments	* 2/5 Vocabulary * 2/5 Shortened assginments * 2/5 Modeling * 2/5 Partner/Group work * 3/5 Notes * 3/5 Pictures/Visuals
5	Implementing Strategies for Differentiation	Whole group instruction, partner work, reteach, individual support	Students know what the plan is for the day	Partner work, group work, teacher provided individual support	Partner work, whole group instruction and activitiies	Teacher timing, lesson planning	* 2/5 Whole group instruction * 3/5 Partner work * 3/5 Teacher provided individual support
6	Effectiveness of Differentiation	When students are able to do what is expected, reevauate teaching and strategies if not effective	The more the better, make adjustments if not effective	When they ask questions, reteach if not effective	Students fall through the gaps if not effective	Students are proud of their work, students get frustrated/shut down if not effective	* 3/5 Fulfill expectations /proud/engaged when effective * 3/5 Frustrated/shut down/fall if ineffective

Questions seven through ten evoked quantitative responses.

Qualitative

Qualitative questions addressed the experience level of participants with differentiation, the frequency of differentiation use in their classrooms, how participants knew how to differentiate, strategies used to differentiate, how strategies were implemented, and the effectiveness of differentiation. A summary of qualitative responses can be found in Figure 3.10.

Question 1: Tell me about your experience with differentiation. (Follow up/clarifying questions: What has your experience been this year? Tell me about training you have had on differentiation.) All participants received some training on differentiation but believed their knowledge came from the experience of working with emergent bilinguals throughout their career. Participants discussed annual training in the current district. However, Participant A mentioned not having much training in the current district but having multiple training courses in prior districts. Participant B also mentioned receiving more training in other districts.

Question 2: How often do you differentiate in your classroom? All participants responded with “daily” or “every day.”

Question 3: How do you know how to differentiate? (Follow up/clarifying questions: How do you plan for differentiation? What resources do you use?) Most participants (4/5) responded that knowing their students was the best way to know how to differentiate. Participant A said, “that’s something that’s hard for me to put into words, it feels like I just know my kids and I know what they’re capable of.” Experience was a second common theme, specifically being able to adjust during instruction as needed. Participant B said, “not sure I’m great at it, but I feel like I know enough about it to do it pretty well.” Implying special education, Section 504, and English as a second language,

Participant C mentioned documentation from other departments provided them with information regarding how to support students. Participant C excitedly discussed learning an idea from a recent training, “if we took one text and did multiple lessons on that text, it would be easier for us to differentiate because everybody has the same text, but they’re all doing something different.” This teacher was previously creating multiple lessons using multiple texts to differentiate.

Question 4: What strategies do you use to differentiate in your classroom? (Follow up/clarifying questions: How do you decide what strategies to use to support your students? Where do you find strategies to support your students?) A variety of strategies were mentioned. Participants A, B, and C named four strategies. Participant D named five strategies. Participant E named seven strategies. Some strategies were named by multiple participants: vocabulary (2/5), shortened assignments (2/5), modeling (2/5), partner/group work (2/5), notes (3/5), and pictures/visuals (3/5). Participant B said, “the preteaching vocabulary is a big deal” and “I like to make sure everybody has a copy of the notes. I feel like...too much writing, they’re not listening.” Participant C uses online resources “and everything else has just been experience.” Three participants mentioned finding strategies from various programs, trainings, and personal archives. None of the locations were duplicated amongst participants. Participant E said, “I have a great team and I work with my PLC to come up with ideas together.”

Question 5: Tell me about implementing the strategies you choose. (Follow up/clarifying questions: What does that look like in the classroom for students, for the teacher, for the lesson, for timing, for activities?) Participants named whole group instruction (2/5), partner work (3/5), and teacher provided individual support (3/5) as ways of implementing differentiation. Participant E mentioned lesson planning to help

implement strategies “for my struggling students.” Participant A said, “I pair students...the higher ones with the lower ones, and I have different expectations for he higher and the lower.”

Question 6: Talk about how you know when differentiation was effective. (Follow up/clarifying questions: What happens when differentiation is ineffective? How do students react differently to effective or ineffective differentiation?) A common theme in responses (3/5) was recognizing when students are engaged, proud, or fulfill expectations, then participants know differentiation was effective. Similarly, participants (different 3/5) recognized when differentiation was not effective when students became frustrated, shut down, or fell through the gaps. Participant A said, “when they’re able to do what I’m expecting...if it doesn’t work, I reevaluate my teaching.” Participant B said, “the more differentiated I do, it feels like they’re more successful on the assignment” and “there’s a lot of trial and error.” Participant C said, “differentiation is effective when they ask me questions...raising their hands because they need help.” Participant E said, “the student is going to be very frustrated and shut down if they’re, if they don’t get it.”

Thematic Analysis. Participants showed common levels of confusion and uncertainty at times throughout the interview while discussing the topic. One participant referred to Special Education modifications throughout the interview. Two participants responded “I don’t know” before giving their answer to question three about how they know how to differentiate. From the limited training reported to the begrudging tone of “every day,” participants seemed overwhelmed. Teachers reported promising ideas for differentiation in practice using visuals, accommodated notes, and collaborating with peers as the most reported. Peer work and group work are practices supported in Vygotsky’s Social Interaction Theory (1934). Visuals and accommodated notes help students work within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky,

1978). A concerning common theme was the whole group instruction. Whole group instruction is not differentiated for individual learners. However, teacher participants did report recognizing when students were not understanding what they needed to do by reporting seeing frustrated students or students who are not engaged.

Initial Observations. After initial observations, teachers were seen using more strategies than they could articulate in the interviews. All teachers were seen providing individual support as needed and partner work at times throughout the 45-minute observation. Also seen were choice boards, visuals, graphic organizers, check for understanding, realia, videos, copy of notes, and a vocabulary focus within the lessons. However, none of the strategies, except individual support and partner work, were specific to individual students. Teachers implemented the strategies as a whole group. When strategies are implemented to the entire class, they are no longer individual support. Furthermore, three of the teacher participants never spoke to the emergent bilinguals in their classes within the 45-minute observation.

Quantitative

Quantitative questions addressed participants' comfort levels with differentiation, their confidence in aligning differentiation with student needs, the effectiveness of differentiation in their classrooms, and the difficulty of implementing differentiation. The Likert type questions ranged from one to ten, one being the least comfortable, confident, effective, or difficult, and ten being the most comfortable, confident effective, or difficult, as identified in the questions. Figure 3.11 contains a summary of pre-intervention quantitative responses.

Question 7: On a scale of 1-10, one being completely uncomfortable and ten being completely comfortable, how comfortable are you with differentiating in your classroom? Participants responded, rating themselves between seven and ten. The mean

was 8.2. The median was eight. The standard deviation was 1.09. These teachers reported feeling mostly comfortable with differentiation.

Question 8: On a scale of 1-10, one being completely insecure and ten being fully confident, how confident are you that the strategies you choose to differentiate are truly aligned with the needs of your students? Participants responded by rating themselves between five and eight. The mean was seven. The median was seven. The standard deviation was 1.22. These teachers reported that they are mostly confident in aligning differentiation with student needs.

Question 9: On a scale of 1-10, one being consistently ineffective and ten being consistently effective, how effective do you think differentiation is for students in your classroom? Participants responded, rating themselves between six and ten. The mean was 8.4. The median was eight. The standard deviation was 1.67. These teachers reported that differentiation is mostly effective in their classrooms.

Figure 3.11

Pre-Intervention Quantitative Participant Response Analyses

Questions		Participant						
Number	Topic	A	B	C	D	E	Average by Question	Median
7	Comfort Level with Differentiation	8	7	8	8	10	8	8
8	Confidence in Aligning Differentiation with Student Needs	8	7	5	7	8	7	7
9	Effectiveness of Differentiation in Your Classroom	8	8	6	10	10	8	8
10	Difficulty of Differentiation Implementation	7	3	6	5	5	5	5
	Average by Participant	8	6	6	8	8		

Question 10: On a scale of 1-10, one being the easiest and ten being the hardest, how easy is it to implement differentiation in your classroom? Participants responded by rating themselves between three and seven. The mean was 5.2. The median was five. The standard deviation was 1.48. These teachers reported finding differentiation implementation of medium difficulty.

Averages by participant revealed varying levels of confidence and diverse strengths and weaknesses concerning differentiation. Participants B and C reported an average response rating of six. Participants A, D, and E reported an average response rating of eight. The three participants who reported an average of eight exuded a higher confidence working with differentiation than the two who reported an average response of six. Participants B and C shared comparable comfort level ratings with the majority, but reported lower in confidence, effectiveness, and difficulty. Participant A rated themself consistently with eights and one seven whereas Participant B reported a range of responses from three to eight. Participant C reported a range of responses from five to eight. Participants D and E reported a range of responses from five to ten. The fluctuations in responses by participants could indicate gaps in their knowledge base or understanding of differentiation.

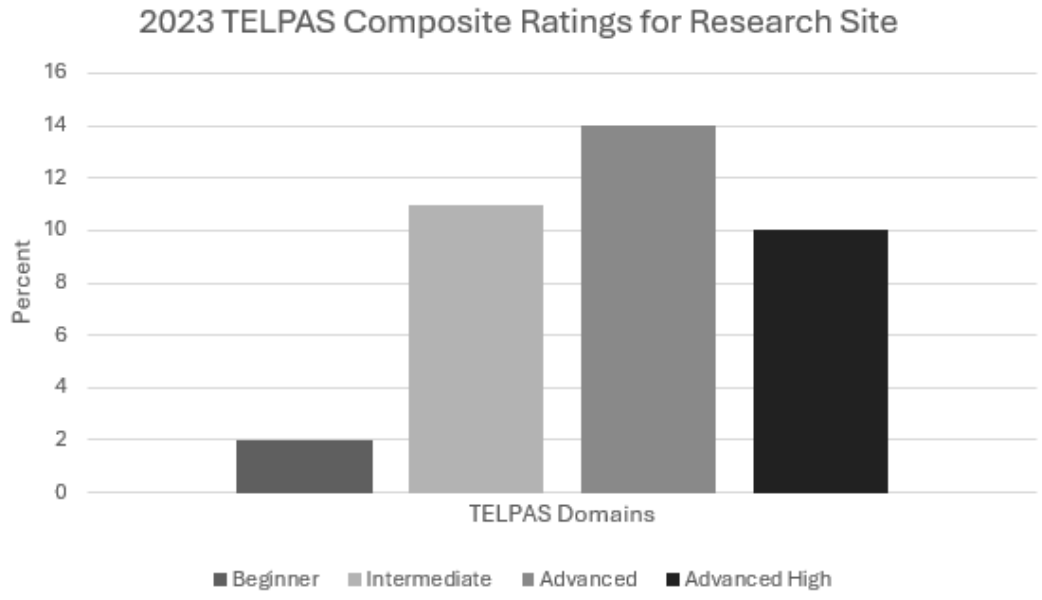
Thematic Analysis. In the quantitative responses, teacher participants ranked themselves high. Teachers felt comfortable and confident within the expectations, aligning with student needs, and the effectiveness of the differentiation implemented. Participants scored themselves the lowest on difficulty showing they feel implementing differentiation is somewhat difficult. The positive responses to comfort, confidence, and effectiveness may be the support helping to encourage teachers to continue to face the difficulty they reported.

2023 End of Year Data. The end of year student outcome data for the population studied showed the Beginner group was 5.40%. The Intermediate group was 29.73%. The Advanced

group was 37.83% and Advanced High group was 27.02%. Advanced represented the largest group as seen in Figure 3.12. The mean was 2.86 (Advanced). The median was three, Advanced. The mode was three, Advanced. The standard deviation was 0.88. Of the population studied (76), three (8.10%) emergent bilinguals reclassified at the end of the 2023 school year. For the three students that reclassified, all qualified based on scoring Advanced High in all TELPAS domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, passed the appropriate grade level STAAR or IOWA exam based on their grade level, and teachers reported the students routinely demonstrate readiness for reclassification as English proficient. The average grade for English courses within the study in the first six weeks collected was 80.23. For the second six-week period collected, the average was 76.78. The average for the two six weeks was 78.51. PLC agendas were reviewed at the end of the initial year. One instance of emergent bilingual-focused training took place during PLC time each semester. The Secondary ESL Coordinator led the training.

Figure 3.12

2023 TELPAS Composite Ratings for Research Site



Discussion of Results

Pre-Intervention Lesson Plan and Walkthrough Review

Lesson plans and walkthrough documentation were reviewed to identify differentiation within lesson plans and in the classroom before the intervention. Two walkthroughs for each participant and two lesson plans reviewed for each participant revealed Participant A was the only teacher implementing differentiation reported during those walkthroughs. In the lesson plan review, three out of five teachers had planned for differentiation at least once. Two participants had planned for differentiation in their lesson plans two out of two times. A summary of walkthroughs and lesson plan reviews is depicted in Figure 3.13.

Figure 3.13

Pre-Intervention Walkthrough and Lesson Plan Review by Participant

Participant	Walkthroughs	Lesson Plans
A	2	2
B	0	0
C	0	0
D	0	1
E	0	2

Qualitative

Qualitative questions exposed varied responses and inconsistencies within the knowledge base and implementation of differentiation though many themes were discovered through in vivo coding to identify key words and inductive coding to build common themes. Although all teacher participants recognized they had received some training, they still all noted their knowledge base came from their experience working with students. This is emphasized with most participants reporting they know how to differentiate because they know their students and their students' needs. Though the five participants are all English teachers in the same high school, there was little overlap in their named strategies. More than one participant mentioned three to five strategies including: vocabulary, shortened assignments, modeling, partner/group work, notes, and pictures/visuals. Reteaching, review, project-based learning, technology, KWL charts, close reading, background knowledge, and extend learning were also named once among the five participants. In implementing strategies, the participants commonly named three approaches: whole group, partner work, or individual. Only one participant mentioned all three and two participants did not mention any of the three. Other ways of implementing differentiation mentioned by participants included teacher timing, lesson planning, and ensuring students know the plan for the day.

When questioned on the effectiveness of differentiation in their classrooms, the participants were able to clearly recognize when students felt supported and when they did not feel supported based on the actions of the students. Students who are receiving the support they need are engaged, proud of their work, and do what is expected of them according to these participants. Students who are not supported become frustrated, shut down, and fall through the gaps based on responses from the participants. Most participants noted that if differentiation

strategies are not working, they must reevaluate, reteach, and/or adjust to better support their students.

Quantitative

Quantitative questions revealed some diverse perceptions of comfort levels using differentiation, confidence in aligning differentiation with student needs, effectiveness of classroom use, and the difficulty of implementing differentiation. Participants were mostly comfortable with differentiation, rating themselves an average of eight, and confident in aligning differentiation with student needs, rating themselves an average of seven. Participants rated themselves an eight, mostly believing the differentiation in their classrooms is effective for students. Of the five participants, two responded with ten to this question of effectiveness of differentiation in their classroom. The area of struggle was with the difficulty of differentiation implementation where participants rated themselves an average of five. Teachers felt it was somewhat difficult to implement the differentiation due to the number of students in the room and the need to potentially create individual assignments. In considering overall participant averages, the mean across the four quantitative questions was seven. The median was eight. Two participants had an average of six across the four quantitative questions. Overall, participants reported feeling comfortable with differentiation and confident in aligning differentiation with student needs. They felt differentiation is effective in their classrooms and that it was moderately difficult to implement.

Making Connections

When teachers practice whole group strategy implementation, they are not differentiating. Allowing for partner work is supported by Vygotsky's Social Interactionist Theory (1934) and good practice for emergent bilinguals if they are practicing the English language as they work. For example, pairing Spanish speakers can be positive, but if they do not practice English, they

are not working on language development within the content. As McLeod (2020) stated, "collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society", he referred to the practice amongst peers (para. 5). If the Spanish speakers in this example are all speaking Spanish, that is not supporting the emergent bilinguals. This also addresses Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978). Students are not being challenged as in the case of whole group instruction when there is only one lesson. Students idle within that lesson instead of being challenged and pushed outside their comfort zone. Scaffolding is important for emergent bilinguals. As Krashen (1982) explained in his Input Hypothesis, emergent bilinguals need the next level support to expand their learning and language development.

Initial interviews and observations reveal a need for focused training and support for teachers to understand differentiation, implementation of differentiation, and how to support emergent bilinguals in their general education classrooms. At the research site, it was clear teachers have been provided some training on strategies. However, there appears to be a gap between knowing strategies and knowing when and how to implement those strategies. Multiple teacher participants struggled to describe how they implement the strategies during the interview and did not interact with emergent bilinguals in their classroom during the observations.

Recommendations for Intervention

Theory of Improvement

The researcher theorizes that an increase in training for teachers on differentiation and best practices for working with emergent bilinguals will impact the quantity of usage in general education classrooms. This increase in differentiation in the classroom could result in a higher percentage of long-term emergent bilinguals reaching English language proficiency as indicated by scoring Advanced High on TELPAS and qualifying for exit from English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. In ESL classrooms, language strategies and differentiation are used

regularly to support students' language development needs while learning content. In general education classrooms, these tools are not seen as frequently. Tomlinson, Moon, and Imbeau (2013) discussed the impact of differentiation in the classroom using varied student groups, scaffolding learning, and extending learning based on the needs of students (p. 10). They further shared that knowing students, planning, and being prepared to provide the necessary group or individualized supports impacts assessment data and stated, "teachers who carefully and purposefully study their own students find that each opportunity to watch and converse with students as they work provides another round of formative assessment information that can further guide their teaching and instructional planning" (Tomlinson, Moon, & Morrison, 2013, p. 11). Providing teachers with training, mentoring, and guidance on how to implement differentiation and how to support emergent bilinguals in their general education classes can impact the language growth and development of these students.

In considering the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle, planning ("Plan" phase) takes place in the training itself while teachers are anticipated to incorporate their learning into their lessons to impact student learning. The implementation of differentiation and emergent bilingual support in classrooms falls into the "Do" phase. The "Study" phase happens in the assessment of the strategies used in the classroom and the impact on student learning. As mentioned by Tomlinson, Moon, and Morrison (2013), teachers can continue this process by formatively assessing students throughout lessons to gather data on what works for their content. The "Act" phase takes place when teachers adjust the strategies or how they are implemented. Part of the training includes how to implement strategies with a focus on differentiating because there is no one-size-fits-all aspect to individualized student needs and learning. Teachers should adjust and continue their PDSA cycle within their content to ensure student success.

Policy can also support mitigating the findings from initial interviews and observations. The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) brought much needed attention to supporting emergent bilinguals and included this population in accountability. However, including standards for services and practices that also recognize the diversities within the LEP indicator would be beneficial as those were left to states to figure out with no guidance. Emergent bilinguals are a heterogeneous group of dual identified students, first year emergent bilinguals, and long-term emergent bilinguals that require varied support and services. Each group needs to be recognized and teachers need specific training to support students within this diverse group and at their various language proficiency levels.

Limitations

Several limitations could obstruct this research study. The researcher is an administrator at the research site. This could leave some teacher participants feeling vulnerable, although they did agree to participate of their own accord. This could also sway teacher participants to respond differently in classroom observations. The review of lesson plans prior to the observations allowed a chance to see what was planned and what was implemented to negate impromptu changes to the lesson. Including only English teachers could cloud the results as English content works within language routinely when emergent bilinguals may not have the base social or academic language to begin with. The small participant size of five teachers leaves room for more in-depth study in the future. Finally, data reliability in some instances is a concern. Students taking STAAR and TELPAS who have tested for years often become frustrated and lethargic with the testing. They tend to lose motivation and hope for being successful and so do not try their best and rush to finish the test. Because they rush through or resentment or loss of hope sets in, some long-term emergent bilinguals score at the Beginner or Intermediate levels on TELPAS when they are at an Advanced High proficiency level in that domain. The same is

common for students taking STAAR repeatedly. Some long-term emergent bilingual juniors and seniors have taken the STAAR English II six or more times and have grown distraught, angry, and helpless.

Future research could ensure the researcher is not employed as an administrator at the research site and include a larger selection of teacher participants to include multiple ESL classrooms potentially at multiple sites to provide a broader sense of consistency amongst ESL classrooms.

Conclusion

Summary

Initial research indicated a disconnect between teachers' understanding of differentiation, implementation, and practice. With no differentiation noted in walkthrough data and forty percent of the lesson plans reviewed, teachers are not focused on differentiation. By implementing whole group supports, it is clear teachers recognize the value of strategies and best practices, but they do not understand the purpose of those strategies in supporting specific learning and language development needs. It is important for educators to not only implement strategies but to implement them appropriately at the appropriate time, for the appropriate reason, and for students who need them. Implementing the right support for emergent bilinguals will improve language development leading to reclassification. Providing teachers with the right training and support can improve their understanding of differentiation and emergent bilingual support. This study contributes to the larger body of knowledge by advancing an understanding of differentiation through teacher interviews and its impact on long-term emergent bilinguals by comparing classroom observation data to student outcomes.

Future Research Recommendations

It is recommended that long-term emergent bilingual populations be studied from initial indication of the emergent bilingual status. Many students qualify after participating in bilingual programs from kindergarten to fifth grade. Starting their sixth-grade year and for some, their first year in ESL programs, they are already indicated as long-term emergent bilinguals. Once long-term emergent bilinguals reach their tenth-grade year, some have already been indicated as long-term emergent bilinguals for five years. This means, those students have been in bilingual and English as a Second Language programs intended to build language skills for eleven years without adequate progress to qualify for English language proficiency through the state of Texas. According to Hakuta et al. (2000), oral proficiency takes between three and five years to develop and academic English proficiency takes between four to seven years (p. 13). This forces programs to find ways to improve. By tracking student growth from the beginning, and on-going review of data and programs, there may be clear areas for improvement identified allowing for interventions to occur before students are indicated as long-term emergent bilingual.

Future Research should address the diversities within the LEP indicator. Suggested studies include expanding the scope of research across multiple schools or multiple districts. Other districts may have different expectations and outcomes. A longitudinal study consisting of a review from initial LEP indication to track growth and support systems could reveal significant gaps in the learning or services provided. Identifying differences between students who exit within the four to seven years projected for language development and comparing to long-term emergent bilinguals could provide data to facilitate understanding of how students become long-term emergent bilinguals. Long-term emergent bilinguals represent a growing population of overlooked students. Differentiation provides an opportunity to individually address the needs of

emergent bilinguals by recognizing language development needs, adapting learning experiences, and personalizing instruction leading to improved student outcomes.

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Chapter 4: Evaluation of the Intervention

Introduction

Background

Long-term emergent bilinguals have been in U.S. schools for six or more years, not reaching language proficiency as indicated by Language Proficiency Assessment Committees (LPACs). These students remain in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs due to Advanced or Advanced High language proficiency ratings placing them in general education classes with minimal support. The Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) exam scores show many of these students are Advanced or Advanced High (the highest proficiency level), but without language support, students are not successful on grade level standardized testing such as STAAR (State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness) and IOWA (approved norm-referenced standardized achievement test for students without grade level STAAR). High scores do not indicate proficiency, yet.

Problem Statement

Eighty-six percent of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students at a large Texas 6A high school are classified as long-term emergent bilinguals who have attended U.S. schools for six or more years without attaining language proficiency levels for reclassification.

Objectives

Long-term emergent bilinguals need focused support in general education classrooms to continue to improve language proficiency as they are no longer in English as a Second Language (ESL)/ Sheltered Instruction (SI) classes due to their higher language proficiency levels. With training and professional development focused on building awareness, teaching strategies to support language learners, and ongoing coaching, teachers will have the tools to better support long-term emergent bilinguals in their quest for reclassification and ESL program exit.

Literature Review

Emergent Bilinguals

Emergent bilinguals are indicated through their Home Language Survey required upon enrolling in any school. School administrators or specialists are notified when a parent has completed a Home Language Survey indicating the regular use of any language other than English. Once identified, the student's language proficiency is assessed. If the student scores below the threshold, they are indicated as emergent bilingual. They are then offered support through language programs such as ESL or Bilingual programs along with accommodations to fit their language development needs. Parents can accept or deny support, but students are still indicated as Limited English Proficient by the state. Students who accept services are scheduled into the appropriate classes providing language support when available and accommodations to be used in general education classes. Emergent bilinguals are previously known as English Language Learners or Language Learners.

Emergent bilinguals carry an additional layer of challenges. "The development of literacy by EL/EBs [emergent bilinguals] includes all of the challenges implicit in monolingual English speakers' learning to read and write and is additionally compounded by a diversity of linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and academic variables" (Escamilla et al., 2022, p.7). Emergent bilinguals need individualized support to be successful in their classes.

Language Development and Accommodations

"All accommodations alter how content and language are taught, made accessible, and assessed...specific linguistic accommodations are critical to ELLs' [emergent bilinguals] academic development" (Pappamihiel & Lynn, 2016, p. 5). Aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development and Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982), emergent bilinguals need support and practice just outside their comfort zone and ability level. This is where

accommodations provide scaffolded support. Pappamihiel and Lynn (2016) explain "while instructional accommodations take into consideration generic student differences, linguistic accommodations involve language supports that address the specific linguistic characteristics of different ELLs [emergent bilinguals]" (p. 6). In their study of motivation and ESL in Malaysia, Azar and Tanggaraju (2020) found motivation (specifically integrative, instrumental, resultative, and intrinsic) to be a critical factor in language development (pp. 330-331). Accommodations function as a motivating factor for students by bolstering language acquisition through content. As they learn English, emergent bilinguals require additional support not only for content, but also language. Their language proficiency level should not be confused with academic ability as language proficiency is not an indicator of academic ability (Umansky, 2016, p. 1798). In his research of middle school emergent bilinguals, Umansky (2016) found this misconception leads to course tracking where emergent bilinguals are underrepresented in higher level courses and overrepresented in lower-level courses (p. 1826). Emergent bilinguals need accommodations to provide classroom support for language development. Gupta (2019) says "it is imperative that teachers and instructional leaders become aware of effective ESL teaching strategies to help this population in their classrooms" (p. 56). Pappamihiel and Lynn (2016) emphasize the necessity of instructional and linguistic accommodations for the success of emergent bilinguals (p. 2).

Professional Development and Instructional Support

With the sheer amount of content to be covered in any given subject or course, teachers often struggle to get through everything and still provide the necessary support for diverse student groups. Providing, tracking, adjusting, and monitoring accommodations can be tedious and overwhelming. Along with this, Pappamihiel and Lynn (2016) say "these [mainstream] teachers are often either not prepared or underprepared to work with this population of students" p. 3). Teachers need professional learning and ongoing support to master the effective use of

accommodations in their content classrooms. For emergent bilinguals, "they [teachers] need to implement and reflect on instruction that specifically targets ELLs' [emergent bilinguals] language and literacy development goals in the context of complex learning environments such as inclusive mainstream classrooms" (Coady et al., 2016, p. 23). When a parent has accepted language support services, those language needs are identified for teachers. This information includes accommodation that can help support the student's language proficiency level. The piece that is often missing is professional development. Implementing effective accommodations for the content and the classroom can be challenging. Teachers should have specific training to support their learning needs in this practice and the student's learning needs. Most professional development is content based. Bates and Morgan (2018) say "the inclusion of and attention to specific strategies to teach content when working with specific student populations is a key principle of effective professional development" (p. 623). It is necessary to provide teachers comprehensive support and training to meet the needs of every student in their classroom.

Differentiation

Differentiation is a method used to generate fairness for everyone in the classroom by creating opportunities for all students to access the content. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023) stated "Differentiation can be accurately described as classroom practice with a balanced emphasis on individual students and the class as a whole" (p. 30). Though differentiation is often discussed through specific strategies and individual students, there are many ways to support the needs of students in the classroom. "At the core of the classroom practice of differentiation is the modification of four curriculum-related elements: content, process, product, and affect – which are based on three categories of student need and variance – readiness, interest, and learning preferences" (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023, p. 31). Considering the flexible options, Aftab (2015) still found teacher beliefs and time were roadblocks to teacher implementation of differentiation

in classrooms (p.101). Schools must provide professional development and consistent feedback based on data along with ongoing support to teachers to emphasize the importance of differentiation and inform classroom practice.

Problem of Practice

To improve language development in long-term emergent bilinguals, research was conducted to identify the relationship between differentiation and language development in general education classrooms. This study evaluated how the frequency and types of differentiation implemented in general education classroom for long-term emergent bilinguals impacts language development leading to reclassification. The research questions were:

- How does differentiation in general education classrooms impact long-term emergent bilingual language proficiency as indicated by TELPAS?
- How does differentiation impact long-term emergent bilingual reclassification rates?
- What are the characteristics of effective differentiation that positively impact long-term emergent bilingual reclassification rates?
- Does the implementation of professional development for general education teachers lead to increased TELPAS scores for long-term emergent bilingual?

Target Population and Participants

The target population is long-term emerging bilingual 10th–12th grader aggregate outcomes. Long-term emergent bilingual high school students typically advance in some or all Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) domains, but do not reach Advanced High status to reclassify as English proficient. Failure to pass the grade-level appropriate STAAR or the Texas Education Agency (TEA) approved IOWA norm-referenced standardized achievement test (as used in this district for eleventh and twelfth grade emergent

bilinguals) prevents reclassification. Students who have been in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program for six or more years are classified as long-term emergent bilinguals. This study examines how differentiation in general education classrooms affects student outcomes on STAAR (or IOWA) and TELPAS. Students must be enrolled for two consecutive years at the designated research site for outcomes to qualify within the study.

Study participants were English teachers at the research site teaching tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grades. Participants must also have had one or more emergent bilinguals in their classes, been willing to be interviewed, and allowed classroom observations. A signed consent was required for participation.

Intervention Evaluated

The interventions evaluated in this study included focused support and training for general education classroom teachers of long-term emergent bilinguals, *ELLevation* program training, and Sheltered Instruction strategy coaching and professional development. The intervention was provided to the entire English department at the research site, but aggregate data were reviewed based on long-term emergent bilingual outcomes. The outline of training and support enabled ESL staff at the district and campus levels to stay connected to participants. With this structure, teachers discussed emergent bilinguals, learned how to support them, learned about and how to implement effective strategies, and reviewed data every three weeks. This repetition created awareness, focused efforts on learning students in the classroom, and empowered teachers with the right tools to better support emergent bilinguals.

Figure 4.1

Intervention Outline

I. Support
    a. Ongoing
    b. follow-up check-ins by presenters
    c. Focused conversations based on information presented
    d. Initiated by presenters or at participant request

II. EB Training
    a. District ESL department presenter
    b. Organized by ESL department
    c. District PD days assigned by District (requested by district ESL department)
    d. One PD Day each semester

III. *ELLevation* program training and data review
    a. District ESL department presenter
    b. Organized by ESL department
    c. One training/data review each Six Weeks
    d. During campus English department PLCs

IV. Sheltered Instruction strategy professional development and coaching
    a. Campus LPAC/ESL representatives
    b. One PD/coaching session each Six Weeks
    c. During campus English department PLCs

The Intervention

Interventions included building awareness for emergent bilinguals and their instructional needs through training for classroom teachers on emergent bilinguals, *ELLevation* program training, professional development on differentiation and language learners, as well as coaching focused on emergent bilingual support and best practices. Figure 4.1 detailed specific interventions of support, emergent bilingual training, *ELLevation* program training and data review, and sheltered instruction strategy professional development and coaching. Figure 4.2 depicted the intervention timeline showing teacher support, training, and/or professional development happening twice per six weeks. Additional training for the beginning of the year and middle of the year indicated annual training by the district ESL department. District ESL department trainings were created and presented by the district to deliver updates to law and district practice including a whole district data review. Each six weeks, teachers were scheduled to receive sheltered instruction strategy professional development and coaching from the Campus LPAC Liaison and/or ESL Administrator and incremental *ELLevation* training with campus/content data review from the Secondary ESL Coordinator at the district level. Sheltered Instruction strategies were pulled from *ELLevation*, English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS), and learned best practices from district and regional trainings. The Campus LPAC Liaison and/or ESL Administrator selected a best practice to present to the English PLC (Professional Learning Community). Examples and implementation were discussed as well as specific lesson plans to add the strategy to upcoming lessons.

Figure 4.2

Intervention Timeline

General Time Period	Month	Event	Intervention	Person/Group Responsible
Beginning of School Year	August	Beginning of Year Professional Development	ESL/EB Professional Development	District ESL Department
First Six Weeks	August	English PLC	Sheltered Instruction Strategy Professional Development and Coaching	Campus LPAC Liaison and/or ESL Administrator
First Six Weeks	September	English PLC	Incremental ELLevation training with data review	Secondary ESL Coordinator
Second Six Weeks	September	English PLC	Sheltered Instruction Strategy Professional Development and Coaching	Campus LPAC Liaison and/or ESL Administrator
Second Six Weeks	October	English PLC	Incremental ELLevation training with data review	Secondary ESL Coordinator
Third Six Weeks	November	English PLC	Sheltered Instruction Strategy Professional Development and Coaching	Campus LPAC Liaison and/or ESL Administrator
Third Six Weeks	December	English PLC	Incremental ELLevation training with data review	Secondary ESL Coordinator
After Winter Break	January	Mid Year Professional Development	ESL/EB Professional Development	District ESL Department
Fourth Six Weeks	January	English PLC	Sheltered Instruction Strategy Professional Development and Coaching	Campus LPAC Liaison and/or ESL Administrator
Fourth Six Weeks	February	English PLC	Incremental ELLevation training with data review	Secondary ESL Coordinator
Fifth Six Weeks	March	English PLC	Sheltered Instruction Strategy Professional Development and Coaching	Campus LPAC Liaison and/or ESL Administrator
Fifth Six Weeks	April	English PLC	Incremental ELLevation training with data review	Secondary ESL Coordinator
Sixth Six Weeks	April	English PLC	Sheltered Instruction Strategy Professional Development and Coaching	Campus LPAC Liaison and/or ESL Administrator
Sixth Six Weeks	May	English PLC	Incremental ELLevation training with data review	Secondary ESL Coordinator

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed methods triangulation design convergence model, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. By comparing separate results from teacher perceptions and practice, a more comprehensive understanding of differentiation in classrooms was sought. The research aimed to support the long-term emergent bilingual population by analyzing the impact of differentiation on language proficiency development. Following the evaluation, design-based research was used to refine classroom practices supporting emergent bilingual language development. This approach emphasized iteration, allowing for continuous improvement through evaluation and adjustment.

Through studying multiple classroom settings, including sheltered instruction and general education, the research sought to identify effective differentiation strategies to support long-term emergent bilinguals. This iterative process was symbolized through a circle showing continuous feedback, support, data review, and adjustment for continuous improvement.

Context of the Study

At a large 6A high school in Texas, most Limited English Proficient students were long-term emergent bilinguals, having attended U.S. schools for six years or more without meeting language proficiency standards for reclassification or exiting ESL programs. Among them, eighty-four students, or 73%, achieved Advanced or Advanced High scores on the TELPAS. While these students were typically placed in general education classrooms, those scoring at lower proficiency levels received intensive language support in sheltered instruction classrooms. However, concerns arose regarding the lack of progress among long-term emergent bilinguals not receiving direct language support in any classes. Despite their high TELPAS scores, they had not met the proficiency threshold to exit ESL programs. To address this, teachers in general education classrooms should provide individualized language support to foster continued English language development aimed at improving TELPAS scores and eventual exit from the ESL program.

Limitations

The research study faced several limitations. Firstly, the researcher's role as an administrator at the research site could have influenced teacher participants' behavior during classroom observations. Teachers could have felt vulnerable, although they voluntarily agreed to participate. Secondly, the small sample size of five teachers limited the depth of the study and suggested potential for more comprehensive research in the future. Also, data reliability was a concern, particularly regarding standardized testing such as STAAR, IOWA, and TELPAS.

Students who have taken these tests repeatedly over the years often experience frustration and lethargy, leading to rushed completion and potentially inaccurate scores, especially for long-term emergent bilinguals who may perform below their actual proficiency level.

In November of 2023, after the initial evaluation year, TEA adjusted the emergent bilingual reclassification criteria to allow students to reclassify based on a composite score of Advanced High on TELPAS. In previous years, emergent bilinguals had to score Advanced High in all four domains of TELPAS: listening, speaking, reading, and writing to qualify for reclassification. The other two criteria points remain the same: passing STAAR or the TEA approved norm-referenced standardized achievement test (IOWA for the research site), and a subjective teacher evaluation. The mixed methods study allowed for varied data points to highlight student outcome improvement leading to reclassification.

Participants

Recruitment for participants was conducted according to specific criteria. Eligible candidates were English teachers currently teaching tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grade at the research site, with at least one emergent bilingual in their classrooms. They also had to be open to participating in interviews and undergoing multiple classroom observations. Before participation, individuals signed a consent form.

Data Collection

The research plan outlined a thorough methodology for data collection over two six-week grading periods. It began with one-on-one semi-structured interviews (Appendix A) with teachers before the start and one at the end of the data collection period to assess attitudes and perceptions towards differentiation strategies. The semi-structured interview style allowed for flexibility in follow-up questioning as needed. These interviews, each lasting between twenty and thirty minutes, took place in the teacher's time and place of choice to allow for comfort and

confidence in responding to questions. Also, two classroom walkthroughs and one observation were conducted per teacher during each grading period to document the planning and implementation of differentiation strategies. The observations focused on differentiation strategy selection, teacher activity, and student response, with effectiveness assessed based on student group participation and grades.

Observations were conducted discreetly during regular school days following an unannounced class period rotation. The classroom Observation Data Collection Sheet (Appendix B) was used to track strategies seen, activities supplemented, and student response. The selection of observation period was randomized to accommodate up to fifteen teachers, with adjustments made for individual schedules. Student data were collected at the end of each school year, including aggregate student outcomes and language proficiency scores, and organized using a Student Outcome Data Chart created by the researcher. Coding techniques such as in vivo and inductive coding were employed to identify themes and patterns in the data. Previous year's TELPAS data were accessed and compared to current year data to track growth, while STAAR scores were collected and added to the Student Outcome Data Table. LPAC data were also collected and added to the table once finalized. Furthermore, teacher lesson plans were reviewed every six weeks during walkthrough and observation weeks to compare planning and implementation data. Professional Learning Community agendas were reviewed each semester to document training and support activities.

Overall, the research plan encompassed a comprehensive approach to data collection, analyses, and evaluation, aimed at understanding and improving differentiation strategies in the classroom. Interviews were chosen to provide teacher perceptions which impact classroom practice. Farrell and Ives (2015) found that teacher perceptions provided a “strong basis” for classroom practice (p. 608). Observations were conducted to provide data on classroom practice

at the research site. Reliability and validity were ensured through shared data collection items for reproduction of this study and research-based practice for differentiating instruction.

Results

Sample Differences

The original data set included a larger group size. After two of the teacher participants left the district and subsequently did not continue in the study, the group size was seventy-six. Of the seventy-six, 9 were not long-term emergent bilinguals that lived in the country less than 6 years, 14 graduated, 5 moved out of the district, 2 withdrew to home school, 2 graduated early, 6 moved to an alternate program within the same district, 3 students exited prior to the intervention implementation, and 1 student passed away during the school year prior to the intervention. The final data set included a group size of thirty-four.

Qualitative

Qualitative Questions. Qualitative questions one through six of the survey covered participants' differentiation experience, frequency of differentiation implementation, how they know how to differentiate, strategies used in their classrooms, how strategies are implemented, and the effectiveness of differentiation, in the participant's opinion. Figure 4.3 summarized qualitative responses after intervention implementation.

Question 1: Tell me about your experience with differentiation. (Follow up/clarifying questions: What has your experience been this year? Tell me about training you have had on differentiation.) All participants acknowledged increased training throughout the school year.

Figure 4.3

Qualitative Participant Responses After Intervention Implementation

Question		Participant Reponses Summary					Overview of Findings
Number	Topic	A	B	C	D	E	
1	Experience with Differentiation	some training	online training	campus training	Removed from study - left district	Removed from study - left district	* 3/3 Some training
2	Frequency of Differentiation in Your Classroom	Every Day	Every Day	Every Day			* 3/3 Every Day
3	How do you know how to Differentiate	data, know the students, ELLevation	professional development, data, know the students	know the students			* 2/3 Data * 3/3 Knowing the students
4	Strategies Used to Differentiate	preferential seating, modified assignments, translation, visuals, peer support, extra time, technology, speak slowly, modeling, vocabulary, check for understanding, found online	vocabulary, clarifying questions, visuals, found online and professional development	graphic organizers, text-to-speech options, oral upon request, check for understanding			* 2/3 Vocabulary * 3/3 Pictures/Visuals * 3/3 Check for Understanding
5	Implementing Strategies for Differentiation	partner work, individual support	routines, vocabulary, peer support varies	individual support, small groups			* 2/3 Teacher provided individual support * 3/3 Peer support
6	Effectiveness of Differentiation	engaged, not effective if confused/freeze up/finish quickly	formative and summative evaluations, ineffective if students struggle, shut down	when student work automonously, reteach if ineffective			* 3/3 Students engaged when effective

Question 2: How often do you differentiate in your classroom? All participants responded with “every day.”

Question 3: How do you know how to differentiate? (Follow up/clarifying questions: How do you plan for differentiation? What resources do you use?) Participants responded with data, one mentioning the *ELLevation* program, and professional development. All participants mentioned knowing the students as how they know how to differentiate.

Question 4: What strategies do you use to differentiate in your classroom? (Follow up/clarifying questions: How do you decide what strategies to use to support your students? Where do you find strategies to support your students?) All participants mentioned check for understanding and visuals. Most participants mentioned vocabulary

work. Other strategies mentioned include preferential seating, modified assignments, translation, peer support, extra time, speaking slowly, modeling, and text-to-speech.

Question 5: Tell me about implementing the strategies you choose. (Follow up/clarifying questions: What does that look like in the classroom for students, for the teacher, for the lesson, for timing, for activities?) Most participants mentioned individual support. All participants named peer support as one way they implement strategies.

Question 6: Talk about how you know when differentiation was effective. (Follow up/clarifying questions: What happens when differentiation is ineffective? How do students react differently to effective or ineffective differentiation?) All participants identified that students are engaged when differentiation is effective.

Thematic Analysis. Participants recognized they had received increased training while also pointing out the online aspect and campus focused components as integrated into the intervention. All participants still reported implementing differentiation every day. Two of the three participants now reported using data to know how to differentiate. All participants continued to believe knowing their students was important for knowing how to differentiate. After the intervention, all participants reported using pictures/visuals as well as checks for understanding while two of the three participants reported using vocabulary-based practice. An important shift was seen in implementing strategies for differentiation, no whole group instruction was reported. Participants noted teachers provided individual support and peer support. All three participants reported knowing students were engaged when differentiation was effective. Participant A stated, “Active monitoring is very important.” Participant C stated, “It is effective when the student eventually works autonomously after two to three examples or suggestions.”

Participants reported several new strategies different from the first interview: preferential seating, graphic organizers, and extra time. Consistent with the first interview was vocabulary practice, checks for understanding, modified assignments, pictures/visuals, and modeling. Notes were not mentioned in the second set of interviews. Participant A stated or shared, “If it is a topic that is unfamiliar to them, I will give them a prompt that is similar, but easier for them to be able to work with.” Participant B stated, “I use both summative and formative evaluations.” These statements alluded to the data talks included in the intervention. See Figure 4.4 for an overview of findings before and after the intervention.

Figure 4.4

Comparison of Qualitative Participant Question 1-6 Findings Before and After Intervention

Overview of Findings Before Intervention	Overview of Findings After Intervention
* 5/5 Some training * 5/5 Knowledge based on experience	* 2/3 Some training
* 5/5 Every Day	* 3/3 Every Day
* 4/5 Experience/knowing the students	* 2/3 Data * 3/3 Knowing the students
* 2/5 Vocabulary * 2/5 Shortened assginments * 2/5 Modeling * 2/5 Partner/Group work * 3/5 Notes * 3/5 Pictures/Visuals	* 2/3 Vocabulary * 3/3 Pictures/Visuals * 3/3 Check for Understanding
* 2/5 Whole group instruction * 3/5 Partner work * 3/5 Teacher provided individual support	* 2/3 Teacher provided individual support * 3/3 Peer support
* 3/5 Fulfill expectations /proud/engaged when effective * 3/5 Frustrated/shut down/fall if ineffective	* 3/3 Students engaged when effective

Observations. Observations revealed teachers continued to use more strategies than they articulated in interviews. Teachers continued to provide individual support and partner work throughout 45-minute observations. Teachers were seen using visuals/pictures, read aloud, graphic organizers, copy of notes, output choices, sentence starters, modeling, vocabulary practice, scaffolding, chunking of assignments, and technology. More strategies were seen in observations after the intervention coinciding with the planning. Some whole class strategies were implemented; however, those were not documented as differentiation for the purposes of this study.

Quantitative

Quantitative Questions. Quantitative questions assessed participants' differentiation comfort, confidence in connecting differentiation with student needs, classroom effectiveness, and implementation difficulty. The questions used a Likert scale where one indicated the least comfortable, confident, effective, or difficult, and ten represented the most comfortable, confident, effective, or tough. Figure 4.5 summarizes quantitative responses.

> Question 7: On a scale of 1-10, one being completely uncomfortable and ten being completely comfortable, how comfortable are you with differentiating in your classroom? Participants rated themselves between eight and ten. The mean was nine. The median was nine. The standard deviation was 1.0. These teachers reported feeling mostly comfortable with differentiation.
>
> Question 8: On a scale of 1-10, one being completely insecure and ten being fully confident, how confident are you that the strategies you choose to differentiate are truly aligned with the needs of your students? Participants rated themselves between seven and nine. The mean was eight. The median was eight. The standard deviation was 1.0. These teachers are mostly confident in aligning differentiation with student needs.

Figure 4.5

Post-Intervention Quantitative Participant Responses Analysis

Questions		Participant						
Number	Topic	A	B	C	D	E	Average by Question	Median
7	Comfort Level with Differentiation	10	8	9	Removed from study - left the district	Removed from study - left the district	9	9
8	Confidence in Aligning Differentiation with Student Needs	8	7	9			8	8
9	Effectiveness of Differentiation in Your Classroom	8	10	10			9	10
10	Difficulty of Differentiation Implementation	8	8	3			6	8
	Average by Participant:	9	8	8				

Question 9: On a scale of 1-10, one being consistently ineffective and ten being consistently effective, how effective do you think differentiation is for students in your classroom? Participants responded, rating themselves between eight and ten. The mean was 9.33. The median was ten. The standard deviation was 1.15. These teachers believed differentiation is moderately effective in their classrooms.

Question 10: On a scale of 1-10, one being the easiest and ten being the hardest, how easy is it to implement differentiation in your classroom? Participants responded by rating themselves between three and eight. The mean was 6.33. The median was eight. The standard deviation was 2.88. These teachers found differentiation implementation of moderate difficulty after the intervention.

Thematic Analysis. Teacher participants ranked themselves higher in the second interview after the intervention than initial interviews. Teachers felt comfortable and confident

within the expectations, aligning with student needs, and the effectiveness of the differentiation implemented. Participants scored themselves the lowest on difficulty showing they felt implementing differentiation is somewhat difficult. This is consistent with the first interview. Positive responses regarding comfort, confidence, and effectiveness may be linked to the support that encourages teachers to continue facing the difficulties they reported.

2024 End of Year Data

After the intervention, 5.88% of emergent bilinguals in the study scored in the Beginner group compared to 5.40% prior to the intervention. The Intermediate group represented 29.41% compared to 29.73% prior to the intervention. The Advanced group represented 47.05% of the group compared to 37.83% before the intervention and the Advanced High group represented 17.64% after the intervention compared to 27.02% before. The mean was 2.76 (3, Advanced). The median was three, Advanced. The standard deviation was 0.81. Within the population studied, six (17.64%) reclassified as non-LEP and exited ESL programs. For the six that reclassified, all qualified based on Advanced High TELPAS composite scores. None of the six qualified through STAAR data, so all six took the IOWA grade appropriate reading exam and passed. All six received positive teacher subjective evaluations indicating their readiness for reclassification from emergent bilingual to English proficient.

The average grade for English courses within the study after the intervention in the first six weeks was 79.88 compared to 80.41. The second six-week data reported 78.38 compared to 77.32. The average of post-intervention aggregate grade outcomes was 79.12 compared to 78.86 in the pre-intervention data. TELPAS aggregate data showed identical scores from pre-intervention to post-intervention at 2.7647059, Advanced. PLC agendas were reviewed at the end of the intervention year. Of the six scheduled PLC meetings for professional development and coaching on sheltered instruction strategies, led by the campus LPAC liaison and/or the ESL

administrator, four meetings took place. Similarly, out of the six planned *ELLevation* training courses with data reviews conducted by the secondary ESL Coordinator, four were completed. Additionally, both the beginning-of-the-year and mid-year professional development sessions provided by the district ESL department occurred as scheduled.

Statistical Test

A parametric statistical procedure, paired samples t-test, was used to examine the effectiveness of teacher professional development, training, and support for emergent bilinguals and differentiation. The interval level dependent variable was TELPAS outcomes. The independent variable consisted of two related groups. Group data were collected at the end of the 2023 school year, pre-intervention, and post-intervention at the end of the 2024 school year. The non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was appropriate due to normality issues identified when conducting the paired samples t-test.

Assumptions. The paired samples t-test assumptions were reviewed. The dependent TELPAS outcomes were interval level data as TEA counts the data as continuous. There is one independent variable consisting of two related groups, pre- and post-intervention TELPAS group outcomes. There are no significant outliers in the difference scores between the two paired groups. These data were normally distributed as indicated by the histogram's general bell shape. The Q-Q plot's points fell in four distinct horizontal lines rather than following one data line. The absolute value of skewness was higher than the doubled standard error of skewness, indicating no issues with skewness = .81 (*SE* = .40). The absolute value of kurtosis was lower than the doubled standard error of kurtosis indicating issues with kurtosis = 1.06 (*SE* = .78). The Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was significant being less than $p < .05$ ($p < .001$). Due to normality violations, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test assumptions were reviewed and met by the

population distribution of the difference scores being symmetric and the sample difference scores being independent of one another.

Results. A Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was used to determine the impact of implementing professional development for teachers on TELPAS outcomes for long-term emergent bilinguals. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was used because the data violated the assumptions of the paired samples t-test. The directional hypothesis was that post-intervention TELPAS outcomes would be higher than pre-intervention TELPAS outcomes. Implementation of the teacher professional development was not statistically significant for TELPAS outcomes, $W = 52$, $p = 0.50$, $r = -0.01_{\text{rank biserial}}$. The lack of statistical significance meant implementation of one year of teacher professional development focused on differentiation and emergent bilinguals did not have a significant impact on improving TELPAS outcomes.

Results Analysis

Post-Intervention Lesson Plan and Walkthrough Review

Lesson plans and walkthroughs revealed increased instances of differentiation compared to pre-intervention walkthroughs and lesson plans. See Figure 4.6 for comparison data. Participant A was steady, still documenting differentiation in lesson plans and differentiation seen in walkthroughs. Participant B increased from no documentation or witness of differentiation in the classroom to documenting in one of two lesson plans reviewed and differentiation was documented in one of two walkthroughs by an administrator. Participant C improved from no documentation in lesson plans or on walkthroughs to one of two walkthroughs documented differentiation and both sets of lesson plans noted differentiation strategies to use in the classroom. Participants D and E were removed from the study after leaving the district at the end of the pre-intervention year.

Figure 4.6

Pre- and Post-Intervention Walkthrough and Lesson Plan Review Comparison

Participant	Walkthroughs		Lesson Plans	
	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention
A	2	2	2	2
B	0	1	0	1
C	0	1	0	2
D	0	Removed from Study - left district	1	Removed from Study - left district
E	0	Removed from Study - left district	2	Removed from Study - left district

Research Questions Answered

Question 1: How does differentiation in general education classrooms impact long-term emergent bilingual language proficiency as indicated by TELPAS? This study did not reveal significant changes in language proficiency based on Composite TELPAS scores. When reviewing individual student outcomes, the number of students who qualified for reclassification did increase.

Question 2: How does differentiation impact long-term emergent bilingual reclassification rates? Based on quantitative data, more students qualified for reclassification than in the previous year. Based on qualitative data, teacher perceptions improved around comfort levels and confidence as well as noted focus on individual student engagement.

Question 3: What are the characteristics of effective differentiation that positively impact long-term emergent bilingual reclassification rates? Students who receive individual support

versus whole group accommodation improve language proficiency and engagement as documented by the increased group grade averages across the two-year study.

Question 4: Does the implementation of professional development for general education teachers lead to increased TELPAS scores for long-term emergent bilinguals? The implementation of professional development did increase the number of students qualifying for reclassification based on Composite TELPAS scores.

Qualitative Question Analysis

Participant responses changed after the intervention of ESL and emergent bilingual professional development, sheltered instruction strategy professional development and coaching, and the incremental *ELLevation* training with data reviews. Participants responses became centered around verbiage used routinely in the trainings such as “data,” “know your kids,” “vocabulary,” “visuals,” and “check for understanding.” These terms are used regularly to build awareness, foster a focus on student ability and achievement, and guide teacher planning. The interviews revealed a shift from whole group instruction to individual support and partner work focused on individual student needs. After the intervention, all participants recognized that student engagement increases when individual student needs are met through differentiation. Figure 4.4 provides a visual summary to compare response findings.

Quantitative Question Analysis

Participants exhibited a change in opinion after the intervention. Teacher participants reported improved comfort levels with differentiation averaging one point higher than before the intervention. Improved confidence in aligning differentiation with student needs ratings rose an average of one point as well as the improved sense of effectiveness of differentiation in their classrooms which rose one point.

Figure 4.7

Comparison of Quantitative Interview Question 7-10 Findings Before and After Intervention

Average by Question Before Intervention	Average by Question After Intervention	Change in Responses
8	9	+1
7	8	+1
8	9	+1
5	6	+1

There was also an increase in experiencing more difficulty implementing differentiation. Figure 4.7 shows the participant averages by question before and after the intervention. A notable change in individual participant responses was also found. Figure 4.8 depicts the averages by participant before and after intervention. Participants average responses ratings were seven prior to the intervention. After the intervention, participant average responses ratings increased to eight. Participant A increased comfort level, confidence, effectiveness, and difficulty by one point. Participants B and C increased in the same areas by two points.

Quantitative Report Analysis

The descriptive statistics show most student outcomes did not change from year one to year two. The analysis of student outcome data, displayed in the chart in Figure 4.9, shows the gathered student outcomes. Though the average of grades is comparable from 2023 to 2024 data, the number of students passing increased from 44% in 2023 to 52% in 2024 after the intervention.

Figure 4.8

Comparison of Quantitative Interview Question 7-10 Findings Before and After Intervention by Participant

	A	B	C	D	E
Average by Participant Before Intervention:	8	6	6	8	8
Average by Participant After Intervention:	9	8	8	Removed from Study - left district	Removed from Study - left district
Change in Responses:	+1	+2	+2		

The average Composite TELPAS rating was consistent across the two years at the Advanced level. The mean was 2.76 (3, Advanced). The median was three, Advanced. Student outcomes show ten students qualifying for exit based on TELPAS Composite ratings. Of those 10, 4 did not meet grade appropriate reading assessment expectations on either STAAR (for tenth grade students) or IOWA (for eleventh and twelfth grade students). Of the thirty-four student outcomes in this study, 10 (29%) qualified based on TELPAS Composite ratings. Six (60%) of those ten passed the STAAR/IOWA and reclassified as English proficiency, exiting the ESL program. Reclassification rates for this study were 18% for 6 of 34 student outcomes.

Discussion

The practice of peer work was the most frequently used support tool by participants in the study, aligning with Vygotsky's Social Interactionist Theory (1934), which emphasizes the importance of social support in learning. When teachers were trained in differentiation and best practices for engaging emergent bilinguals in learning, improvement was seen in the population studied.

Figure 4.9

Completed Outcomes Data Chart

#	English Six-Week Cycle Grades Spring 2023		English Six-Week Cycle Grades Spring 2024		English II EOC	TELPAS 2023	TELPAS 2024	Grade Appropriate Reading Assessment		2024 LPAC Decision
	6 WK A	6 WK B	6 WK A	6 WK B		Composite	Composite	STAAR/IOWA	Score	
158323	75	91	68	80	DNM	2	2	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
158223	93	90	86	70	DNM	3	2	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
157823	93	81	95	95	Approaches	3	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
157723	83	91	93	90	Meets	3	2	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
157523	82	60	62	51	Approaches	3	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
156923	70	70	94	76	Meets	2	2	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
157323	70	74	74	81	Approaches	2	2	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
157223	91	72	73	70	Absent	2	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
157224	83	81	63	70	Approaches	3	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
156723	86	35	75	87	Absent	1	2	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
156423	74	71	81	92	Approaches	2	2	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
155924	98	99	94	72	Approaches	3	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
155823	70	77	88	70	DNM	3	2	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
156623	46	60	17	60	DNM	1	1	STAAR	DNM	Continue ESL
156523	60	80	48	60	Absent	2	2	STAAR	DNM	Continue ESL
156223	60	64	68	50	Approaches	2	4	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
155523	94	77	93	97	Approaches	4	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
155623	71	75	93	98	Approaches	3	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
155233	60	82	87	98	DNM	3	3	STAAR	DNM	Continue ESL
155423	97	92	98	96	Meets	4	4	IOWA	P	Exited
155323	53	65	82	65	DNM	2	2	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
154423	70	30	70	37	Approaches	3	4	IOWA	P	Exited
154823	83	76	94	97	Approaches	3	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
155223	97	99	86	98	Approaches	3	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
154923	94	93	98	94	Meets	4	4	IOWA	P	Exited
154723	89	70	88	97	Approaches	2	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
154623	89	75	72	70	Approaches	3	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
154523	92	91	80	91	Approaches	3	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
152323	80	78	80	83	Approaches	4	3	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
152623	85	94	68	82	Approaches	4	3	IOWA	DNM	Continue ESL
152433	97	91	91	96	Meets	4	4	IOWA	P	Exited
152123	70	84	80	70	Approaches	2	4	IOWA	P	Exited
152923	94	100	92	76	Meets	4	3	IOWA	P	Continue ESL
152823	85	61	85	46	Meets	2	1	DNQ	DNQ	Continue ESL
Average:	80.41	77.32	79.88	78.38	Average:	2.76	2.76			
	78.87		79.13							

Teacher planning improved and implementation increased, resulting in double the number of reclassified students by the end of the study. Differentiation creates varied learning opportunities within the classroom based on individual needs. Teachers implement strategies to align with Krashen's theory on Input Hypothesis (1982) meeting students at their ability level and challenging them in language and content. With increased training, teachers reported higher levels of comfort and confidence as documented by the qualitative and quantitative data reported in this study.

At the research site, continued training and teacher support can continue to improve emergent bilingual outcomes. As seen in the post-intervention data, the number of Beginner level students decreased, while the number of Intermediate and Advanced students increased. However, the number of Advanced High students decreased. Lower Beginner level numbers mean students improved to the Intermediate level or higher. Lower Advanced High numbers could mean students fell back or reclassified. Improvement was seen in the increased number of reclassifications.

Conclusion

The intervention provided professional development on emergent bilinguals, data reviews, coaching, and *ELLevation* program training regularly throughout the school year. Teachers received training during beginning of the year and mid-year professional development from the district ESL department and in English PLCs twice per six weeks from the secondary ESL coordinator, the campus LPAC liaison, and/or the ESL Administrator. The routine support, training, and check in was intended to provide layered support throughout the school year to help teachers identify best practices and best approaches for supporting emergent bilinguals in their classrooms.

The qualitative data revealed the teacher participant perceptions changed from interview one prior to the intervention to interview two after the intervention. Participants reported recognizing the value of data and knowing emergent bilinguals and their needs. Teachers had adjusted their thought process to include implementing best practices shared in training like vocabulary practice, using visuals, and continuously checking for understanding. Participants moved away from whole group support to more individual and partner/peer work. Participants also recognized supported students are engaged in their lessons. This shift in thinking and awareness of the needs and tools to support emergent bilinguals is invaluable to the growth and success of emergent bilinguals.

The quantitative data had similar positive results. Teacher participants reported an improved comfort level with differentiation, improved confidence in aligning differentiation to student needs, and feeling more effective in the classroom. They also noted the increased difficulty in implementation, which is understandable as they implement more support for students. Descriptive statistics and the paired samples t-test did not show the same level of improvement in language proficiency of students across the two years. The data showed a slight decrease in the average language proficiency score, though a higher percentage of students qualified for reclassification than the previous year.

Overall, participants' growth from professional development is evident. Continued support and professional development will lead to student growth as teachers become increasingly comfortable and confident in their abilities to better support emergent bilinguals in their classrooms.

Recommendations for Future Improvement

Future improvement should include continued support, coaching, and professional development for teachers. Professional development can be broken down into supporting

emergent bilinguals at various language proficiency levels and focus on modeling and in-class coaching to build teacher confidence and practice. As teachers' perceptions change through comfort levels and increased knowledge, student outcomes will continue to improve due to the awareness of student needs, the relationship building that happens when students feel supported, and the continued growth as students and teachers experience success.

State policy should focus on various dynamics within the emergent bilingual or LEP indicator. This heterogeneous group has diverse needs and support requirements to be successful. Keeping them in the same category implies there is a one-size-fits-all response to support emergent bilinguals. Teachers need to understand and implement specialized support for content instruction and language development to effectively meet students' needs.

Recommendations for Future Research

Long-term emergent bilinguals are often identified after participating in bilingual programs from kindergarten to fifth grade. They may have been in bilingual and English as a Second Language programs for eleven years without sufficient progress to qualify for English language proficiency. Future research should address diversities within the LEP indicator, including expanding the scope across multiple schools or districts. A longitudinal study and review of initial LEP identification could reveal gaps in learning or support systems. Future research should focus on fidelity of professional development and training. As teachers gain knowledge and coaching in practice, follow-up is necessary to ensure practical application of learned material and accountability for implementation. Differentiation allows for individual attention to emergent bilinguals' language development needs along with content, allowing for personalized instruction and improved student outcomes.

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Appendix A

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experience with differentiation. (Follow up/clarifying questions: What has your experience been this year? Tell me about training you have had on differentiation.)
2. How often do you differentiate in your classroom?
3. How do you know how to differentiate? (Follow up/clarifying questions: How do you plan for differentiation? What resources do you use?)
4. What strategies do you use to differentiate in your classroom? (Follow up/clarifying questions: How do you decide what strategies to use to support your students? Where do you find strategies to support your students?)
5. Tell me about implementing the strategies you choose. (Follow up/clarifying questions: What does that look like in the classroom for students, for the teacher, for the lesson, for timing, for activities?)
6. Talk about how you know when differentiation was effective. (Follow up/clarifying questions: What happens when differentiation is ineffective? How do students react differently to effective or ineffective differentiation?)
7. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being completely uncomfortable and ten being completely comfortable, how comfortable are you with differentiating your classroom?
8. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being completely insecure and ten being fully confident, how confident are you that the strategies you choose to differentiate are truly aligned with the needs of your students?
9. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being consistently ineffective and ten being consistently effective, how effective do you think differentiation is for students in your classroom?
10. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being the easiest and ten being the hardest, how easy is it to implement differentiation in your classroom?

Appendix B

Classroom Observation Data Collection Sheet

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Course: _____ Period: _____

Strategy Used	Activity Supplemented	Student Response

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Results

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the results, offering a clearer view of differentiation in general education classrooms and its impact on long-term emergent bilingual outcomes on the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS). Based on the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test, there was no statistically significant impact of differentiation training for teachers on TELPAS outcomes. The impact was seen in improved teacher confidence ratings, increased implementation of differentiation in classrooms, and improved student grades. The shift in group sizes within TELPAS were also apparent before and after the intervention, although the averages of TELPAS scores did not change. There was also an increase in reclassification rates which is the goal of long-term emergent bilinguals and educators. A clear shift in whole group instruction to more partner work and individual support from teachers was seen when comparing pre-and post-intervention interviews and observations. This research was significant because it provided evidence that teacher training impacts practice with ongoing teacher support and coaching. It added research highlighting the many factors to consider when working with emergent bilinguals. The data is multifaceted, just like these students.

The fidelity of professional development implementation could be a factor in practice as well as ongoing coaching and post-training support. Future research could cover various aspects of emergent bilinguals and their path to long-term emergent bilingual status considering the diversity found within the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) indicator. Expanding the study to other schools or whole districts could offer a different view based on training practices and support systems within the district. A longitudinal study would assess impact over time. This chapter aligns with Improvement Science and the study or assessment phase of the Plan-Do-

Study-Act (PDSA) cycle, emphasizing the importance of reviewing data and integrating it with other factors influencing identified successes or challenges.

Discussion of Results

Explanation of Findings

Findings revealed focused emergent bilingual professional development for teachers does have an impact on emergent bilingual outcomes. Post-interview quantitative interview questions found that participant averages increased by one to two points for each participant. Increased comfort levels, confidence, effectiveness, and difficulty were reported. Similarly, averages by question increased by one point across all quantitative questions. Both qualitative and quantitative data support the growth of teachers and students. Teacher perceptions impacted their confidence levels as seen in the qualitative data. It is important to note that during the second set of interviews, no participant responded, “I don’t know.” This was heard multiple times in the first set of interviews. The second set of interviews also revealed a shift from whole group strategies to more individualized support recognizing and addressing the needs of emergent bilinguals in their classrooms.

It was surprising how many students were omitted from the final sample due to mobility, early graduation, and alternative programs offered by the district. It was surprising in that mobility does not just have its own impact but is also impacted by the other groups as well: early graduates and alternative programs. Mobility, early graduates, and alternative programs could have impacted the data by eliminating students who may have reclassified or showed no improvement. Average TELPAS scores for the group prior to removing those that were omitted from the study was 2.59, lower than the study group average of 2.76 both pre- and post-intervention. These factors commonly create challenges to supporting the emergent bilingual population due to the inconsistent support systems.

The findings suggest that individualized support for teachers is more effective than whole group instruction in improving student outcomes. Administrators should recognize that targeted professional development, combined with follow-up and ongoing support, significantly enhances teacher confidence and practice. Stakeholders acknowledge the importance of investing in teachers to improve student outcomes. Policymakers should notice the impact on accountability made by this small adjustment to better support long-term emergent bilinguals, one facet of the LEP indicator.

Previous Research

Previous research supports the consistency of the TELPAS composite scores from year to year for long-term emergent bilinguals, as seen in this research. Just as Kim (2019) mentioned, teachers are not aware of emergent bilinguals in their classes. This research found, prior to the intervention, that teachers were focused on whole group support, which transitioned to individual and peer support after the intervention. When teachers planned and implemented differentiation specific to student needs, student outcomes improved, just as Lawson et al. (2017) noted. Like the findings of Turner et al. (2017), several teacher participants commented on knowing their students has the greatest impact on understanding how to help their students. Tomlinson (2005) found that students learn better when lessons are differentiated to meet individual needs. Teacher participants in this study reveal higher engagement amongst their emergent bilinguals after the intervention. This study contributes to the broader understanding of differentiation by connecting teacher perceptions and differentiation implementation to student reclassification rates of emergent bilinguals.

Improvement Science Framework

Just as improvement science details, it is the continuous cycle of improvement that will continue to grow teachers and improve student outcomes. After initially documenting teacher

planning and practices for differentiation with emergent bilinguals using the PDSA cycle, the planning phase focused on developing an intervention concept centered on professional development. This aimed to provide teachers with learning opportunities and support, as they had reported minimal training on differentiation.

The “Do” phase of the PDSA cycle consisted of implementing professional development for teachers. The “Study” phase reviewed the information gathered from the intervention. The “Act” phase included adjusting and planning for the next phase to continue to improve implementation and practice of differentiation to support emergent bilinguals in general education classrooms.

One side effect that appeared was the focus on administration and campus practice. Teachers need ongoing coaching and support that follows-up on learned material in professional development. Learning must build on previous knowledge rather than be forgotten once the session ends. District support and participation of the English as a Second Language (ESL) department improved the productivity of this research including discussions for additional training. This research benefited from those plans. One area that did not work well was the unannounced observations. Although the differentiation documentation was positive in most cases, additional walkthroughs may have provided a different picture of practice rather than 45-minute observations. This research lends itself to the Improvement Science Framework by surfacing varied paths to pursue for future iterations. A focus on proficiency level training is one option.

Future Iterations

Future iterations could include surveying teachers on the impact of training to find which training was perceived to be more beneficial, looking at the impact of specific differentiation practices, or planning in practice. Lesson planning with peers could impact planning practices,

leading to increased implementation of differentiation. One area of improvement would be to include unstructured questions in the interviews to allow more freedom and flexibility in responses or survey teachers on specific practices to identify trends to be more intentional with professional development planning.

Recommendations

Practice

The study showed professional development and teacher support impact lesson planning and classroom practice. Implications for the organization include fidelity of implementation and accountability. Administration may choose to institute specific follow-up cycles to visit and revisit best practices and adjustments based on data reviews. Next steps for the institution would be to expand the research to the entire English department. Supplementing regular professional development for emergent bilingual training within PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) on a scheduled basis could improve differentiation in all classrooms with accountability for implementation from campus leadership. Expanding this intervention to other schools in the district would provide a vertical alignment planning aspect to emergent bilingual support that could potentially reduce the number of long-term emergent bilinguals in the district. This could also allow students to receive focused interventions as teachers regularly plan for individualized support, learning and implementing best practices, and reviewing emergent bilingual data.

This research is scalable across campuses and districts. Other schools or districts who wish to recreate this intervention may find it difficult to obtain support from districts at the frequency implemented during this study. However, campus administration could implement training within faculty meetings, department meetings, or PLCs. Fidelity and accountability of implementation were the most significant factors. Routinely sharing best practices or practicing a skill a week as campus expectations could explicitly emphasize the campus-wide investment in

improvement. Checking for differentiation or specific differentiation strategies during walkthroughs increases implementation and practice. This also provides a way to monitor usage and provide support as needed.

Future Studies

Part of this research focused on the continuous feedback and support to teachers. Accountability for implementation did surface as a concern to be acknowledged in future research. Additionally, student and teacher mobility proved to be a concern that impacted sample size and teacher participants. This study could be replicated in a smaller period of one year or in repeated iterations over multiple years. Expanding the research to include the entire English department or other subject areas could provide a broader scope and more comprehensive understanding of the impact of differentiation on emergent bilingual outcomes. Longitudinal studies are recommended to track the long-term impact of differentiation and professional development on student outcomes. Such studies would provide deeper insights into the sustained effects of the interventions.

Conclusion

Summary

No Child Left Behind (2001) mandated districts and schools to provide performance level data for subpopulations as well as holistic data. Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) furthered this agenda. This unraveled a growing concern for long-term emergent bilinguals (students who have been in the country for six or more years and have not qualified for reclassification as English proficient) as they were highlighted as an area of stagnation within the emergent bilingual population. To improve student outcomes, attention must be paid to individual students and their learning needs. This meant considering the varied supports available and coordinating support with individual students amongst a classroom of diverse students when the student was

no longer enrolled in sheltered instruction classes for language development alongside content learning. These students were now in general education classrooms with teachers who were not receiving regular support for emergent bilingual best practices.

This study analyzed the impact of differentiation training on long-term emergent bilingual outcomes in general education classrooms. Results showed improved teacher confidence ratings, increased implementation of differentiation, and improved student grades. However, there was no statistically significant impact on TELPAS outcomes. Future research should consider various aspects of the LEP indicator and longitudinal studies.

Continuous Improvement

This study's purpose was to determine the relationship between differentiation in general education classrooms and language proficiency outcomes of long-term emergent bilinguals. Following the continuous improvement cycle, PDSA, the intervention for teacher professional development focused on emergent bilinguals and data reviews. Data collected included specific data required for reclassification: TELPAS scores and STAAR/IOWA (grade appropriate reading assessments). Teacher participants also completed pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews along with observations and a review of walkthrough and lesson plan documents.

Data showed differentiation and emergent bilingual specific training for teachers did have an impact on long-term bilingual reclassification. Qualitative data highlighted the positive impact on teacher comfort levels with differentiation and confidence. Teachers implement more differentiation strategies when they know what to use and how to use them. Quantitative data showed the amount of growth that can take place during one iteration in the PDSA cycle. Teachers reported higher perceptions of their abilities to support emergent bilinguals in their classrooms, as supported by the increase in strategies seen post-intervention in classroom

observations. It is important to continue the iterations at this research site to continue to improve long-term emergent bilingual support to reclassification.

Call to Action

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of differentiation by connecting teacher perceptions to practice. Existing theories show the value of differentiation. Implementing differentiation effectively requires extensive, focused training for teachers on differentiation strategies and supporting emergent bilinguals, coupled with coaching and ongoing support. Emergent bilinguals need additional assistance in language development beyond the standard curriculum which creates a unique challenge for both students and teachers. Differentiation provides the necessary scaffolding to support emergent bilinguals in both content and language development.

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