SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF THE READING ACHIEVEMENT GAP AMONG SPANISH-SPEAKING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN A WEST TEXAS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: AN APPLIED STUDY

by

Narichica Handy

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2023

SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF THE READING ACHIEVEMENT GAP AMONG SPANISH-SPEAKING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN A WEST TEXAS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: AN APPLIED STUDY

Narichica Handy

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2023

APPROVED BY:

Susan Quindag, EdD, Committee Chair

Anna Cates, EdD, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to solve the problem of low reading achievement among English language learners at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas. A multi-method design was used, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The first approach involved semistructured interviews with campus administrators, campus teaching coaches, and dual language teachers. The second approach involved conducting a focus group with campus administrators, campus teaching coaches, and dual language teachers. The third approach consisted of a document review of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness reading results. The findings resulted in several recommendations for solving the problem of improving low reading achievement among English language learners. These recommendations include providing targeted professional development to teachers to enhance their practice and improve the academic achievement of ELLs.

Keywords: English language learners, English proficiency, student achievement, achievement gap, balanced literacy.

Dedication

I dedicate my work to God, my family, and my friends who have continuously encouraged me not to give up. My wonderful husband has been supportive and understanding. I want to thank my niece, Alysha Lagua, a University of Texas, Austin graduate, for reading my work and helping with editing. I also thank my friend Wendy Vaughn for reading my work and providing feedback. Also, I thank my big sister Katonna Cunningham for believing in me when I did not believe in myself.

I also dedicate my work to educators passionate about helping students learn to read and comprehend. With an excellent foundation in literacy, children can excel in all content areas. There are many benefits to being bi-literate and bi-cultural. I thank my school district for making dual language education a reality for many students.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for giving me the strength to endure the many challenges I faced while writing this dissertation. With faith in God, anything is possible. I thank God for my church family and friends who prayed and encouraged me to complete this journey. I also acknowledge my classmates, who shared their journey and inspired me to continue mine.

I am grateful to everyone who helped and supported me as I completed this project. I appreciate my husband, Thomas; children, Thomas C. III and Hannah Grace; niece Alysha Lagua; Wendy Vaughn; and Katonna Cunningham. I am thankful for my encouraging and supportive dissertation chair, Dr. Quindag, who invested much prayer, academic expertise, and creative energy into me and this project. I also thank the faculty and staff of Liberty University for their constant support and guidance throughout the doctoral program.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Basic Interpersonal Skills (BICS)

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (CLR)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

English Learners (ELs)

English Language Learners (ELLs)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

Middle-of-the-Year (MOY)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Paz Independent School District (PISD)

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)

Targeted Improvement Plan (TIP)

Team Teaching and Learning (TTL)

Texas Education Association (TEA)

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills curriculum standards (TEKS)

Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS)

Two-way Dual language (TWDL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to solve the problem of low reading achievement among English language learners (ELLs) at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas. The ELLs consistently scored low on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) at Wiley Elementary School. Wiley Elementary students have struggled to consistently meet the state standard for student achievement. In the 2016–2017 school year, the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) report stated that Wiley Elementary must improve. During the 2017–2018 school year, Wiley Elementary School students did meet the state's academic standard. However, Wiley received an overall D rating in the 2018–2019 school year. In that year, only 24% of ELLs scored at the meets grade level or above on the STAAR for reading. The meets grade-level performance indicates the students showed strong knowledge of course content and were prepared to progress to the next grade (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2021a).

Many factors out of the school's control negatively impacted students' test scores, such as students' socioeconomic status, race, gender, and access to community resources (Bradley, 2022). The factors schools could change included improving students' performance with better teacher efficacy, class size, curriculum, and instructional strategies. Stakeholders sought to identify the factors impacting low test scores on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary School because the implications of the data can have significant effects on the community.

Chapter One provides the background of this study, including historical, theoretical, and social content. The chapter includes discussions of the problem to be addressed and the study's purpose. The chapter also introduces the research questions and the significance of the study.

The chapter closes with a list of key terms used in this study, with definitions relevant to the research context.

Background

The U.S. public education system has relied on standardized student testing for over 100 years (Burch, 2020), with school accountability ratings derived from student performance. Schools that fail to meet adequate performance levels risk placement on growth plans and state takeover. Therefore, school leaders must work diligently to improve students' performance on standardized tests to ensure the school continues to meet state standards.

In Texas, the STAAR determines accreditation and accountability. The STAAR measures students' progress in reading, math, writing, science, and social studies. Educators administer the STAAR for reading in the spring to students in Grades 3–5. Some ELLs in bilingual programs take the reading test in Spanish and receive language support.

Bilingual education in the United States has been revised to identify an effective method for supporting ELLs, also known as *newcomers*. Kim et al. (2015) explained that there are five dominant forms of bilingual education. These include (a) submersion; (b) English as a second language (ESL) instruction; (c) early-exit or transitional bilingual education (TBE); (d) late-exit, developmental, or maintenance bilingual education (Spies et al., 2018). Federal and state laws require language instruction programs for students identified as English learners (ELLs; TEA, 2020)

Educators implementing various approaches to support ELL education have succeeded over the years, and some policies have impacted educational methods for ELLs in the United States.

Table 1

Reading Test Performance for English Learners and all Students at Wiley Elementary School

Year	Reading test: English learners %	Reading test: All students %
2019	16	31
2018	21	30
2017	29	23

In Texas, when a student enrolls in a government-funded school and their Home Language Survey indicates a language other than English, the law requires schools to evaluate the student's English ability and inform parents or guardians of the results. If the evaluation classifies students as having limited English proficiency, they are placed in a bilingual program with their parent or guardian's consent. If parents deny the program, educators classify the student as having a limited English proficiency (LEP) denial; however, parents at Paz Independent School District (PISD) provided consent for their children to enter a bilingual education program.

The dispute over optimal education for ELLs has focused on beginning reading instruction (Slavin & Cheung, 2004). Debate has continued over whether public schools should teach ELLs to read in their native language first or whether ELLs should be instructed to read in English from the outset with appropriate support (Slavin & Cheung, 2004). Until 2014, PISD educators utilized the 80-20 bilingual model. In this form, educators taught 80% of the curriculum to ELLs in Spanish and taught the remaining 20% in English. In 2014, PISD educators decided to implement a 50-50 dual-language model. In this model, educators taught the curriculum half of the day in Spanish and the other half in English. Despite these changes, ELL students at Wiley Elementary School did not meet the appropriate standards on the Texas

standard test for the 2017, 2018, and 2019 school years, and they continued to fall behind their peers.

Mooney (2018) argued that the *achievement gap*, also known as the *opportunity gap*, refers to the difference in academic performance between students from low-income communities and those in affluent areas. However, researchers have reported an achievement gap between ELLs and native English speakers in content areas such as reading, math, and science, and they have attributed this gap to a lack of academic language proficiency among ELLs. Consequently, ELLs are more likely to be disadvantaged in learning the English literary language and the content area domains than their native English-speaking peers (Tong et al., 2017).

With the continued growth of the ELL population in U.S. public schools, educators must focus on closing this achievement gap. According to the U.S. Office of English Language Acquisition, the enrollment of ELLs in U.S. public schools from prekindergarten through 12th grade increased by approximately 64% from the 1994–1995 school year to the 2009–2010 school year (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2019). According to the U.S. Department of Education, out of 50 million students registered in public elementary and secondary schools during the 2009–2010 school year, roughly five million were identified as ELLs or ELs (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2016). Consequently, instructional practices must effectively support linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Historical Perspective

According to DeJong (2013), multilingualism has been the standard on the North American continent for decades, with Native Americans living around the country and speaking approximately 300 languages. Europeans who colonized America spoke Spanish, French,

German, Dutch, English, and many other northern European languages (DeJong, 2013; Gandara & Escamilla, 2017). The idea of establishing a national language was proposed in 1914.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared that teaching languages other than English in schools was un-American and undesirable during World War I. Educational policies were based on negligence and indifference, emphasizing English instruction. After World II, Congress decided against an official language and declared that the U.S. would not have a language policy (DeJong, 2013). During the 19th century, the U.S. language policy consisted of schools that used the native language and English (DeJong, 2013). Many German bilingual schools that provided Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish instruction have been documented in U.S. public schools. Students learn English when taught in their native language. This started to evolve, and the United States began to strive for a single primary language.

DeJong (2013) explained that the origins of the assimilationist debate can be traced back to the late 1920s, a period marked by industrialization, urbanization, and the introduction of compulsory public education. The rise of the nation-state and its focus on having a unifying language and national identity to support a sociopolitical society led to the assimilation of immigrants into American culture. At this time, the number of immigrants arriving in the United States increased dramatically. DeJong asserted that most new immigrants did not speak English and chose to live in cities rather than rural areas. Assimilationists saw linguistic and cultural diversity as a barrier to assimilation and advocated for monolingualism, which posed a challenge to unity. In response to the diverse immigrant population, the U.S. government encouraged immigrants to learn English and adapt to the modern American way of life. To preserve sociopolitical stability and development, assimilationists emphasized the importance of having a single, official language.

Several laws were passed restricting immigration and requiring English proficiency (DeJong, 2013). Language became crucial in immigration debates that occurred between 1914 and 1918 (DeJong, 2013; Gandara & Escamilla, 2017). Assimilationists portrayed languages other than English as un-American and unacceptable in the classroom. The Immigration Act of 1924 established limits on the number of immigrants who could enter the United States. Legislators based the percentages on the 1890 census, so northern European immigrants had a significant advantage (DeJong, 2013).

Educational leaders reintroduced pluralism into educational policy after WWII. The importance of foreign languages was highlighted during World War II. The 1964 Immigration Act abolished the quota system in place since 1924. Immigration from Latin America and Asia increased, resulting in new linguistic diversity (Garcia & Sung, 2018). President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, into law in 1965 (Drouhot & Nee, 2019). This act repealed the national origin quotas imposed in the 1920s, which limited immigration from non-Western countries. As a result, the United States, which had traditionally favored immigrants from Canada and Europe, allowed immigrants from all over the world to enter the country on an almost equal footing. The act sparked a massive influx of immigrants from Latin America and Asia.

Pluralist discourse increased because of the influences of various cultures and peoples living in the same nation. Many who did not fit into the American identity framework—primarily non-English speaking immigrants of color—were mistreated or underrepresented. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s paved the way for the recognition of minority community rights and antidiscrimination legislation, which directly impacted immigrant children's educational opportunities (DeJong, 2013).

Davis(2023) explained that Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act in 1968 as an amendment to Title 7 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. This amendment supported the development of bilingual services for English language learners. First, Title 7 did not require public schools to use a second language in the classroom if they received funds (Crawford, 2004). Second, advocates suggested segregation within the public school system violated language-minority children's civil rights under the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The question of equity arose in the landmark Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* (1974). Chinese parents in San Francisco debated whether their children had equal access to the educational system if educators delivered instruction in a language their children did not understand. The Supreme Court ruled the children did not receive equal treatment under the state-imposed standards that required the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum. In *Lau vs. Nichols* (1974), the Court made the critical observation that same does not mean equal. The Office of Civil Rights reinforced the Lau remedies, which increased native language instruction by requiring bilingual education for ELL students in elementary school(Davis, 2023).

Due to changes in laws and policies, all school districts must offer a bilingual program. Public schools must identify potential EL students and assess English language proficiency annually. In addition, they must continue monitoring former ELs for at least 2 years after they achieve English proficiency (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016; Franquiz et al., 2019). Congress passed Title 3 of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, establishing a federal formula for grants to help states support language acquisition. The goal was to help students improve their English language skills. Therefore, NCLB policy mentions children explicitly.

President George W. Bush enacted NCLB in response to a 1983 report claiming that the nation's future was at risk (Adler-Greene, 2019; Duran, 2008). According to the report, students

in the United States had fallen behind their European and Asian counterparts in math and reading. As a result, President Bush proposed significant changes to the federal government's educational policies (Adler-Greene, 2019; Duran, 2008). With the passage of NCLB, the president aimed to close the achievement gap that existed in math and reading according to ethnicity, race, and language in U.S. public schools.

In December 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. The ESEA was reauthorized, and NCLB was repealed. The ESEA is a federal law that authorizes funding for K–12 schools and symbolizes the country's commitment to equal educational opportunity for all students. It has influenced the education of millions of children (Franquiz & Ortiz, 2016; Young et al., 2017). The ESSA primarily required states to align their education programs with college and career-ready standards and expand the federal focus on equity by providing resources for needy students, students of color, ELs, and students with disabilities. The ESSA directly called on educational leaders to achieve national educational goals. The act established new avenues for states and districts to use federal funds to develop school principals and leaders ("Every Student Succeeds Act: Explained," 2015). According to ESSA supporters, ELLs comprised a compelling aspect of the new legislation, which required states to improve English language acquisition instruction as part of their ESSA accountability plans (Adler-Greene, 2019; Lachance et al., 2019).

DeMatthews and Izquierdo (2018) asserted that implementation of a dual language program depends on shifting federal, state, and district policies. According to DeMatthews and Izquierdo, language policies in education swing like a pendulum between opposing ends. Historically, the U.S. education system has approached linguistic diversity with alternating restrictions and tolerance. For example, the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 addressed the issue

of bilingual education to remedy the challenge of educating students who spoke languages other than English. On the other hand, the law offered no specific guidance on the types of programs or language models schools should address.

The Bilingual Education Act's passage resulted in the Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* (1974). The Supreme Court's decision in this case required U.S. public schools to develop policies ensuring ELLs access to linguistically appropriate instructional accommodations so they could experience meaningful learning (King & Bigelow, 2018). Eligibility was determined according to the student's first language and the language the student most frequently spoke. If a child primarily spoke a language other than English, educators evaluated their English linguistic ability (King & Bigelow, 2018).

The Civil Rights movement sparked a new willingness to consider the needs of students who could not communicate in English. The movement also popularized the idea that making children feel ashamed of their language and culture would detract from their learning (Gandara & Escamilla, 2017). With the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, legislators recognized the needs of LEP students by providing $7.5 million for selected bilingual pilot programs (Valdes, 2018). However, the law did not specify the goal of these programs, leaving it unclear as to whether the aim was to teach bilingual children to become literate or to transition LEP students into English as soon as possible (Crawford, 2004). However, because the legislation referred to bilingual instruction, it lent credibility to the provision of education in two languages. Following the federal government's lead in promoting bilingual education, most states with sizable LEP populations enacted legislation to provide a range of bilingual programs (Gandara & Escamilla, 2017).

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 arose primarily from the incorporation of bilingual education into education policies and initiatives created by the war on poverty and a lack of cultural awareness regarding minority communities (Cervantes-Soon, 2018). Leaders had to justify bilingual education in ways aligned with the dominant group's ideologies and rationale in the late 1960s. The transitional model that gained prominence was the bilingual program, which provided home language instruction for only 1–3 years and was intended to push students into the mainstream classroom (Flores et al., 2018).

The Supreme Court later ruled schools could not bar undocumented students from attending school, nor could they require parents to disclose their immigration status or prove citizenship, as in *Plyer v. Doe* in 1982. The U.S. District Court of Appeals established a three-part assessment for bilingual education programs in *Castaneda v. Pickard* in 1981. First and foremost, the Court ruled educational programs must be founded on sound educational theory. Second, the ruling required the curriculum to be implemented effectively and with sufficient resources. Finally, instruction had to be evaluated and deemed beneficial for teaching English and the entire curriculum.

According to Cramer et al. (2018), in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that separate but equal is inherently unequal. For more than 60 years, the United States had struggled with equity issues for all learners in the public education system. Cramer et al. claimed that equal education, defined as all students receiving the same education, is insufficient to ensure positive student outcomes. To achieve educational equality, each student must receive instruction and support tailored to their specific and unique learning needs. The authors suggested that, as a result, equal education may be intrinsically unequal. The authors asserted such efforts have failed to address continual inequities in outcomes and have frequently

resulted in sanctions that disproportionately impact students of color who attend low-performing public schools.

Leavitt and Hess (2019) argued that closing achievement gaps represented one of the primary goals of the 2001 NCLB legislation, which required schools to report achievement data disaggregated by race and ethnicity for the first time. Despite these efforts, the achievement gap continues to exist. This persistence highlights the importance of additional research to understand better what factors may contribute to this long-term trend (Leavitt & Hess, 2019). Valdes (2018) stated that the educational policy climate had recently shifted. The ESSA amended some of NCLB's accountability requirements. Some scholars expressed optimism that the new accountability approach would create new opportunities for addressing inequalities in teaching and learning systems and how learning outcomes are assessed and measured (Leavitt & Hess, 2019).

Initially, U.S. school leaders showed little interest in promoting bilingual education. Consequently, educational policies for immigrant children derived from ignorance and fostered neglect, with a focus on learning English. Intelligence testing conducted in English disproportionately placed immigrant children in special education classes (DeJong, 2013). Educators and policymakers recognized that practical instruction would assist students who did not speak English (Garcia & Sung, 2018). Sanchez et al. (2018) asserted that public schools frequently encourage immigrant students to switch to English. In the mid-20th century, the United States embraced bilingual education programs to provide an equitable education for language-minority students, primarily Latinos. Many of these educational programs were transitional, but some were developmental maintenance bilingual programs (Sanchez et al., 2018).

Classrooms that only promote the English language and only educate in English fail to meet the educational needs of immigrant children who speak multiple languages, as has been the case in the past. Moreover, as the population of immigrant children grows, the cultural and educational divide between them and English speakers grows. According to the Pew Research Center (2017), the United States welcomed 44.4 million immigrants in 2017, accounting for 13.6% of the total population. This percentage has more than quadrupled since 1960, when there were only 9.7 million immigrants in the United States, accounting for only 5.4% of the total U.S. population. Though growth has slowed in recent years, the number of immigrants living in the United States is expected to double by 2065 (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Social Perspective

The educational contexts in which children learn can influence their achievement. Before the 1960s, segregated schools that divided White students from Black and Latino students prevailed in many parts of the United States. Since then, several constitutional and legal initiatives have supported more equitable and desegregated educational opportunities for Hispanic children. However, significant research and lawsuits have documented the adverse educational impact of segregation and the resulting inequitable schooling experiences (Garcia & Sung, 2018; Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010).

Even when schools are desegregated, Hispanic immigrant children may be separated into classrooms with all or primarily ELL students. According to Lindholm-Leary and Block (2010), these classroom environments have not been as effective as California ELL studies suggested. Even after 10 years of English classrooms, only 40% of students were designated fluent English proficient and ready for mainstream English classrooms and coursework (Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010).

Lindholm-Leary and Block (2010) discussed two significant subgroups of Hispanic children: (a) immigrant children, or children of immigrant parents, who speak Spanish and little or no English when they start school, and (b) second- or later-generation children who speak only English or bilingual children who are fluent in English but have varying levels of proficiency in Spanish. In terms of underachievement, school dropout rates, and college entrance and graduation rates, these two groups of Hispanic students have become more similar over time (Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010).

Although many educators and stakeholders have argued that ELLs and other children should be educated in an English-only environment, as evidenced by English-only legislation in several states, other educators, psychologists, and neurologists have demonstrated that bilingual education can improve cognitive and academic functioning in children and adults (Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010). According to research on ELL students, those instructed in their primary language in addition to English perform at or above their peers when measured on reading and math tests in English. Biliteracy benefits ELLs in a bilingual program, whereas their ELL peers are not educated in monolingual English settings.

Theoretical Framework

Maslow's hierarchy of needs served as the first theoretical framework in this study. To implement the best instructional models, educators must know their students' needs. Maslow defined the essential components individuals require to succeed. With this hierarchy, Maslow demonstrated how important it is for general education elementary teachers to understand their students' basic classroom needs. The linguistic requirements for social and academic language acquisition differ. The ELLs’ educational needs and cultural and social acclimation are necessary in the classroom environment (Sosa & Bhathena, 2019).

Piaget's (1951, 1952, 1964) theory of cognitive development served as the second theory in this research study. According to this theory, children's intelligence develops over time, and they think differently than adults. Sensory, motor, preoperational, concrete, and formal operational stages are all represented in a child's intellectual ability. Each of these takes place over a specific period, though the time frames serve only as guidelines for expected developmental changes. This theoretical framework suited this applied research because it contributes to a fundamental understanding of students' learning, which is necessary when considering appropriate standardized assessments and instructional strategies.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was that English language learners at Wiley Elementary School had failed to meet the TEA expectations for performance on the STAAR in reading (TEA, 2021a). Specifically, TEA (2021a) defined low test scores as those indicating a student's incomplete understanding of essential concepts. Educators intended the STAAR tests to assess what students learn in each grade and whether they are prepared to move on to the next grade level. STAAR performance standards link test performance levels to the expectations defined in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills curriculum standards (TEKS).

The TEA (2021) established cut scores to distinguish between performance levels or categories. The standard-setting process refers to the process of establishing cut scores that define performance levels for an assessment. The standard set also assigns students to a performance category. The labels for the performance categories on the STAAR and the STAAR Spanish are master's grade level, meets grade level, approaches grade level, and did not meet grade level. The district aimed for 90% of students to perform at the approaches level, 60% to perform at the meets level, and 30% at the master's level. In the previous three academic years

when educators administered the STAAR, less than 20% of EL students performed at the meets level, less than 61% at the approaches level, and less than 8% at the master's level, with 40% failing to meet grade-level expectations on the STAAR for reading.

In this study, the researcher defined low test scores as those demonstrating an incomplete understanding of genre analysis, the inability to understand and analyze various written texts across reading genres, and the inability to comprehend and analyze literary and informational texts. Students who score lower than 52% on the assessment or earn 17 out of a possible 34 points are considered to have failed to meet the state's expectations (TEA, 2019). The aim of administering the STAAR is to measure performance and ensure all students receive what they need to succeed academically. The ability to meet students' learning needs primarily depends on the collaboration of schools, parents, and community members.

The educational achievement gap between English speakers and ELLs demonstrated that English speakers outperform ELLs on all standardized tests (Kena et al., 2016). ELLs account for more than 9% of the public school population in the United States (Lopez, 2019). According to Lombaldi and Behrman (2016), in the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test, ELLs scored 39 points lower than non-English learners in fourth grade, 45 points lower in eighth grade, and 53 points lower in 12th grade on a scale of 0 to 500. Thus, a need existed to investigate ELLs' reading underperformance and the growing achievement gap between them and monolingual speakers. This study focused on the potential for balanced literacy as a reading intervention in elementary dual-language programs to help ELLs succeed.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to solve the problem of low reading achievement among English language learners at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas. The first step in meeting

this objective was to conduct structured interviews with principals, literacy instructional coaches, and elementary school leaders to determine the effectiveness of dual language instruction. The second step involved conducting a focus group with teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators to assess the gaps in dual language instruction. Finally, the third step involved a review of documents at Wiley Elementary school.

Significance of the Study

The research was significant for the students at Wiley Elementary School, but other schools faced similar issues, so the study's findings could be disseminated throughout the district and possibly throughout Texas. The study will benefit educators, students, and critical stakeholders in the community by contributing to resolving the issue of low reading achievement at Wiley Elementary School. A wealth of information and research exists about various pedagogies developed in the United States and other countries to address ELLs' learning challenges (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016).

Nationally, concern has grown about how to meet ELLs' learning needs (Hopkins & Schutz, 2019). Barrow and Markman-Pithers (2016) asserted that Spanish is the home language of 76.5% of public elementary and secondary EL students across all grade levels, followed by Arabic, Chinese, English, and Vietnamese. The authors added that ELLs are more likely to come from low-income families with fewer resources at home. The average EL faces the disadvantages of coming from a low-income family and being an EL in a primarily English-language education system. Barrow and Markman-Pithes pointed to the difficulty of determining which disadvantage causes poor EL educational outcomes. Early achievement disparities between ELs and their native-English-speaking peers can still result in lower academic achievement.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

Central Question: How can English language learners' scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas be improved?

Sub-question 1: How would instructional coaches and administrators in an interview solve the problem of low test scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas for English language learners?

Sub-question 2: How would dual language teachers participating in a focus group solve the problem of low test scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas for English language learners?

Sub-question 3: How does a review of documents inform the problem of low test scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas for English language learners?

Definitions

The following terms and definitions were used in this research study.

1. *Achievement gap* - The achievement gap in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between students (Wu et al., 2021)
2. *Content or academic language* – Content and academic language both refer to language related to academic subjects, such as English, mathematics, science, or social studies (Shin, 2018).

3. *English language learners* - ELL students have initiative's core assumption difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016).
4. *English proficiency* – English proficiency refers to student performance as reported in terms of the English language proficiency levels described as beginning, intermediate, advanced, and advanced high (Howard et al., 2018).
5. *Language 1* – Language 1 refers to the student's congenital language; for ELLs, this would be a language other than English.
6. *Language 2* – Language 2 refers to the student's second language; for ELLs, this language would be English.
7. *Newcomer* – A newcomer is an ELL- or an LEP-identified student (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2019).
8. *Second language acquisition* – Second language acquisition refers to the study of how second languages are learned (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2019).

Summary

This chapter presented the gravity of the achievement gap between Spanish ELL students and their English-speaking peers. Since 1980, the proportion of Americans aged 5 and older who speak a language other than English at home has increased significantly. Today, more than 60 million people speak another language at home, with roughly two-thirds speaking Spanish. One in every five students in American public schools comes from a family where English is not the primary language, and approximately 11% of all students are classified as ELLs (Pak, 2018).

The children of immigrants account for nearly all the recent growth in U.S. public schools. These children contribute significantly to the nation's cultural and linguistic assets

(Gandara & Escamilla, 2017). According to research, enhancing these assets through bilingual instruction represents the most effective way to improve ELs' academic achievement and social and psychological well-being. Bilingual education would also benefit ELLs and the nation (Gandara & Escamilla, 2017). Because children with poor English skills are less likely to succeed in school and beyond (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016), public schools must find a way to effectively instruct them so they can improve productive socioeconomic outcomes. The issue of low reading achievement among ELLs at Wiley Elementary School must be addressed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this study was to solve the problem of low reading achievement among English language learners at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas. Although Wiley Elementary School implemented a dual-language model, students' achievement remained behind their White, monolingual peers, and the school received an overall F accountability rating in the 2018–2019 academic year (TEA, 2020). PISD diligently implemented and promoted the dual-language program. Still, continuous underperformance has persisted among ELLs and LEPs at Wiley Elementary School during the 2018–2019 school year. Chapter Two provides a study overview, discussions of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, a review of the related literature, and a summary.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks and their components must be linked to research methods. An explanation of the theoretical foundation for this multimethod applied research study facilitates an understanding of the related literature, research questions, and data to solve the specific research problem from a theoretically grounded perspective. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Cherry, 2019) and Piaget's (1951, 1952, 1964) theory of cognitive development served as the theoretical foundations for this research study.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is a very well-known motivation theory. Maslow initially developed a hierarchy of needs in his 1943 paper “A Theory of Human Motivation,” which he later expanded on in his book *Motivation and Personality* (Cherry, 2019). According to Maslow’s hierarchy, people are motivated to meet basic needs before addressing advanced needs

(Cherry, 2019). Cherry (2019) explained that Maslow's hierarchy is mainly depicted as a pyramid (see Figure 1), with the lowest levels representing fundamental deficient needs or needs arising from deprivation. According to Cherry, Maslow referred to the upper-section needs as growth needs, which individuals are only motivated to satisfy by a desire to advance personally. According to Cherry, Maslow's hierarchy of needs includes physiology, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Food, water, warmth, and rest all serve as examples of physiological conditions. Security needs involve personal safety, whereas love and belonging relate to intimate relationships and friends. Prestige and feelings of accomplishment represent examples of esteem needs. Finally, self-actualization entails an individual realizing their full potential (Cherry, 2019).

Figure 1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

MacDonald et al. (2013) depicted ELLs' four primary needs as intertwined but must coincide dimensions: culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. The authors asserted the following four dimensions are essential for ELL students in the dual-language education classroom: academic development, language development, and cognitive development, which includes social and cultural processes. According to Herrera and Murry, the need to focus on these four dimensions implies that the dual language education elementary classroom teacher must be aware of the individual students' physiological needs to assist in specific planning to address their diverse needs. When students' basic needs (e.g., food and clothing) are met, they will more likely be able to concentrate in class.

By categorizing individuals' physical, emotional, social, and intellectual qualities and by providing a lens through which to examine how they impact learning, Maslow significantly contributed to teaching and classroom management in schools. Teachers must ensure that students' social and emotional needs are met in the classroom, which is the second level of Maslow's hierarchy. Educators can meet these needs by implementing a social and emotional learning program. According to Keehne et al. (2018), teachers must be visible individuals who implement social and emotional learning practices in schools and classrooms. According to the authors, teachers must be aware of their social–emotional competence because their well-being significantly impacts their students. Teacher–student relationships in the classroom promote deep learning and positive social and emotional development in students (Keehne et al., 2018).

Self-actualization represents the fifth level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (McLeod, 2020). According to Maslow, the final level of needs is self-efficacy, which is achieved when an individual feels capable, self-assured, and confident. Students in a dual-language education classroom have varying social and cognitive conditions; the teacher learns to assess these

differences and differentiate instruction based on the needs they observe. With his theory, Maslow promoted awareness of these needs and the need to address them before or during instruction. As a result, Maslow's theory provided a foundation for this study aimed at identifying elementary teachers' dual language education motivations when teaching in ways based on the individual needs of ELL students.

Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist who believed that mental development happens in stages, formulated one of the most widely recognized theories of cognitive development (Kurt, 2020). Piaget studied children from infancy to adolescence to determine how they developed logical thinking. Kurt (2020) explained that Piaget attempted to document cognitive development stages by observing children's memory processes. Kurt asserted that according to Piaget's theory, humans create their understanding of the world. As a constructivist, Piaget believed that learning results from a combination of two processes: assimilation and accommodation. Piaget asserted that for children to understand a new concept, they must first reflect on their previous experiences and then adjust their expectations to include the unique experience (Kurt, 2020). Piaget was more concerned with the cognitive developments that occurred over time.

The first stage, sensorimotor, refers to how infants learn until they reach the age of two (Piaget, 1952). Infants recognize information through their senses from birth: by touching, looking, and listening (Kurt, 2020). Piaget considered this stage critical to their development, and each subsequent step is built on the growth in this stage (Kurt, 2020). The second stage is known as the preoperative stage. Language continues to develop during this stage, as does pretend play and associated skills. This stage lasts from age 2 to age 7 (Piaget, 1951). Finally, the third stage lasts from age 7 to 11 (Piaget, 1964).

According to Piaget (1964), children reside in the concrete operational stage. Cherry (2019) described children's thinking as more factual, literal, and logical during this stage, and Cherry asserted that the fourth stage, the formal operational stage, occurs between the ages of 12 and 26. The author claimed this fourth stage is distinguished by an increase in logic, the ability to use deductive reasoning, and an understanding of abstract concepts. Cherry explained that children can begin to think more scientifically about their surroundings and the world around them and added that during the final stage, they develop the skills to make plans and propose hypothetical situations.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development served as a foundation for this study because it explains how children acquire knowledge from birth to adolescence and beyond into adulthood. This information was essential to the study because it was necessary to understand how students learn and build on their experiences, how they learn in the present moment, and how they can best demonstrate learning. The STAAR for reading represents one way students can demonstrate their understanding aligns with Piaget's theory of cognitive development; the assessment scores provide evidence of student learning and the student’s ability to use various problem-solving strategies (Piaget, 1964).

Related Literature

Children whose first language is not English account for roughly 20% of all public school students. Immigrants have traditionally settled in large urban areas; however, they now live in cities, suburbs, and rural areas across the country (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). The resulting linguistically and culturally diverse American classrooms require a unified model for instructing ELLs. Larson et al. (2020) argued that linguistically and culturally responsive interventions are needed to support the learning of ELLs.

U.S. children with limited English proficiency are less likely to succeed in school and beyond. English immersion (TEA, 2020) and bilingual education are two terms used to describe methods for teaching English language learners (L1 & L2). Debate exists about which type of teaching most benefits students. Because of this uncertainty, researchers and policymakers cannot agree on English learner education (TEA, 2020). Questions remain about whether programs should help ELLs become genuinely bilingual or help them become proficient in English as quickly as possible. Language and literacy development in the student's native language is essential for cognitive development and learning.

Bilingual students create a one-of-a-kind interdependent system in which languages interact to improve linguistic functionality. This linguistic interdependence facilitates literacy skills from Language 1 to Language 2. Students who do not speak English as their first language use their native language as a foundation for communication (TEA, 2020). For example, explicit and systematic instruction in the appropriate Spanish skills sequence, combined with early English as a second language-based literacy instruction, is essential for student success (TEA, 2020). Because 28% of Texas's sequence K–3 students are ELs, and 89% of these children come from Spanish-speaking families, educators must consider ELs' literacy and cultural needs. Texas currently has more than 130 languages represented in its schools. Data show that third-grade students who read below grade level have significantly lower graduation rates than their peers who read at or above grade level (TEA, 2020). In addition, students who do not meet grade-level expectations are less likely to succeed in the next grade level or course unless they receive significant, ongoing, and sequenced academic intervention (TEA, 2020).

The inability to read has ramifications for children, families, and society. Teenagers and adults with low literacy skills have higher dropout rates, law enforcement involvement,

incarceration, poverty, and mental health issues (TEA, 2020). However, another concern emerges when reviewing Hispanic students' academic success in higher education: they are underrepresented, accounting for only 11% of all college students (TEA, 2020).

The literature on dual-language models and the importance of using culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies to support ELLs has been discussed in the previous sections. Despite efforts by the El Paz School District to implement dual-language programs, some ELLs have continued to struggle with literacy. This research aimed to determine why ELLs at Wiley Elementary School performed poorly on the STAAR reading test. In 2018–2019, English language learners at Wiley Elementary School did not perform at the approaches-, meets-, or master-level for reading on the STARR, although many ELLs in EPSD met state requirements.

Students must possess literacy skills to perform well on reading assessments and examinations in other content areas such as math, science, and social studies. In addition, students take exams to determine their readiness for college, a career, or the military. Unfortunately, as measured by the STAAR, ELLs at Wiley Elementary School lagged behind their peers.

Recently, researchers have raised concerns about how educators can meet the reading achievement, linguistic, and cultural needs of the country's growing population of ELLs. According to Knight (2019), NCLB policies required educators and policymakers to review accountability measures and analyze schools that failed to meet their adequate yearly progress targets for ELLs. The law then required administrators to devise corrective actions to address achievement gaps. The ELL population is expected to more than double by 2050, and most, if not all, teachers will be teaching ELLs in the coming year (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Li and

Peters (2016) stated that ELLs are the fastest growing segment of the school population, particularly in urban schools. Therefore, preparing mainstream or urban educators to work effectively with ELLs represents a critical instructional challenge that must be met (Feiman-Nemser, 2018). Urban schools function as the statistical epicenter for ELL students, so adding educational models would impact these schools.

For many years, researchers, educators, and policymakers have debated how to prepare students whose native language is not English to succeed in classrooms where English is the language of instruction (Murphy et al., 2019). According to Serafini et al. (2020), designers of language instruction policies and practices worldwide have responded to linguistic and cultural diversity in various ways, resulting in varying access to bilingual and multilingual forms of education. Garcia and Godina (2017) asserted many instructional programs used with Spanish-speaking children grew from monolingual English reading research, aiming to improve ELLs' English reading performance but not their Spanish or bilingual performance. The authors continued that instructional programs aimed at strengthening bilingual learners' oral reading fluency in English succeeded but did not improve their English reading comprehension. According to Garcia and Godina, when researchers incorporated ELLs' first language and ESL features to support their understanding of English, the instructional programs became more effective. As a result, the bilingual children who participated in the study could elaborate on their interpretations of English texts in Spanish. In this way, instruction and assessment included the learner's native language, allowing students to rely on first-language skills to help them understand English.

The growing ELL population in general education elementary classrooms has challenged teachers to implement instructional strategies and specific language models that will meet

students' academic, cultural, and social needs. Despite abundant resources for general education instruction, general education teachers with embedded language acquisition and social context within the core content have limited resources (Herrera & Murry, 2005). Regarding ELLs, teachers must present instruction so that a diverse population of students can succeed (Herrera & Murry, 2005). Maslow elaborated on the importance of education, beginning with the necessity for educational cultivation and progress. Language acquisition in simple social skills within social settings, necessary interpersonal skills, and cognitive academic language proficiency skills in the classroom represent basic requirements for the EL population (Herrera & Murry, 2005).

U.S. students with limited reading and comprehension proficiency in English are less likely to succeed in school than their White English-speaking peers. They may have difficulty finding high-paying jobs. Individuals with strong bilingual and bicultural skills, on the other hand, are in high demand. Meanwhile, the educational achievement gap for ELLs has widened, with native English speakers outperforming ELLs on all standardized test measures (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017; Kena et al., 2016).

Immigration and Assimilation

A significant three-way overlap exists among Latino, dual-language, and immigrant children (Gjelten, 2015). Most immigrant families speak a language other than English at home (most commonly Spanish), and most Latino children in the United States are the children of immigrants. The number of Latinos in the United States has doubled in the last 60 years, from 10 million in 1970 to 20 million in 2000. Gjelton (2015) identified Latino students as the largest minority group in schools but also explained that each year, unique people with their cultural histories become new citizens of the United States.

Children from migrant families represent a subset of the larger population of ELs who face unique challenges in school (Wood et al., 2018). ELLs' difficulties include developing and maintaining basic literacy skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (TEA, 2021a). Decoding, encoding, and language comprehension all present challenges for ELLs (TEA, 2020). Reading comprehension is hampered without adequate biliteracy decoding, encoding, and language skills.

Despite the historical trend of ELL students primarily residing in urban areas, an increasing number have dispersed to rural areas and migrated between schools. El Paso, Texas, a border city in the United States, is located near Juarez, Mexico. One El Paso school, referred to by a pseudonym, Lola Institution, in a study by Campbell (2019), provided a prime example of these migrating students, with 70% of the student population residing in Juarez but crossing the border daily for class. Educators in schools such as Lola Institution may have a diverse background and education in language diversity and adapt to culturally and linguistically diverse children (Wood et al., 2018). However, academic performance may not accurately reflect these students' intellectual capabilities. Although the Lola Institution was bilingual, Campbell reported that educators still administered standardized tests in English, and the achievement gap persisted for ELL students.

Socioeconomic Variables

In their report, Feliciano and Lanuza (2017) addressed the concept of immigrant advantage, which affects second-generation immigrants. The phrase refers to how most immigrant students outperform their peers of similar socioeconomic status with native-born American parents. The authors explained these second-generation immigrant students complete more years of schooling or earn higher ranking postsecondary degrees than their native-born

peers. These students' high average rates of educational attainment result in white-collar jobs. Such high academic achievement occurs among the children of Asian immigrants, who progress into benchmark occupations with socioeconomic success. Engineering, science, and medicine are among these professions (Lee & Zhou, 2015)

Second-generation Americans are children born to immigrants in the United States (Valdez, 2018). Second-generation students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds as White students tend to outperform their White peers, whereas the subgroup statistically underperforms their White peers. This paradox exists because many Central American and Mexican immigrants typically have lower educational attainment levels and lack organizational resources that allow for information sharing and advancement strategies in the public school system (Drouhot & Nee, 2019).

Children with Hispanic immigrant parents who arrive in the United States with relatively low educational and occupational attainments frequently emulate their parents' achievements. Only 28% of second-generation Mexicans and 32.5% of second-generation Central Americans—the descendants of the most socially disadvantaged groups—are approximately 3 times more likely to be in managerial and professional positions than their foreign-born counterparts (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine & Committee on Population, 2016). The remaining 72% and 67.5% of second-generation Mexicans and Central Americans, respectively, are more likely to work in service and laborious occupations than in more academic careers (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine & Committee on Population, 2015).

Cultural Identity After Assimilation and Socioeconomic Achievement

Successful Mexican Americans have frequently integrated their middle-class and Mexican identities (Drouhot & Nee, 2019), allowing them to advance while maintaining ethnic solidarity with less fortunate communities (Drouhot & Nee, 2019). Upward mobility generates social capital based on ethnic organizations and middle-class role models, similar to the collective culture of achievement and mobility found in many Asian American communities (Lee & Zhou, 2015).

Although social mobility can lead some people to identify as White (Emeka & Vallejo, 2011), middle-class members of immigrant groups frequently maintain hyphenated identities in which ethnic belonging and socioeconomic success are not mutually exclusive (Jimenez & Horowitz, 2013). According to Liu (2014), some reports have suggested that Hispanics, rather than forging a distinct ethnic identity and becoming the driving force of a "majority–minority" future, may instead seek to be the latest group of immigrants, like Italian or Jewish immigrants, to "become White." The research revealed three significant points in the Annual Population Association of America meeting report. First, Hispanic individuals can be of any race, including Black, White, and Asian. The census intended the label "Hispanic," which means "with origins or heritage in Spanish-speaking countries," to be a category of linguistic and ethnic heritage rather than an official race in and of itself. Second, according to Liu, Hispanics do not want to identify as White.

Liu (2014) discovered an increasing number of Hispanic individuals, when confronted by pre-2020 government forms requiring them to choose a race, they chose "White." Second, developing researchers argued that the complexities and limitations of the census forms before the 2020 updates were at least as important as any underlying desire among Hispanics to be

White. Third, some Hispanic individuals have expressed confusion about the desire of other Hispanic individuals to be White rather than Hispanic, expressing the class's subtle reality through the ponderous language of color. According to a Pew Research report (Liu, 2014), the longer an extended Hispanic family resided in America, the more likely they were to check the White box. Finally, identifying as White equates upward mobility and mainstream integration with becoming White. As highlighted by the reactions to these findings, a significant risk existed that some people would continue to treat whiteness as a social baseline for being American.

Culture and Language

Cultural and linguistic diversity primarily refers to the presence of non-Caucasian people of color. However, it can also include Caucasian or White people outside the mainstream of American culture (Leake & Black, 2005). American mainstream refers to most Americans who identify with Caucasian/White American cultural traditions and values and speak English as their first language (Di Stefano & Camicia, 2018). Di Stefano and Camicia (2018) discovered that belonging and identity are essential to community culture.

According to Di Stefano and Camicia (2018), speakers of languages other than English in the U.S. educational system have been subjected to labels that marginalize them. LEP student, ELL, EL, and newcomer are all labels. The authors point out that these categories derive from a deficit-oriented approach, with cultural and racial differences interpreted as a deficiency. Bilingual programs marginalize the identities of speakers of languages other than English, holding up English speaking as the standard against which all other speakers are measured (Di Stefano & Camicia, 2018). According to Di Stefano and Camicia, some bilingual programs do not provide adequate services for students who speak languages other than English at home, which is an essential part of their cultural and linguistic background. Transitional and ESL

educational models that do not teach core content in an ELL's native language fail to provide ELLs with educational opportunities in their language. The authors also argued that if designers intended dual-language programs to provide equity of access to education for Hispanic and language-minority students, teachers must consider ensuring equity among all students in the classroom.

Educators must allow all students have a voice and give them opportunities to contribute to classroom discussions. Di Stefano and Camicia (2018) researched the development of a dual-language program in a predominantly Hispanic community. They used a culturally sustaining pedagogy to develop cross-cultural competencies among the dual-language students who participated in their study. The researchers discovered that students' understanding of their identities evolved according to their sense of belonging and language practices. Furthermore, Di Stefano and Camicia found that the students' sense of belonging and language tradition linked to their identity via places, languages, and various cultural features that alluded to their collective and shared community. Food, family, music, dance, and other cultural features specific to a particular ethnic group can all be incorporated into these shared experiences. The data revealed factors that intersect with identity and culturally sustaining pedagogy, such as the role model teacher and migration issues. To serve as a role model for students, the teacher mediated identity development and culturally sustaining pedagogical practices (Di Stefano & Camicia, 2018).

Glover et al. (2017) investigated highly effective teaching strategies to learn about how teachers incorporated a culturally responsive approach in their classroom instruction. The researchers chose these teacher participants because they were award-winning educators who successfully taught diverse students. The researchers defined award-winning teachers as those named teacher of the year at the school or district levels. Reviewing existing literature, the

researchers conceptualized culturally responsive teaching to frame the study. They examined how award-winning teachers used culturally responsive practices as an assessment technique to develop culturally responsive urban learning environments. The researchers (Glover et al., 2017) defined urban education in the educational context of their study as urban emergent schools that are typically located in large but not major cities. According to the researchers, large cities usually share some of the same characteristics and challenges as urban-intensive schools and districts regarding resources, teacher qualifications, and academic development.

Glover et al. (2017) described culturally responsive teaching as a theoretical framework that supports classroom instructional practices based on students' cultural backgrounds and experiences. With this framework, the authors also challenged the notion that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds cannot succeed unless they conform to Eurocentric values, ideals, and lifestyles. On the other hand, culturally responsive teaching suggests that students of color have deeply rooted funds of knowledge that, when effectively activated, can add a rich depth to a subject and curricula presented in the classroom (Quezada & Alexandrowicz, 2019).

In their study, Glover et al. (2017) included seven award-winning teachers who provided insight into how to increase student achievement in urban schools and close achievement gaps. According to the researchers, culturally responsive teachers care and spend time connecting with students and their families. The researchers discovered four major themes that may inform educators' culturally responsive classroom teaching. To begin, educators are compassionate and understanding in their efforts to ensure the success of culturally diverse students. Second, culturally responsive teachers ensure their classrooms represent beliefs and attitudes about other

cultures. Finally, another recurring theme is that teachers reflect on their cultural frames of reference (Glover et al., 2017).

The final characteristic of culturally responsive teachers is their awareness and understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds. Culturally responsive teachers actively seek information about the cultures represented in their classrooms (Glover et al., 2017). According to Machado (2017), multilingual students bring a wealth of linguistic and cultural knowledge to their schools and engage in literacy in various ways. Diversity in U.S. classrooms can lead to rich linguistic, cultural, and literate learning environments. Nonetheless, although cultural and linguistic diversity exists in a school's student body, it is rarely reflected in how educators conceptualize literacy teaching and learning in classrooms. According to Machado, educators who teach literacy and use language have become increasingly standardized and regulated. Machado said that standardized test performance levels frequently favor language and literacy practices associated with the dominant White culture.

Dong (2017) researched strategies for using prior information, native language and culture, and previous reading academic achievement to meaningfully and effectively teach social studies concepts to ELLs. According to Dong, students in U.S. social studies classrooms come from various linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. The theoretical framework for this study was developed by focusing on culturally relevant pedagogy and linguistically responsive teaching. Dong researched culturally relevant pedagogy and its impact on ELLs. The author argued the importance of restructuring the social studies curriculum and preparing prospective social studies teachers to use culturally relevant pedagogy and linguistically responsive teaching approaches to teach diverse students. The theoretical framework for this

study was developed by combining two lines of research literature: culturally relevant pedagogy and linguistically responsive teaching.

Dong (2017) discovered that culturally relevant pedagogy arose from 1990s research on educational disparities among racial minority groups. Dong argued that, compared to other subject areas, such as math and science, social studies presented additional challenges for ELLs who lacked knowledge about U.S. history and encountered culture and language barriers. Dong showed that although 72% of native English-speaking high school students achieved proficiency in global history, and 75% of that same group achieved proficiency in U.S. history in the 2015–2016 school year, only 23% of New York City public high school ELLs achieved mastery in global history and 29% in U.S. history. In addition, although many social studies teachers have made significant progress in meeting the needs of ELLs by providing vocabulary support and utilizing technology and visual aids, they are often hesitant to incorporate their prior knowledge.

Even if ELLs disclose prior experience, teachers may not recognize it as relevant or appropriate prior knowledge. Dong (2017) used culturally relevant pedagogy and linguistically responsive teaching methods. In Dong's study, teacher candidates created lesson plans with ELLs in mind. As a result, the educators actively connected their students' backgrounds and perspectives. They boosted students' self-esteem and sharpened their critical thinking abilities. When teachers use culturally relevant pedagogy, students respond positively and actively participate in learning. Schettino et al. (2019) attempted to define how educators conceptualize culture in the classroom through his framework of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies. Proponents of culturally sustaining pedagogy encourage all children and youth to engage in various activities.

Achievement and Learning Gap Among ELLs

Terry et al. (2018) reported children from minority backgrounds underperform compared to their Caucasian peers in U.S. schools. When comparing Caucasian children's performance with that of Latino or Hispanic children, these achievement gaps become clear. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has consistently noted significant performance disparities between Hispanic and White students. Over the last 30 years, research has shown a slight narrowing of these gaps (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). These persistent achievement disparities also appear in reading (Terry et al., 2018).

Empirical evidence has confirmed that Hispanic children raised in low socioeconomic status households have more moderate oral language processing, production, and reading comprehension than their White peers (Terry et al., 2018). Students considered at risk are more likely than their White peers to have fewer and poorer quality oral language interactions at home and school (Hoff, 2012). Inequalities in reading and literacy-related skills between ELs and native English speakers frequently emerge early and persist throughout students' school careers (Calderon et al., 2011). According to Caldas et al. (2019), as achievement gaps persist, educators, politicians, parents, and the school community all seek resources to reduce inequalities.

The disparity between advantaged and diverse, disadvantaged groups of students is visible both culturally and linguistically (Ferguson et al., 2015). Researchers have discovered that different family and community environments and classroom student experiences contribute to achievement disparities (Alexander et al., 2014; Caldas & Bankston, 2014; Garcia, 2015). Researchers have also shown that by age 6, children's families, parents' psychological support for their children's schooling, the neighborhood and school's socioeconomic status, and the

school's academic profile all influence a student's resources. Family dynamics also affect the risks adolescents and young adults face (Alexander et al., 2014).

According to Caldas et al. (2019), disparities frequently reflect socioeconomic status. Compared to their middle-class peers, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often exhibit limited language development (Garcia, 2015). Poverty-related inequalities persist in the classroom. According to Caldas et al., students from low socioeconomic backgrounds frequently have limited language development compared to their middle-class peers. In addition, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often attend schools with limited resources, making it challenging to attract and retain highly qualified teachers and administrators.

According to Kieffer and Thompson (2018), researchers consistently showed a significant achievement gap between ELLs and their monolingual peers on state and national standardized tests. The authors cited a recent report on key NAEP trends that highlighted the stagnation of non-English speakers over the last 15 years. According to this report, the U.S. educational system has made little progress in meeting the instructional needs of ELLs. In all content areas, Texas educators have aimed for all students to perform at the approaches, meets, and master's levels. According to Kieffer and Thompson, focusing solely on the scores of students currently classified as ELLs can lead to false assumptions about whether education systems are improving or deteriorating in their service to this population. The study challenged the dominant narrative by emphasizing ELLs' underachievement and educational systems' failure to meet their linguistic needs.

Kieffer and Thompson (2018) used descriptive analyses of publicly available NAEP data to investigate whether and how much multilingual students' achievement improved in the United States between 2003 and 2015. The authors identified multilingual students based on students

reporting that people in their homes spoke a language other than English. Kieffer and Thompson defined monolingual students as students who said that no one in their homes spoke a language other than English. The authors discovered that between 2003 and 2015, NAEP achievement gaps between monolingual and multilingual fourth- and eighth-grade students respectively narrowed by 24% and 27% in reading and 37% and 39% in math. The researchers also showed that when these differences were converted into grade equivalents, multilingual students were about one-third to one-half of a grade level closer to their monolingual peers in 2015 than in 2003. Kieffer and Thompson concluded that contrary to expectations, multilingual students had made significant academic progress in the years studied, showing significantly higher reading and math achievement in 2015 than in 2003. The academic performance of multilingual students has improved to 2 to 3 times that of monolingual students, narrowing the gap by 24 to 39% depending on grade and subject.

Kieffer and Thompson (2018) suggested that future researchers investigate the relationship between education policy, practice changes, and multilingual student achievement. They contended that the significant progress of multilingual students demonstrated in their study indicated that the various changes were more beneficial than harmful. Therefore, the author anticipated that assessing new policy changes affecting multilingual students would be critical as schools implemented the ESSA. In NAEP, Kieffer and Thompson also demonstrated limitations.

NAEP variables did not allow Kieffer and Thompson (2018) to describe trends specifically for the ever-EL subgroup—the stable group of current and former ELs—to capture the effects of EL policies and practices more precisely. Furthermore, the multilingual students did not include all current ELs because a small percentage reported speaking a language other

than English less than “most or all of the time” (p.20). Therefore, the researchers suggested that NAEP collect information on students’ previous EL status and representation.

Factors That Affect Second Language Acquisition

Soltero (2011) explained that internal and external factors influence ELLs’ academic success or failure. Internal factors influencing students’ second language acquisition include self-esteem, age, learning style, personality traits, and native language proficiency level. According to the author, students have little control over external factors that influence their language acquisition. These factors include social conditions, learner-related structures, quality of second language instruction, teacher expectations, education policies, and society’s attitude toward the ELL’s background. Soltero asserted the negative attitudes of some teachers and students toward a minority language and its speakers make English acquisition difficult. Consistent underachievement among ELLs over the last few decades may indicate that educators have struggled to decide which curriculum to use with ELLs.

Soltero (2011) advocated for teachers and school leaders to recognize and accept shared schoolwide responsibility for ELLs’ education. Schools that serve ELLs require qualified ELL teachers, appropriate materials and learning tools, and an intelligent assessment system that measures student progress and the impact of programs and approaches on students (Van Roekel, 2011). According to Soltero (2011), many schools have deficiencies in all three areas. Van Roekel explained that general education teachers need practical, research-based information, resources, and strategies to teach, assess, and nurture ELL students. Soltero added that schools that affirm and promote ELLs’ language and cultural backgrounds and Hispanic social and economic circumstances are best positioned to advance educational improvements for students. According to Gandara (2017), Hispanic students lag far behind White and Asian students in

academic achievement and educational attainment because they frequently do not have the opportunity to attend preschool.

Furthermore, of all subgroups, Hispanic students are the least likely to attend preschool. Although Hispanic students have made significant gains in the last decade, only 52% of those aged 3 to 6 attend or have participated in a preschool program, compared to a national average of 61% for all children (Gandara, 2017; Taggart, 2018). Additionally, Hispanic students outperform their peers on the NAEP (Gandara, 2017). The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s resulted in a renewed desire to consider the plight of students who did not speak English, as well as a new understanding that making children feel ashamed of their language and culture was detrimental to their learning (Gandara, 2017).

Gandara (2017) argued that language rights had primarily been defined as freedom from discrimination, and bilingual educators have frequently been defensive about helping students maintain their native language. According to the researcher, most Americans believe bilingual education involves teaching English rather than educating students in two languages. With the continued educational growth of the Mexican population in the public schools of Texas's Rio Grande Valley, a need exists for new and innovative ways to educate ELLs. Immigrant children account for much of the recent increase in the ELL population in U.S. public schools (Gandara & Escamilla, 2017). These children bring a wealth of cultural and linguistic assets to the country. According to research, enhancing these assets through bilingual instruction would be the most effective way to improve their academic achievement and social and psychological well-being. It would also benefit their employment prospects and the country (Gandara & Escamilla, 2017).

A second language learner's first acquired language skill is social interaction, which can take anywhere from 2 to 4 years to master (Herrera & Murry, 2005). According to Herrera and

Murry (2005), basic interpersonal communication skills involve social settings and are less competitive or restrictive for CLD students. The authors believed that creating a classroom environment conducive to collaborative work and a less competitive environment allows for meaningful communication in the learning environment where scaffolded instruction addresses students' academic needs and promotes academic achievement in all content areas.

Language Program Models

ELLs who do not receive specialized assistance perform worse academically than their peers who receive technical language instruction through ESL or bilingual programs (Soltero, 2011). The various types of second language models differ between states and school districts. For ELLs, overlaps and blending of program types occur. Two-way or bilingual education provides one example of an additive language model (Soltero, 2011). Another example involves structured English immersion, which is considered a subtractive method.

Steele et al. (2017) researched seven cohorts of students who applied to kindergarten immersion programs in Portland between the fall terms of 2004 and 2010. The lottery applicant sample included 3,457 students, and the researchers also had information on 24,841 other students who enrolled in the district as prekindergarteners or kindergarteners during the study years.

Steele et al. (2017) asserted that immersion education is a comprehensive instructional method that can result in direct academic benefits such as multilingual proficiency while improving cognition and overall academic performance. The authors explained that researchers have reached varying conclusions about how linguistic similarity facilitates a bilingual advantage, with some data indicating that orthographically similar languages confer more significant benefits in executive control. According to Steele et al., many studies have been

conducted to compare students' performance in dual-language immersion versus monolingual education. However, most studies have been observational, and due to data constraints, they have been unable to fully account for unobserved differences between immersion and nonimmersion participants.

Steele et al. (2017) addressed this limitation by taking advantage of a lottery that randomly assigned students—native English speakers and ELs—to language immersion in Oregon's Portland Public Schools. Portland Public Schools represents one of the Pacific Northwest's two most important public school districts. Steel et al. conducted the most comprehensive random-assignment study of dual-language immersion, allowing them to track students across multiple immersion schools for up to 9 years. The researchers discovered that students randomly assigned to immersion programs in kindergarten outperformed their fifth-grade reading counterparts by 13% of a standard deviation and more than a fifth of a standard deviation in eighth-grade reading. The researchers said these estimates did not appear to differ according to a student's first language.

Steele et al. (2017) discovered that dual-language programs might have a different learning impact on ELLs than on native English speakers. Immersing ELLs in their native language for at least part of the school day allows them to receive a significant portion of core academic content instruction in a language they understand, share a classroom with native English speakers, and begin school with a baseline advantage in terms of knowledge of the partner language, which is English. The researchers argued that several meta-analyses supported the idea that ELs benefit from school-based instruction in their first language rather than dual-language immersion programs per se. The study also showed that among students randomly assigned to immersion, those whose native language matched the partner language had a 6%

lower chance of being classified as an EL by fifth grade and a 14% lower chance in sixth grade. This finding supported previous research showing an immersion gave ELLs an advantage during reclassification beyond the primary levels.

Steele et al. (2017) showed that students randomly assigned to immersion outperformed their peers in reading on state accountability tests by about 7 months in Grade 5 and 9 months in Grade 8. In addition, the researchers discovered no statistically significant benefit or detriment to immersion after examining mathematics and science scores. The researchers claimed this was significant because students receive 25 to 100% of their mathematics and science instruction in the partner language from kindergarten to Grade 5. The researchers collected the outcome data during the 2013–2014 academic year, allowing the oldest cohort to be observed through ninth grade and the youngest cohort to be observed through third grade.

According to Gandara and Escamilla (2017), students who speak languages other than English have been primarily viewed as having a challenge that should be remedied by public schools. However, researchers discovered a clear advantage for maintaining dual language and bilingual programs over English-only or transitional programs for students' achievement, attainment, and other outcomes. With bilingual, second language programs, educators aim to develop bilingualism, biliteracy, and cross-cultural competency. To this end, they include students who are monolingual English speakers as well as those who are learning English as a second language (Gandara & Escamilla, 2017).

According to Cervantes-Soon (2018), bilingual education is primarily perceived as an immigrant issue affecting every language-minoritized immigrant community. Communication has historically been a power source for many Latinos, mainly Mexican Americans in the Southwest and Puerto Ricans. Bilingual education became a highly politicized and central issue

that emerged during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s for these groups. According to Garza-Reyna (2019) and Butvilofsky et al. (2017), ELL students received bilingual education services with varying degrees of native language support based on state guidelines and district bilingual program implementations. Regardless of the style of bilingual education program received, each is intended to prepare the ELL academically for success in the K–12 system and beyond, allowing the student to learn content while addressing the ELL's unique language needs.

Lotta Lara is part of an extensive, paired literacy instructional program designed to improve ELL instruction (Butvilofsky et al., 2017). According to Butvilofsky et al. (2017), paired literacy instruction effectively promotes academic success for emerging bilingual learners. Paired literacy begins in kindergarten or first grade. With this form of instruction, educators teach children to read, write, speak, and listen in two languages simultaneously. In addition, two-way dual-language (TWDL) programs integrate students from various linguistic, cultural, and racial backgrounds. TWDL bilingual education methods have three critical goals for students: academic achievement, bilingualism and biliteracy, and sociocultural competence (Palmer et al., 2019).

In addition to the three core goals, Palmer et al. (2019) proposed a fourth core goal: critical consciousness. The researchers contended that emphasizing critical consciousness in TWDL education can help to increase equity and social justice. The TWDL programs are subsets of bilingual education. Educators place students who are dominant English speakers and authoritative speakers of a minority language, such as Spanish, in the same classroom to learn each other's languages. In a dual language immersion program, educators teach core content, and students learn a specific portion of their curriculum in each programming language.

Palmer et al. (2019) asserted that educators must prioritize equity to create a just society. They contended that if critical consciousness for students, teachers, parents, and leaders is infused in the curriculum, pedagogy, policies, and leadership of TWDL programs, all of these stakeholders will be better able to maintain an equity focus and fulfill their potential to support a more integrated and socially just society than they would when exposed to pedagogical approaches that do not include cultural and linguistic curriculum approaches. Teaching sociocultural competence, or the ability to negotiate across languages and cultures, becomes more profound as people learn about the Civil Rights Movement, which led to the development of educational programs such as TWDL. The researchers advocated for enhancing bilingualism, biliteracy, academic achievement, and sociocultural competence in a program centered on critical consciousness for all. Critical thinking must become a primary goal in TWDL schools to empower immigrant and language minority learners (Palmer et al., 2019).

Texas has advocated for dual language education since former Governor Dolph Briscoe signed the Bilingual Education and Training Act into law in 1973. This act repealed the 1918 English-only teaching requirement. Texas Senator Jose Rodrguez's Senate Bill 159 aided in preserving and expanding dual-language education in schools throughout the state. The bill also assisted in implementing programs in the El Paso Independent School District. The bill clarified teacher requirements in TWDL (Negron, 2015). National experts in dual language education and professionals at the University of Texas, El Paso, believe that a bilingual certified teacher in the Spanish-language component of the education program and an educator with an ESL certification to be essential.

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching

Hollie (2018) asserted that educators must learn about their students' cultures and languages and try to engage students in ways that validate and affirm their identities. The author added that cultural and linguistic responsiveness (CLR) in instruction empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by conveying knowledge through cultural references. According to the author, educators practice CLR to help them close achievement gaps in education when students' topics of language, race, and culture are combined with the pressure to improve standardized test scores. Teachers must also manage complex choices to address diversity issues and improve student achievement.

Hollie (2018) contended that CLR refers to a specific teaching methodology. The "how" of methods is divided into strategy and activity. The process implies that instructional activities must be planned strategically and deliberately. Educators must consider various factors, including outcome, purpose, standards-based relationships, time allocation, resources, students' prior knowledge, and other variables (Hollie, 2018). Many of the exercises used by CLR are familiar to teachers, according to Hollie. The difference, however, is in how the activities are strategically used to increase responsiveness to the student's cultural and linguistic needs. To build and bridge proficiency in standard English and academic vocabulary, educators must validate students' cultural and linguistic behaviors in the context of their home language.

Educators must communicate that any language can be used for communication (Hollie 2018). Teachers can begin to validate students' heritage language when recognizing students' linguistic behaviors as positives rather than deficits. As a result, educators can start constructing and bridging to enable students to acclimate to school culture and access language content. This

validation of the native language encourages students to acquire a second language (Hollie, 2018). Finally, instruction must fully meet the needs of the students (Hollie, 2018).

COVID-19 Impact on Student Learning

In March 2020, the United States enacted lockdown procedures to halt the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. No existing federal policies dictated what schools should do, so governors from each state implemented their own policies. Consequently, many school districts shifted to remote learning to provide an equitable and appropriate education for students (Huck & Zhang, 2021). Huck and Zhang (2021) asserted that since March 2020, teachers have stated in multiple online surveys that they were unprepared to teach online. Middleton (2020) added that during the pandemic, only a small percentage of course offerings occurred face-to-face, and the most vulnerable populations fell further behind with online instruction. Parents of school-age students struggled to balance the demands of work and the responsibility to ensure their children could access instruction from home. According to Middleton, students also struggled to engage and connect with their teachers and peers online. Huck and Zhang found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, children could not properly manage their remote instruction time. Middleton claimed factors such as stress, anxiety, illness, and the need to study in such a dramatically different manner (i.e., ways that were not in person) significantly affected students' ability to learn. Middleton explained that the lack of access to instructional materials increased students' risk of falling behind. A large percentage of Hispanic families have inadequate levels of formal education and struggle to read in English. Consequently, during the implementation of remote learning, Hispanic family members may have been unable to establish in-home teaching, assist children with their schoolwork, or provide extra educational opportunities (Lara et al., 2021).

Consequently, the effects of online learning during the pandemic had a greater impact on ELLs than they did on most of their classmates (Lara et al., 2021).

U.S. schools with a large population of students from immigrant and socioeconomically disadvantaged families were not prepared to transition to remote learning during the pandemic (Huck & Zhang, 2021). In many families, students lacked access to computers and the internet. Additionally, school officials encountered significant communication challenges with multilingual families when attempting to organize and disseminate resources online. Educators provided an overabundance of information to students and parents in English, with few accommodations for ELL families (Sayer & Braun, 2020). Furthermore, parents of students with limited or interrupted formal education did not always have the reading abilities needed to adequately comprehend school material. Compounding the problems for ELL students, implementation of online resources and remote learning for content area learning did not always help students' English acquisition. Online learning created a lack of the important social connections necessary to assist ELLs and their families (Sayer & Braun, 2020).

During remote learning, teachers reduced the content they presented to students, especially to students from schools with high rates of poverty (Middleton, 2020). Regarding ELLs, school districts reported having a limited number of appropriately trained instructors to teach these students through remote instruction (Lara et al., 2021). According to several of the school districts with the most enrolled ELLs, fewer than half of ELLs logged in for online teaching. To compensate for this shortfall, some districts used funds to provide summer instruction for elementary students and smaller in-person classes for migrant students; this allowed for more hands-on experiences (Middleton, 2020).

The pandemic negatively impacted ELLs' academic performance. Meanwhile, COVID-19-related school closures raised important issues for educators, researchers, and policymakers, including how virtual learning affects student achievement, which students are most affected, and the value of in-person schooling during a global pandemic (Grooms & Childs, 2021). Although many school districts did their best under the circumstances, the already troubling test score gap is likely to widen between ELLs and their English-speaking peers. In comparison to 2019, math and reading test scores for elementary and middle school children in the United States fell significantly. Sugarman and Lazarin (2020) explained that states and districts responded to March 2020 in a very inconsistent manner, and the ongoing public health crisis is likely to cause the existing gaps in opportunity and achievement to worsen. The authors called for more research to help educators fully comprehend the ways COVID-19 affected ELLs' academic progress.

Summary

This literature review provided information about the theoretical frameworks related to the study, which were Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Piaget's theory of cognitive development. These theories contribute to an understanding of how children learn in stages. The literature also provided information on standardized testing; the structure of standardized tests; the use of standardized testing in evaluating reading across the country; the history and evolution of the TEA testing process, including the use of the STAAR for reading (TEA, 2021); the underlying factors that influence ELs' performance on assessments; and strategies and interventions that can improve student achievement. To help close the achievement gap for ELLs, the literature offered processes such as providing linguistically and culturally responsive teaching techniques, analyzing student performance, and implementing targeted instruction.

According to Beachum (2018), some strategies can improve student performance on standardized assessments, which serve as indicators of students' proficiency with standards. According to the literature, educators implement strategies and interventions at Wiley Elementary to improve students' performance on the STAAR for reading (TEA, 2021). More research is needed to determine which processes are already in place and which benefit students in the short and long term. The literature emphasized the importance of research in this area; thus, this researcher designed this applied research study to contribute to the field of knowledge and close the gap in research regarding strategies that can best aid students' academic achievement.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to solve the problem of low reading achievement among ELLs at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas. The STAAR is a series of standardized tests used in Texas public and secondary schools to assess students' achievement and knowledge in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies (TEA, 2021). Texas educators administer the reading and math assessment to all students in Grades 3–5 at the elementary school level.

This chapter defines the study's purpose, including the research design and questions. It also provides descriptions of the setting in which the research occurred. Further sections include information about the participants, the researcher's role within the school and the study, data collection procedures, and the employed data analysis protocols. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's ethical considerations.

Design

The researcher adopted a multimethod research design for this applied study, incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods, to solve the problem of the achievement gap that existed at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The researcher deemed an applied research design appropriate for this study because "applied research uses scientific methodology to develop information to help solve an immediate, yet persistent, societal problem" (Bickman & Rog, 2009). This design involved both qualitative and quantitative methods of gathering data. The combination helped to illuminate the research problem in a way that neither method could effectively achieve by itself (Creswell, 2014). The researcher used this study's multimethod approach to gain complimentary views about the same phenomenon or

relationship, allowing the researcher to triangulate the data gathered from three sources and three different means (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The qualitative component of this study included an interview and a focus group. The third part of the multimethod approach consisted of reviewing archival data, including documents from the TEA regarding students' performance on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary over several years.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

Central Question: How can English language learners' scores on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas be improved?

Sub-question 1: How would instructional coaches and administrators in an interview solve the problem of low test scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley elementary school in West Texas for English language learners?

Sub-question 2: How would dual language teachers participating in a focus group solve the problem of low test scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley elementary school in West Texas for English language learners?

Sub-question 3: How does a review of documents inform the problem of low test scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley elementary school in West Texas for English language learners?

Setting

The site selected for this study was Wiley Elementary School, an urban school in West Texas. The school served 437 students, 53% male and 47% female (TEA, 2021). The enrollment was 90% Hispanic, 4% White, 4% African American, 1% Asian, 1% two or more races, less than 1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 30% ELL, and 86% economically disadvantaged

(Great Schools, 2021). Thirty-five teachers served the school, and the school administrators included a principal and one assistant principal. For this study, the researcher focused on the school's dual-language teachers.

This site represented an ideal location for significant reasons. The school's poor performance on the STARR for reading in recent years made it a perfect setting for the study. The effort to raise ELL students' reading performance emerged as a critical matter because improving students' performance on the STAAR would benefit their educational outcomes while also increasing overall school performance ratings. Secondly, the researcher worked in Wiley Elementary's school district, so ease of access and support within the school district made it an ideal site.

Participants

For this study, the researcher used nonprobability sampling. Use of a nonprobability sample involves identifying individuals as participants because they are readily available and convenient. The potential participants also possessed some characteristics the researcher sought to study (Creswell, 2015). Some of these elements included the amount of training, years of experience, and cultural competency. The sampling technique effectively provided information about specific cases or members of the study population who were intrinsically exciting and essential to the student (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Creswell (2015) defined purposeful sampling as the selection of participants made to better understand a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). The researcher in this study used purposeful sampling to select five participants for this study's interview component. The researcher chose administration and instructional coaches at Wiley Elementary School for their familiarity with the schools' historical performance on the STAAR for reading. The selection included a principal, an assistant principal, a school

counselor, one math instructional coach, and a literacy instructional coach. The researcher also selected dual language teachers in Grades 2–5 and one resource teacher to participate in the focus group. The researcher deemed these educators suitable candidates for the study portion because they directly influenced students' performance on the assessment.

The Researcher's Role

As an educator, a principal functions as an instructional leader who is responsible for ensuring educational equity across all subgroups. I was a principal in the city of El Paso, where I was also the instructional leader and coach for my campus. I used the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) with 30 teachers at my campus. The T-TESS system supports teachers' professional growth (TEA, 2021). Therefore, I understood the importance of observing teachers' instructional practices and ensuring lessons aligned with state standards. My motivation came from my desire to improve ELL students' education, as evidenced by their STAAR performance in reading. Improved scores would provide evidence of student learning, and an increase in scores could lead to an overall better rating for the school. Some of the participants in this study were my colleagues. Although I was a principal, I had no authority over the participants. There were no adverse consequences. For example, participants' responses did not affect their jobs. I informed the participants of my intentions for this study and the importance of the research concerning future instructional efforts to improve STAAR scores for reading at Wiley Elementary School.

My previous experiences as a classroom teacher and principal in the school district introduced biases and assumptions into this study. As a school district principal, I was eager to improve students' performance on the STARR for reading at Wiley Elementary School. Based on casual conversations and interactions before this study, I assumed that a systematic approach

to improving student performance on the STAAR for reading had not been effectively implemented. Due to my position within the school district, I used bracketing to remove my biases from the study's findings (Creswell, 2018).

In this study, I played a multifaceted role. I served as the interviewer and took responsibility for developing the interview questions, transcribing the interviews, and noting the tone and inflection of participant responses throughout each interview. I also asked follow-up questions promptly during the interviews. For the qualitative component of the study, I expected participants to be at ease in my presence due to my employment as a principal within the school district; however, I had no authority over the participant. For the quantitative parts of the study, I reviewed archival data in the form of test scores. I also analyzed the Likert scale survey results administered to dual language teachers at Wiley Elementary School.

Procedures

The involved school district did not grant permission for this study until the researcher had documentation that the proposal had been successfully defended. After the defense, the researcher obtained conditional approval and conditional consent from the university's institutional review board (IRB; see Appendix A). This process included the approval and defense of the research proposal and the IRB's review of the research (Liberty University, 2019). The IRB review process required the researcher to complete the general IRB application and signature page and then send it to the dissertation chair. Once the chair approved the documents, the researcher sent them to the IRB (Liberty University, 2019). The researcher made revisions to the study suggested by the IRB before gathering data (Liberty University, 2019).

The researcher obtained written permission to conduct the study from the elementary school division superintendent, but IRB approval was still required before data collection could

begin. On November 11, 2020, the researcher submitted a request to conduct research to the preferred school division. This was accomplished by completing a school division form that included information regarding problem, purpose, methodology, population, data collection, and survey instruments. The researcher received formal permission on November 21, 2020, through a letter that was provided to the researcher (see Appendix B). The letter has been redacted to maintain confidentiality. Upon approval from the area superintendent, the researcher sought permission from the principals of each elementary school. They obtained permission from the IRB once they successfully defended the proposal. The researcher submitted the IRB application, ancillary material, and documentation of site permissions to the chair for an initial review and approval (School of Education, 2019).

The researcher secured permission from the principal at Wiley Elementary School. The district's superintendent researched the school and utilized the information available regarding the school's performance on the STAAR for reading. The researcher recruited participants at Wiley Elementary School via email and secured consent forms (see Appendices C and D) from each participant before data collection.

Data Collection and Analysis

An applied research study requires qualitative and quantitative approaches, with at least one of these data collection methods being an interview (Liberty University, 2019). This multimethod approach benefits research because each brings different values. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to consider participants' thoughts, feelings, and ideas in the study context. Creswell (2018) asserted that data collection is essential for a research study involving multiple phases. Creswell stated, "An important step in the process is to find people or places to study and to gain access to and establish rapport with participants so that they will provide good

data" (Creswell, 2014, p. 147). In this study, an interview, a focus group and document reviews served as the primary data collection methods. Each of these methods addressed one of the research sub-questions. In addition, the researcher triangulated the collected data to develop a solution for low test scores on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary School. Data triangulation allowed the researcher to find common themes among data, including disconfirming evidence, which limited the researcher's bias in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researcher categorized data from the interviews and coded them according to a comparative method. Motivational patterns determined the initial coding for the teacher's choice of strategies, procedures, models, behavior patterns, words, and phrases used during instruction and familiar situations. Constant comparative analysis enabled the researcher to form meaning and develop new categories. These patterns guided the development of initial types. The coding method involved a table (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Interviews

The first sub-question for this study addressed how teachers and administration would solve low scores on the STAAR for reading at West Texas's Wiley Elementary School. The researcher collected data qualitatively via a 10-question semistructured interview to answer this question. The researcher deemed this approach appropriate for this study because it allowed them to construct an interview guide based on specific topics to be investigated. Furthermore, it enabled the researcher to format questions incorporating previous answers articulating each participant's experiences (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The researcher conducted this interview with five participants: the principal, assistant principal, school counselor, math instructional coach, and reading instructional coach at Wiley Elementary School. The researcher selected these

participants based on their historical familiarity with the STAAR for reading and Wiley Elementary School results.

The researcher conducted the interviews through teleconferencing using the Zoom platform. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hr and was recorded and transcribed by the researcher for data analysis. Throughout the interview, the researcher noted body language and tone to further define the participants' thoughts and feelings about each topic addressed in the interviews. The researcher used a field log to assist in the data collection phase and provided a detailed account of the time spent at each site (Creswell, 2014). The researcher categorically and chronologically organized, repeatedly reviewed, and continually coded the data (Creswell, 2014). The researcher also transcribed the audio-taped interviews verbatim using the online platform Zoom and regularly reviewed their field notes (Creswell, 2014). After completing the transcriptions, the researcher asked the participants to check their interviews for accuracy. The researcher then began the data analysis reading and coding. After coding, the researcher looked for emerging themes and sub-themes.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the participants to ensure they understood the risks associated with the research and the purpose of the study results. After the participants formally agreed to participate in the study, the researcher asked the following 10 questions.

1. How many years have you been an administrator/instructional coach?

This question allowed the researcher to evaluate the principal's experience level. Beginning principals face many challenges, and previous experience can help them navigate difficulties (Master et al., 2016).

2. What are your philosophies about teaching reading and literacy to your students at the

elementary level?

Responses to this question provided insight into teachers' instructional strategies and what motivated teachers to plan and deliver lessons (Swanson et al., 2017).

3. How do you make closing gaps a school-wide responsibility?

This question allowed the researcher to examine the principal's role in the educational improvement of all ELLs because principals are responsible for being the instructional leaders on their campuses. Principals must use data to help teachers with instructional decisions based on student performance. (Burns et al., 2019).

4. What language barriers do ELLs face that other students may not face?

Responses to this question provided the researcher with insight into the relationships administrators and instructional coaches build with students and their families (Case, 2015). The term "English language learner" foregrounds language even though it encompasses native languages, cultures, socioeconomic levels, and educational backgrounds (Case, 2015).

5. How would you use test data and other student performance research to inform instruction?

Several reports have been published for building reading research based on effective reading skills that include word study and text comprehension that should be present in teaching so that children can become successful readers (Swanson et al., 2017)

6. How would you involve teachers in the literacy curriculum that fosters inclusiveness and cultural awareness?

Responses to this question indicated whether respondents had developed the skills and strategies critical for providing a positive learning environment for a highly diverse student population (Miller & Martin, 2014).

7. What specific reading preparation is provided to students before taking the STAAR?

With this question, the researcher sought to ascertain what review and spiraling strategies respondents used with students to prepare them for the STAAR reading test. Such preparation can help reduce test anxiety, boost confidence, and prepare students more effectively, ensuring all students succeed (Adler-Greene, 2019).

8. What process do you use to analyze English language learners' unit assessments and benchmark assessment results?

This question provided the researcher insight into how administrators and instructional coaches used data to guide instruction. The purpose of the inquiries related to how teachers used instructional strategies and best practices to help close the achievement gap among ELLs (Duran, 2008).

9. What do you believe the next steps should be for teachers after the assessment results are shared with them?

The goal of this question was to find out how teachers use test data to make instructional decisions. When teachers collaborate to analyze test data, they can better understand their students' overall strengths and weaknesses, leading to changes in instructional practices that will help students perform better in the future (Adler-Greene, 2019).

10. How do the instructional resources, including textbooks and other campuses, district and in-class materials, and electronic tools, support daily instructional practices?

Responses to this question helped the researcher determine how much the current instructional materials supported daily classroom instruction. Appropriately aligned resources are essential for student success but must align with the course content and the standards' rigor (Ortiz et al., 2018).

11. What other feedback about how students' scores on the STAAR could be increased at Wiley could you add?

This final question allowed participants to provide any other thoughts about the STAAR for reading and the reason for the low scores. The open-ended format for this question allowed the researcher to collect more extensive data than could be gathered from a closed-ended question (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

After obtaining approval from the IRB, the researcher implemented the interviews, focus groups, and document reviews, beginning with the interviews The researcher chose to begin with the interviews in this multimethod design to capture the experiences of administrative participants in the research study. For the second method, the research performed document analysis. This method involved analyzing the interviews, which had been transcribed using Microsoft Word. The researcher transcribed the interviews so the participants could review the transcripts for correctness and validity.

Focus Group

The second sub-question for this study addressed the question of how dual language teachers participating in a focus group could solve the problem of low STAAR reading test scores at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas. Focus groups provide a method of gathering data that allows participants to interact and share information in a larger setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This focus group provided information about the topic and data on the participants' similarities and differences in educational practices for ELLS. The focus group required the researcher to select three teachers and two leadership members from Wiley Elementary School. The focus group lasted for 1 hr and took place over the online platform Zoom. The researcher

recorded the focus group using the Zoom software. Before the focus group started, all participants signed a consent form.

The focus group questions provided data that aided the researcher in determining whether Wiley teachers used culturally and linguistically appropriate instructional strategies (Dong, 2017).

1. How do dual language teachers regularly participate in meaningful data analysis conversations?

Responses to this question helped the researcher identify the level of engagement between teachers specifically related to data analysis (Adler-Greene, 2019).

2. Describe how teachers at this school try out new teaching methods in their grade/content area that can help underperforming students meet school standards.

Responses to this question helped the researcher determine whether teachers attempted to use high-quality instructional practices to help ELLs achieve higher levels of achievement (Atlaya et al., 2019).

3. How does this school implement change to meet the needs of its diverse population?

Responses to this question revealed how teachers and administrators foster cultural responsiveness, educational equity, and social justice on their campuses (Miller & Martin, 2014).

4. Describe how information gleaned from assessments is used to plan future instruction.

Responses to this prompt helped the researcher determine how assessment data is used to plan instruction. When formative and summative tests are used to determine students' conceptual understanding, teaching can be adjusted to students' learning styles, increasing performance on state exams (Barlow et al., 2018).

5. Describe how the school's teachers share a vision of rigorous expectations for all English Learners to have high levels of academic engagement.

Responses to this prompt enabled the researcher to determine whether teachers encouraged ELLs' academic success and set high standards (Uchikoshi & Maniates, 2010).

6. Does professional development consist of new instructional strategies for dual language teachers?

The researcher used responses to this question to determine the frequency with which new instructional strategies were introduced to teachers. Although several instructional methods may be available, teachers must be well-versed in various approaches, including those less familiar with the district and those new to the educational world (Van Roekel, 2011).

7. Describe how teachers participate in the process of data analysis conversations regularly.

With this prompt, the researcher sought to measure the level of involvement among teachers in data analysis. When teachers analyze the data gathered from common lessons and assessments, the discussions can provide insight into helpful teaching strategies, allowing teachers to learn from one another and improve their practice (Barlow et al., 2018).

The researcher transcribed the data and the participants checked their information. for accuracy and validity. The information was read which determined the coding. The codes were organized, and the researcher looked for emerging themes. Coding involved categorizing data and designating categories for future use (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher utilized coding in data analysis to identify themes and patterns. The researcher utilized contrast and triangulation data. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers should actively engage the participants

when using multiple measures related to external individuals and participants. This engagement validates the accuracy of narrative interviews and other forms of data.

Document Review

The third sub-question for this study addressed how a review of documents can inform the problem of low test scores on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas (TEA, 2021). Archival research involves studying collections of documents to understand a school's performance (Mills & Helms Mills, 2018). This review produced quantitative results, providing evidence of students' historical performance on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary School. The researcher retrieved archival data from the TEA website, where test results from the 2015–2016 through the 2018–2019 school years were available (TEA, 2021). In addition, the researcher used the Texas Academic Performance Reports to analyze students' reading performance on the STAAR. Reviewing these documents helped identify similarities and differences in students' performances according to socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, gender, and special education services received. Data gathered from this approach appears in a tabular format according to these categories in Chapter Four.

The document review generated quantitative results and provided evidence of Wiley Elementary School students' historical performance on the STAAR for reading. The TEA website published test results from the 2015–2016 school year through the 2018–2022 school year as part of its archival data. This evaluation was especially helpful in identifying similarities and differences in student performance according to socioeconomic status, ELL coding, and receipt of special education services. According to these categories, the researcher obtained data using this methodology and tabulated and presented it in Chapter Four. The information was

organized into data tables. Descriptive staticswas used to compare results. The information was triangulated with the interviews and the focus group.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical research practice entails skillful planning and effective communication, reducing risks, and creating benefits (Bickman & Rog, 2009). This researcher ensured the study was well-planned and communicated, confirming that participants did not endure risk, especially relative to the benefit of the study. The researcher communicated the research design and procedures to all participants and made them aware of the minimal risks. The researcher's status as a school district employee removed objectivity, so the researcher implemented safeguards to ensure their respect for the participants' rights, values, and desires. The researcher also communicated objectives both verbally and in written form and kept all interview documents locked in a secure location.

Ethical and social norms on all campuses were established during and after this research. The researcher sought IRB approval; participants signed consent forms outlining their participant rights, and the purpose of the study appeared on the informed consent form. The researcher stored all electronic information in password-protected files during data collection and kept all other data in a locked filing cabinet. All transcribed interviews, documents, emails, and surveys were saved on a secure drive that only the researcher could access.

After the study, all recordings of the interviews were destroyed, thus addressing the need for individual participant confidentiality, as well as site confidentiality. The researcher used pseudonyms when referring to participant and site characteristics that could reveal their identity. Member checking was used to improve the study's rigor and allow each participant to read a copy of their interview transcript. To ensure anonymity, the researcher labeled sites as public or

private, as well as the U.S. region. The researcher stored the locations, participants, and pseudonyms list in a password-protected file on their computer.

Summary

Chapter Three presented details about the methods of this applied study. The section on research design showed why the researcher selected a multimethod study design and provided descriptions of convenience and purposeful sampling of teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches. The role of the researcher and how that role might affect data collection and design were discussed. Data collection consisted of interviews, surveys, and document reviews. The chapter addressed data analysis to give the reader greater insight into how the researcher conducted the study. Finally, the ethical treatment of human and material resources is paramount for any research endeavor, so the chapter provided an outline of how the researcher addressed ethical concerns related to the study participants.

The researcher undertook this applied research study to identify the factors that significantly impact students' performance on the STAAR for reading and to determine what interventions and strategies can be implemented to improve students' scores. The researcher analyzed interview data to determine what factors participants reported as having the most significant impact on student performance, survey teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators. The researcher identified areas where changes can positively affect scores and reviewed archival documents from the TEA website. Finally, the researcher recommended these changes and provided the rationale for their implementation, such as giving teachers time to analyze students' data in a group format and focusing on bubble students ("Boosting Test Scores," 2019). This research will help teachers develop strategies to improve weak areas and help support student achievement.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to solve the problem of low reading achievement among ELLs at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas. The researcher used a multi-method approach to gather input from teachers, campus teaching coaches, the school counselor, the assistant principal, and the principal, along with reading performance data from the STAAR for reading.

Chapter Three presented the detailed research methodology, including an outline of the three data collection methods and their role in helping the researcher answer the research questions. These methods included interviews, focus groups, and document evaluation. The researcher conducted interviews with school administrators and teachers, focus groups with school administrators and teachers, and document evaluations to collect data. The document review included assessment data from the following school years: 2015–2016 through 2018–2019, and 2021–2022. To quantify and analyze data, the researcher employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. Chapter Four presents the findings using narrative thematic analysis and tables. The results of the data analysis involved coding and the identification of emergent themes appearing in interviews and field notes.

The following questions guided this research:

Central Question: How can English language learners' scores on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas be improved?

Sub-question 1: How would instructional coaches and administrators in an interview solve the problem of low test scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas for English language learners?

Sub-question 2: How would dual language teachers participating in a focus group solve the problem of low test scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas for English language learners?

Sub-question 3: How does a review of documents inform the problem of low test scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas for English language learners?

Interview Participants

Wiley Elementary School was a small public school in West Texas, serving prekindergarten through fifth-grade students. The school offered monolingual classes and dual language classes. The dual language curriculum consisted of 50% taught in Spanish and the other half taught in English. Students in the dual language program received content in both languages in a program offered at all grade levels. The interview format was semistructured, using structured baseline questions; however, the researcher posed follow-up questions based on individual participant responses. All five interviews occurred over the Zoom platform to accommodate the participants' time constraints and COVID-19 restrictions. Participant pseudonyms and demographic information appear in Table 2.

Table 2

Campus Leadership Team Interview Participants

Role	Pseudonym	Years in education
Principal	P1	25
Assistant principal	AP1	10
Campus teaching coach	CTC1	5
Campus teaching coach	CTC2	15
Elementary school counselors	ESC1	7

Note. P = principal; AP = assistant principal; CTC = campus teaching coach; ESC = elementary school counselors.

Focus Group Participants

The focus group consisted of three dual language teachers, the principal, and the campus teaching coach. Five females and one of the females with an average of 15 years of teaching experience participated. The participants had previously worked together at Wiley Elementary School. The researcher sent electronic copies of the IRB-approved recruitment letter and consent form to the participants before the meeting. During the initial focus group meeting, participants signed and returned the consent forms before beginning the session. The researcher conducted the focus group over the Zoom video platform according to COVID-19 restrictions, ensuring all participants could contribute. Participants were identified by their roles and a number to maintain the research participants' confidentiality (see Table 3).

Table 3

Focus Group Participants

Role	Pseudonym	Years in Education
Second-grade dual language teacher	DL Teacher 1	5
Fourth-grade dual language teacher	DL Teacher 2	16
Fifth-grade dual language teacher	DL Teacher 3	1
Principal	P1	25
Campus teaching coach	CTC1	15

Note. DL = dual language.

Results

In this study, the researcher aimed to identify factors that impacted students' performance on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary School. For this applied research study, the researcher used qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques, developing interview and focus group questions (see Appendices E and F) that aligned with the study's central research question. The researcher purposefully selected participants based on their dual language teaching assignment or their role as administrators, campus instructional coaches, or school counselors at Wiley Elementary School. The study included nine participants, all of whom participated in the individual semistructured interviews and five of whom participated in the focus group.

The semistructured interviews consisted of 11 questions. The researcher recorded field notes during and after each interview; they also created a transcription. In addition, the researcher gathered documents from the TEA website, including publicly available information on students' performance on the STARR for reading at Wiley Elementary School. These

documents provided further supporting evidence for the themes developed. All participants remained in the study until its completion.

Sub-Question 1

The first sub-question was: "How would instructional coaches and administrators in an interview solve the problem of low test scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas for ELLs?"

The researcher conducted interviews with administrators and dual language teachers from Wiley Elementary School to find themes related to teacher lesson planning and instruction at their school. The following themes emerged during the qualitative analysis: data analysis for decisions, aligning curriculum to instruction, awareness of cultural barriers, and aligning curriculum to instruction. Table 4 shows the codes and their frequencies.

Table 4

Campus Leadership Team Interviews Themes and Frequency of Codes

Themes	Codes	Frequencies
Data analysis for decisions	Assessments	11
	Dual language	7
	Bilingual	5
	Growth performance	3
Aligning curriculum to instruction	Lesson plans	13
	Resources	8
	Backward planning	5
	Misconceptions	4
Awareness of cultural barriers	Cultural awareness	7
	Native language	5
	Traditions	2
Aligning curriculum to instruction	Data-driven instruction	10
	Curriculum	6
	Foundational skills	6
	Vertical alignment	4
	Learning goals	3

Theme 1: Data Analysis for Decisions

The first theme that emerged involved data analysis for decisions about improving student performance. During the interviews, participants expressed the importance of analyzing student data to gather teacher and student performance information. The school counselor stated, "we need to do more to foster effective curriculum to enhance student learning." Results revealed that students were learning the curriculum content. The principal stated, "there are some classrooms that are not making the gains that we would like to see. It is mostly due to a lack of sense of commitment to the work we need to do." The results also provided insight into the effectiveness of teacher instructional practices. The principal stated, "Timeliness is important when using data to drive the instruction. Our goal is to address TEKS prior to teaching, during the teaching, and afterward to ensure levels of understanding is obtained." When asked how they would use test data and other research on students' performance to inform instruction, several participants reported that meeting weekly to review and analyze student performance data and identify which students needed interventions were essential. The leadership team also used test data to determine which teachers needed professional development.

During the interview, the principal expressed the importance of using test data to help teachers tailor instruction to improve student success, stating, "Data drives all our interventions and instructional processes, and the campus instructional leadership team meets after each assessment to disaggregate and review data to make data-informed decisions and how to successfully use resources to support student learning."

The campus teaching coaches explained how they used this information to determine which teachers needed support with curriculum and instruction and how to analyze the standards effectively. Campus Teaching Coach 1 said, "Once teachers understand the standard, they can

effectively teach it." Teachers must understand what the standard asks students to do, what to demonstrate, and how to do it. The leadership team supported teachers by planning a practical Tier-1 lesson incorporating explicit instruction and actively engaging students in learning. If students did not succeed with the first lesson, that indicated they needed extra support. During the interviews, each leadership team member stressed the importance of determining the best response to intervention for students who could have performed better on class assignments and assessments. The principal explained that the response to intervention provides high-quality instruction. Both campus teaching coaches stressed the importance of interventions matching each student's needs. Participants reported using data from assessments and progress monitoring to make important educational decisions about how to improve students' academic performance.

Each participant in the interview explained how they analyzed beginning-of-the-year (BOY) data to set the middle-of-the-year (MOY) and end-of-the-year performance (EOY) goals for teachers and students. The leadership team at Wiley was required to ensure students received various assessments, including weekly tests, unit assessments, and mock STAAR assessments in reading. The results determined which students needed Tiers 2 and 3 support. The data further assisted leadership in planning relevant professional development opportunities for teachers. The BOY is obtained from student assessments from the Developmental Reading Assessment, Istation, and benchmark assessments. Istation is a comprehensive e-learning program for reading, math, and Spanish literacy. This program allows educators to track and monitor student progress (Estrada & Wang, 2018).

Teachers and administrators said they reviewed reports on Istation to determine students' skill levels. Students took Istation reading and math assessments at the beginning of the year, so results could be used to support decision-making through reports, providing immediate access to

student performance. Istation also provided teachers with resources to help measure student growth and introduce new skills in the classroom. Once they reviewed the BOY data, teachers used this information to create MOY goals for students. By the middle of the year, teachers expected students to show growth. Progress monitoring during the middle of the year helps teachers determine if students will meet EOY goals and what the EOY goals should be. The process from MOY to EOY is the same as that of BOY to MOY.

The campus teaching coaches explained that weekly tests covered information from the weekly Tier 1 whole-group reading instruction. Typically, educators administer unit assessments at the end of 9 weeks to assess if students have learned the curriculum. The STAAR mock tests are administered toward the end of the fall semester. The assistant principal explained that the results predicted student success on the real STAAR test and allowed for more intensive instruction for students who were expected to fail. The leadership team devised intensive plans for students in danger of failing the upcoming STAAR for reading.

The principal stated: “The classroom should be a literacy-rich environment.” The principal said the classroom climate and culture should create an atmosphere conducive to learning. She added: “Students need multiple opportunities to read through read-aloud, center activities, opportunities to work with peers, self-select materials, and audiobooks.” The campus teaching coaches also expressed that learning to read and comprehend are essential foundational literacy skills and the key to success. Campus Teaching Coach 1 explained that some ELL students needing to make satisfactory progress in Tier 1 reading instruction received increasingly intensive instruction matched to their unique needs based on performance and progress levels. The intensity of targeted instruction varied depending on each student’s proficiency level and the professionals providing instruction or intervention.

Theme 2: Planning Effective Instruction

The second theme that emerged from the interviews was planning effective instruction. Campus Teaching Coach 1 explained that the main challenge for dual language teachers involved implementing dual language instructional practices to improve ELL performance on the STAAR for reading. During the interviews, each participant contended that teachers should receive relevant materials to support students in the dual language program. The assistant principal, for example, described the importance of supporting teachers by reteaching literacy standards where students failed. The assistant principal and the campus teaching coaches expressed the importance of helping teachers improve instructional practices to improve student performance.

Campus Teaching Coach 2 explained that an ELL's ability to perform well in reading depended on reading most or all of the words in the reading passage. The assistant principal explained: "Teaching reading and literacy are the main components in education, and we need to prepare our students, not just go through the processes." The coach stated: "We need to see where students are struggling and build a strong foundation so that they can fix learning gaps." The coach also said many ELLs enter schools behind their peers and require additional academic support. Campus Teaching Coach 1 stated that the transitional ESL and dual language instructional programs have increased since 2014. The assistant principal explained that dual language and the district programs consisted primarily of bilingual and transitional language programs. Bilingual education was an approach that used the native language to support the second language in carefully structured and sequenced manners. The campus teacher coaches explained that, unlike bilingual education, the dual language program was designed to educate students in all subjects in both English and Spanish.

Campus Teaching Coach 1 stated that foundational support was vital to supporting students in dual language programs. Campus Teaching Coach 2 explained the importance of using phonological instructional strategies to help ELL students. The principal shared the same belief about literacy instruction. The principal stated: “The goal of teaching reading is to help students reach grade-level proficiency.” Students with grade-level skills will perform at the approaches level or above on the STAAR for reading.

Theme 3. The third theme that emerged from the interviews was awareness of cultural barriers and their impact on student achievement. Poverty, a lack of academic support resources, and the amount of time spent in the United States all played significant roles in preventing ELL students from developing their academic skills successfully. The assistant principal explained that ELLs often came from households with low economic status and limited resources, including parental support and parents who may need more guidance on how to help with homework in English and Spanish. The school counselor explained that some parents of ELL students often had limited English proficiency and the skill sets to support their child’s learning. The principal stated: “Students who do not have the opportunity to practice English at home are shy to speak and participate in the classroom.” The assistant principal further explained that many ELLs need more support at home or need the opportunity to speak the second language they are learning in places other than school.

As cognitive skills transfer from one language to another, the child’s native language should serve as the foundation for acquisition of the second language. ELL children should receive adequate and appropriate instruction to develop their English proficiency. Instead of becoming a limitation, children’s current strengths and skills should serve as a springboard for new experiences and education (TEA, 2021a). The lack of support can frustrate an ELL student

learning a new language. All children are cognitively, linguistically, and emotionally linked to their home language and culture. The principal stated: “ELLs must have the opportunity to develop their native language first or simultaneously with their second language to learn the language.” To foster cultural awareness, the principal implied the importance of involving teachers in a literacy curriculum promoting inclusiveness and cultural awareness. To make students feel valued and included, the principal said: “We promote dual language by showcasing projects every 3 months and celebrating various special holidays.” These events help students build self-confidence and embrace their culture while learning another language. The principal explained the importance of providing an environment sensitive to cultural, linguistic, and learning differences among all children served. The principal ensured books, environmental print, and other print resources relevant to children’s linguistic and cultural backgrounds, alongside rich English print resources, are available in the classrooms.

The campus teaching coaches, the school counselor, and the principal agreed that teachers are the primary factor in student achievement. The principal explained the importance of teachers believing all students can learn and achieve academic success. The principal said: “The achievement may not be at the grade level, but the expectation is that there will be growth. Ideally, a good teacher can achieve 1.5 years of growth.” They further expressed that dual language teachers must understand the dual language model and strategies to ensure growth with diverse learners. Teachers must incorporate scaffolding and implement differentiated instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners. The principal also stated that teachers must build relationships with the students to create a safe learning environment. According to the TEA, a safe learning environment includes a classroom where the teacher leads a class of actively engaged learners who are mutually respectful and collaborative. The teacher creates a classroom

that is safe, accessible, and efficient. The teacher also makes and employs effective routines, transitions, and easily implemented procedures.

Theme 4. The fourth theme that emerged from the interviews related to aligning standards for congruency between curriculum and instruction. The principal explained that TEKS indicates what students should know and be able to accomplish within a particular subject or timeframe. The participants suggested that the curriculum shapes how students gain knowledge and skills. The campus teaching coaches explained they used the assessments to gather evidence related to student learning. The leadership team at Wiley collaborated at the start of the year to plan instructional goals for students. According to the principal, they aimed to create a well-designed curriculum to ensure students had a range of opportunities to gain knowledge, skills, and abilities required by the Texas standards. The principal observed classroom instruction through daily walkthroughs, guaranteeing students actively engaged in learning and understood the criteria. In Texas, principals, assistant principals, and supervisors must use the T-TESS rubric. T-TESS is intended to capture the holistic nature of teaching (TEA, 2022).

The T-TESS rubric has four domains and 16 dimensions. T-TESS domains (i.e., planning, instruction, learning environment, professional practices, and responsibilities) and dimension rubrics include specific practice descriptors and five performance levels: distinguished, accomplished, proficient, developing, and improvement required. During walk-throughs, the principal checks that the teacher aligns the curriculum to the standard in all four mentioned domains. The assistant principal explained that the criteria describe what students are intended to learn, and the curriculum describes how they will access the knowledge, skills, and abilities adherent to Texas education standards.

Sub-Question 2

The second sub-question was: How would dual language teachers and campus leadership participating in a focus group solve the problem of low test scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas for ELLs?

The themes that emerged related to the second sub-question appear with their frequency codes in Table 5.

Table 5

Dual Language Teachers Focus Group Themes and Frequency of Codes

Theme	Codes	Frequency
Data analysis for decisions	Covering curriculum	4
	Reteaching	3
	Small group interventions	5
	Scope and sequence	3
	Lesson plans	2
	Assessments	4
Planning effective instruction	Dual language	7
Awareness of cultural barriers	Language barriers	3
Understanding the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills	Socioeconomically diverse	2
	Vertical alignment	3

Theme 1: Data Analysis for Decisions

The first theme to emerge from the focus group was data analysis for decisions. Like the interviews, the first theme from the focus group was that educators need to analyze data to make informed decisions. The dual language teachers in the focus group discussed the challenge of having enough time to address the TEKS and the difficulty of deciding on changes following the standard that needs to be taught. Teachers must choose how much extra time to spend teaching TEKS without falling behind the curriculum timeline. Participants expressed concern that the scope and sequence were rushed, and they believed students needed more time to learn the material before moving forward. The TEKS Resource System is a systematic K–12 curriculum model designed, maintained, and continuously developed by educators from Texas school districts. The teachers said they relied on it as a significant part of teaching the district's curriculum, feeling lost when they could not adhere to it. The teachers in the focus group all echoed that they used the TEKS Resource System to find core instruction for all content areas.

All participants agreed on the need to improve teachers' instructional practice in reading. When asked if professional development consisted of new instructional strategies for dual language teachers, Dual Language Teacher 3 said: "The dual program language is supposed to be 50/50, but how do you do that effectively? I know it is a struggle, and I think we need to have refreshers." The teachers in the focus group all expressed a need for more staff development to implement the dual language reading curriculum effectively. Dual Language Teacher 1 said: "You know Spanish teachers are leaving left and right because they do not have that support, and the English side has more support." Teachers in the focus group expressed the need for professional development in classroom practices and child outcomes related to language development and literacy skills in both English and Spanish. Teachers said the importance of

dual language programs was to develop bilingualism, biliteracy, and bicultural competence in students while they achieve grade-level standards.

Theme 2: Planning Effective Instruction

The second theme that emerged from the focus group was the development of effective instruction. Dual language teachers must understand how to instruct students in all subjects in both Spanish and English effectively. In the focus group, Dual Language Teacher 1 stated:

> I am not going to lie to you; some teachers have been teaching 15–20 years and have no idea how the dual language program is supposed to run, and I learned so much from my mentor with less experience than the veteran teachers.

She noted that her mentor had only been teaching in the dual-language program for 5 years but had a firmer grasp of the dual-language model than other teachers with more experience. She further shared that she had encountered some teachers and wondered if they were following the correct method of dual language instruction. Participants also expressed the need for teachers to understand the content that students needed to master. The school principal stated: “The campus has three [campus teaching coaches] strategically recommended due to their skill set to help coach, mentor, and model best practices in the classroom.” The teachers shared that more support was needed to help them be more successful dual language teachers.

Theme 3. The third theme from the focus group was awareness of cultural barriers. Participants explained that some students in the dual language program from Juarez, Mexico, did not speak English and had limited academic skills in their native language. Dual Language Teacher 1 said: “My third-grade student came to school reading at a kindergarten level in Spanish, and the student’s first language is Spanish.” The student was afraid to practice English. Teacher 1 said: “She would only speak Spanish to me, and I told the student, by the end of the

year, you are going to be talking English." The teacher explained that the student could learn the English content with intervention and scaffolding.

The difficulty ELLs have with transferring skills to a second language without formal instruction in their native language is a challenge that both teachers and the leadership team discussed. To help increase student's self-esteem, The principal stated:

> Administration seeks to recommend diverse personnel, and honestly believe all students can learn, have high expectations, a sense of responsibility and initiative, and genuinely care about the profession—it is the consensus that we would prefer to train someone that has the will than to recommend purely on skill level. Our messaging and events are varied to address culture-equity is managed to support all students through scaffolding efforts.

The remaining participants agreed that ELL students usually lag behind their peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds in language and readiness skills. ELLs must have daily culturally responsive instruction enriched by immersion in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. All the dual language teachers expressed the importance of students and teachers learning to communicate effectively and respectfully with individuals of varied backgrounds.

Theme 4. The fourth theme that emerged from the focus group was understanding the TEKS. In aligning standards, the assistant principal stressed the importance of teachers understanding how to identify and define TEKS. The assistant principal explained that the assessments should evaluate whether or not students mastered the content. The principal added that those standards are analyzed so teachers can create a more student-centered learning objective. Consequently, teachers must understand the TEKS and how to deliver them appropriately and succinctly.

Teachers also need to know how TEKS are assessed. The principal and the campus teaching coaches explained that aligning standards includes closely examining the curriculum, assessments, instruction, and overall learning process, all of which must be aligned with the standards. The principal and the campus teaching coach also stressed the importance of vertical alignment, the methodology by which a subject or skill is taught, when it is taught, and the nature of the curriculum. Vertical alignment requires the educator to connect the lesson, necessary skills and learning outcomes, and assessments to focus and prioritize the most salient aspects of the lesson. It includes foundational skills and provides a developmental map of student objectives in the curriculum by content area across grade levels. Teachers can use vertical alignment to fill learning gaps and organize curriculum between grade levels, helping students transition from one grade to the next. Students acquire skills from the ground up, and teachers reinforce these skills by integrating lessons, skills, and assessments into a unified experience.

Dual Language Teacher 1 said: “You have to start backward with your lesson planning; you are going to look at how the standards will be assessed, what checks are being used, and what is the actual objective for a child now.” They noted that teachers must understand the experiences that students bring to the classroom, anticipating misconceptions students may have. Dual Language Teacher 2 added that providing students with opportunities to practice the standards taught is imperative.

Sub-Question 3

The third sub-question was: How does a review of documents inform the problem of low test scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for Reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas for ELLs?

Tables 6–9 list ELLs' overall performance at Wiley Elementary School over the past 7 academic years next to the district and state levels. The data for the overall results for the campus, the state, and the district appear in Table 6. The data presented in Table 6 pertain to the academic accomplishments of third-grade pupils on a form, community, and campus level, respectively. Table 7 shows the results for ELLs in third grade by campus, district, and state. The results of pupils in the fourth grade and fifth grade, broken down by their performance at the campus, district, and state levels, appear in Tables 7 and 8, respectively.

Table 6

Overall Percent of Students Approaching State Expectations on the STAAR for Reading at Wiley

Academic year	State overall %	District overall %	Campus overall %	ELL %	Socioeconomically disadvantaged %	Special services %
2015–2016	73	70	75	51	72	38
2016–2017	72	69	61	38	54	32
2017–2018	74	71	68	60	63	32
2018–2019	75	72	68	63	65	35
2019–2020				Not rated		
2020–2021				Not rated		
2021–2022			82	69	80	37

Note. ELL = English language learner.

Table 7

Overall Percent of Third-Grade Students Approaching State Expectations on the STAAR for Reading at Wiley

Academic year	State overall %	District overall %	Campus overall %	ELL %	Socioeconomically disadvantaged %	Special services %
2015–2016	73	76	75	71	73	Results masked
2016–2017	73	74	58	52	53	Results masked
2017–2018	77	82	73	Results masked	73	Results masked
2018–2019	76	79	70	67	82	36
2019–2020	Schools not rated					
2020–2021	Schools not rated					
2021–2022	Preliminary scores unavailable					

Note. ELL = English language learner.

Table 8

Overall Percent of Fourth-Grade Students Approaching State Expectations on the STAAR for Reading at Wiley

Academic year	State overall %	District overall %	Campus overall %	ELL %	Socioeconomically disadvantaged %	Special services %
2015–2016	75	79	62	Results masked	59	Results masked
2016–2017	70	74	62	Results masked	73	Results masked
2017–2018	73	75	52	Results masked	73	Results masked
2018–2019	75	79	60	61	60	17
2019–2020	Schools not rated					
2020–2021	Schools not rated					
2021–2022	Preliminary scores unavailable					

Note. ELL = English language learner.

Table 9

Percent of Fifth-Grade Students Approaching State Expectations on the STAAR for Reading at Wiley

Academic year	State overall %	District overall %	Campus overall %	ELL %	Socioeconomically disadvantaged %	Special services %
2015–2016	81	85	84	53	Results masked	Results masked
2016–2017	82	85	65	Results masked	73	Results masked
2017–2018	84	88	78	Results masked	Results masked	Results masked
2018–2019	86	89	75	63	67	45
2019–2020	Schools not rated					
2020–2021	Schools not rated					
2021–2022	Preliminary scores unavailable					

Note. ELL = English language learner.

Theme 1: Underperformance on the STAAR

The underperformance of ELLs on the STAAR test emerged as the first and most prominent theme. The proportion of overall ELL students who passed the STAAR at the approaches level appears in Table 6. Based on 7 years of student test data, ELLs consistently performed lower on campus, district, and state tests. Fifty-one percent of ELLs passed the STAAR for Reading at the ‘approaches level in 2015–2016, compared to 73% of all students statewide, 70% in districts, and 75% on campuses. Over the following 6 years, this pattern of low performance persisted. When broken down, the data show an achievement difference between ELLs and the overall student performance scores in the school years 2015–2016, 2016–2017, 2017–2018, and 2018–2019. In the school year 2019–2020, COVID-19 restrictions prevented the administration of tests; thus, no data is available for that school year. When schools were

assessed for the 2020–2021 academic year, ELL students still performed lower than the average student body. Results for third through fifth grades appear in Tables 6, 7, and 8.

Then, analyzing each grade independently, third graders overall performed at the approaches level in 2015–2016 at a rate of 71% compared to 53% of ELL students in fifth grade. The third-grade ELL students continued to exceed the fifth graders in the following academic year. However, ELL students still underperformed at the campus, district, and state levels compared to native English speakers. The fifth-grade results even influenced the low total campus accountability for ELLs.

Participants described how children from Mexico often have little to no literacy skills in their native language, making second language acquisition extremely difficult. This is evident when analyzing the ELL STAAR results. Seventy-three percent of third-grade students at the state level achieved at the approaches level, 76% at the district level, and 75% at the campus level during the 2015–2016 academic year. Test scores were unavailable for ELLs in fourth grade in the academic years 2015–2016, 2016–2017, 2017–2018, and 2018–2019 due to insufficient students to report data. Data for the fifth grade appear in Table 8 for students at the state, district, and campus levels. Fifty-three percent of ELLs in the fifth grade performed at the approaches level during 2015–2016, compared to 81% of all fifth-grade students overall at the state level, 85% at the district level, and 84% at the campus level. For the academic years 2016–17, 2017–18, and 2018–19, there was not a sufficient sample size of ELLs in the fifth grade to collect data. The ELL fifth graders at Wiley continued to lag behind their classmates. The overall ELL achievement passing rate on the campus was also lowered because of the fifth ELL's low student performance on the STAAR for Reading.

Performance standards relate to test performance levels defined in the state-mandated curriculum standards known as the TEKS, another tool used to address curriculum and any necessary changes therein. When looking at the Raw Score Conversion Table on the Reading STAAR in the 2015–2016 school year, students had to score at least 21 out of 40 to pass. This meant that students scoring at the approaches level needed help understanding 54% of the standards on the reading STAAR. In 2017–2018 and 2018–2019, ELL students were required to achieve at the approaches level. Due to COVID-19, schools waived the STAAR test for the 2019-2020 school year. Students did take the test for the 2020–2021 academic year, but schools were not rated. The 2021–2022 preliminary results appeared on the TEA website, but disaggregated data by grade level were unavailable.

Theme 2: English Language Learner Achievement Gap

The achievement gap between ELL students and the overall campus average emerged as the second theme under Sub-question 3. The principal explained that standards are statements identifying what all students need to know, recognize, and be able to do to elevate performance levels. The establishment of the STAAR for reading assesses students' mastery of standards, so the document analysis revealed that ELLs continue to lag behind other subgroups in academic achievement; however, students made some progress after the campus was placed on a targeted improvement plan.

Table 5 shows that in the 2015–2016 school year, ELL students' passing rate at the approaching level was 24% less than the overall campus average rate on the STAAR for reading. In 2016–2017, ELL students' passing rate was 23% less than the overall campus passing rate. Due to the overall D rating throughout the 2016–2017 school year, the school district placed Wiley Elementary School on a targeted improvement plan (TIP), which enabled it to receive

additional support from the district's accelerated leadership team. A TIP system enables campuses to create a year-long action plan. Campuses use TIPs to divide goals into short cycles and identify potential barriers to achieving school improvement goals (TEA, 2022).

In 2017–2018, ELL students' passing rate was 8% less than the overall campus average. That gap closed slightly in the 2018–2019 school year, with the percentage dropping to 5%. During the 2019–2020 school year, the TEA waived the test for all students. In 2020–2021, students took the test, but schools were not rated. In 2021–2022, educators administered the STAAR, and ELLs scored 13% lower than the overall campus average. The achievement gap reduction indicated that the school improved due to the extra support from the school district through the TEA. The principal explained that being on the required TIP required the campus leadership team to focus on checking lesson plans for implementation of academic standards.

Theme 3: COVID-19

The various COVID-19-related restrictions imposed on schools emerged as the third theme under Sub-question 3. Given the widespread closures brought about by the pandemic, Texas Governor Greg Abbott declared on March 16, 2020, that he had exempted the STAAR testing requirements for the current school year (TEA, 2020). Texas schools used distance learning to finish the 2019–2020 academic year. The TEA published school reopening guidelines in July 2020, providing local discretion to postpone start dates and an optional online-only delivery option for the first few weeks of the 2020–2021 academic year.

The COVID-19 pandemic prevented the administration of STAAR tests in 2020, so the 2021 scores must be compared to the most recent previous scores—those from the STAAR examinations administered during the spring of 2019. The TEA made the study of the STAAR results for 2020–2021 public, and findings revealed the degree of educational failure that Texas

schools endured throughout the 2020–2021 school year. Table 5 shows ELLs scored behind the overall campus average. In 2015–2016, 75% of students achieved the approach level compared to 51% of ELLs. In 2016–2017, 61% of the campus scored at the approaches level compared to only 38% of ELLs. In 2017–2018, 68% of the overall campus scored at the approaches level compared to 60% of ELLs. In the 2018–2019 school year, ELLs scored 8% below the overall campus. In 2021–2022, 82% of the students at the campus level scored at the approaches level compared with 69% of ELLs. More students were identified as failing than excelling in 2021 (Jansen & Rettenmaier, 2021). In 2021, state legislators passed House Bill 4545 to help students who failed the STAAR exams. The bill mandated that students who failed any STAAR topic be eligible for 30 hr of individualized instruction in that topic.

Discussion

ELL students' academic performance is essential to state and district education systems, campus leaders, teachers, and other community stakeholders. Subgroup analysis of performance levels showed that ELL students at Wiley Elementary School have continued earning lower scores on the STAAR for reading than their peers at the state, district, and campus levels. Many factors contributed to the underperformance of ELL students, primarily in Grades 3–5 at Wiley Elementary School. Chapter Two provided a review of the literature surrounding achievement and learning gaps among ELL students. The chapter also provided a review of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, including theories and factors that encompass standardized testing and school accountability. The latter was vital to the study of how to improve student performance at a low-income school in West Texas. In this current study, the research analyzed teacher interviews, a focus group, document review data, and additional education-related factors surrounding Wiley Elementary School.

Theoretical Literature

Two theories provided a framework for this study: Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Cherry (2019) explained that Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests people are motivated to meet basic needs before addressing advanced needs. The theory often appears as a pyramid, with the lowest levels representing basic needs for survival, such as food, water, and shelter (see Figure 1). Cherry adds that the theory also includes more primal instincts for survival, such as reproduction, which is also known as the physiological stage. Next is the safety stage, where personal security becomes a focus. According to Cherry, individuals in the safety stage strive to gain employment, gather resources, and maintain health. In the hierarchy's third step, individuals move beyond survival into love and belonging. Friends, family, and other forms of connection become essential as a sense of community deepens. Cherry identified esteem as the fourth step, which includes self-esteem, respect, strength, and egotistical desires, such as recognition and status. Once an individual can survive and satisfy their social needs, the desire to be known. According to Cherry's interpretation of Maslow, individuals are only free to self-actualize after they have moved through the first four levels of the hierarchy. Self-actualization occupies the top of the pyramid, referring to the process by which a person realizes and works to their full potential. The data analyzed in this chapter confirm and support Maslow's theory.

This study demonstrated that teachers in a dual-language education classroom may have a student who understands future and past tenses but who may need help understanding, for example, when those tenses are used in English when they do not recognize the context. Over time, educators learn to address these differences while engaging with students, assessing their level of understanding, and tailoring instruction. The teacher knows how to evaluate these

differences and differentiate instruction based on the needs represented. An emerging theme from the interviews suggested that awareness of cultural barriers was imperative to ELL student success. The base level of Maslow's hierarchy relates to a student's primary academic needs; once they are met, progress can be made. According to Maslow's second level on the pyramid (Cherry, 2019), as students feel more comfortable speaking, they can form bonds with people outside their culture.

Piaget was a constructivist who believed that the process of learning results from two processes: assimilation and accommodation (Kurt, 2020). Piaget believed that for children to comprehend a new concept, they must reflect on their prior experiences and adjust their expectations to include the new knowledge (Kurt, 2020). The STAAR represents one way for students to demonstrate that their reading comprehension relates to the theory of cognitive development because it assesses whether the child can assimilate information linked to already understood concepts. The STAAR also assesses whether the student can accommodate the latest information. Low scores in new subjects or subjects with a higher degree of difficulty suggest further details were not learned, indicating a necessary change in instruction. Similarly, consistently low scores or failing marks in one subject indicate a failure to assimilate information into currently understood schemas. Again, this failure would require additional assessment results showing that students have learned and can apply a variety of strategies for problem-solving (Piaget, 1964). Participants in the focus group shared that some ELLs need help with literacy concepts and TEKS. Piaget's theory affirms the importance of providing students with the support they need to learn foundational concepts before moving on to more advanced material.

Related Literature

Wu et al. (2021) found that the United States has made numerous attempts over the past few decades to close the academic achievement disparity among differing races, with some progress. The racial and ethnic achievement gaps dropped in the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s. The authors claim the achievement gap most likely results from systemic injustices in educational opportunities and procedures. The researchers pointed to an increased call for more attention on the opportunity gap, or *receivement gap*, which refers to the variations in the resources input and learning experiences students receive. Wu et al. claimed studies have shown unequal allocation of resources among school results in disparities in student achievement.

In the focus group, dual language teachers discussed the difficulties of the dual language program and how to deliver effective instruction to ELL students, explaining that some dual language teachers across grade levels in the school struggle with teaching the dual language curriculum. The review of documents provided unambiguous evidence that ELL students need to demonstrate proficiency in the specified TEA standards at the same rate as their counterparts. This can result from the need for more practical instruction and adequate or up-to-date training (Terry et al., 2018).

In a study by Terry et al. (2018), children from minority backgrounds underperformed their Caucasian peers in U.S. schools. When comparing Latino or Hispanic children to their Caucasian peers, these achievement gaps become evident, indicating persistent achievement disparities in reading compared to other subjects. This current study revealed that ELL students continue to underperform on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary School. However, educators at the school lacked information about why. The chosen framework provided some insight. The children's initial needs were not met as they transitioned to elementary school; thus,

they were not as successful as native-speaking students or students with more resources. With a lack of expert instruction, they may also have been unable to contextualize their learning. However, some have also suggested that the language skills necessary for reading are optional for other subjects, such as math. Aspects of visual and audio aids could offer a potential solution to issues with assimilation and accommodation (Terry et al., 2018).

At Wiley Elementary School, teachers and the leadership team have discussed how cultural and linguistic challenges have impacted student performance. According to Kieffer and Thompson (2018), researchers consistently identified a significant achievement gap between ELLs and their monolingual peers on state and national standardized tests. A recent report on key NAEP trends highlighted the 15-year stagnation of non-English speakers (Kieffer & Thompson, 2018).

Summary

According to the literature, some strategies can improve student performance on standardized tests, which provide several indicators of students' proficiency with standards (Beachum, 2018). According to the literature, Wiley Elementary School must implement strategies and interventions to improve student's performance on the STAAR for reading (TEA, 2021). More research is required to determine which methods already benefit students in the short and long term. The literature emphasized the importance of research in this area; thus, the purpose of this applied research study was to contribute to the field of knowledge and bridge the gap between research and practice on strategies that can best aid students' academic achievement.

For this study, the researcher collected data from a participant pool that included dual language teachers, campus instructional coaches, administrators, and a school counselor at Wiley

Elementary School. In addition, qualitative data from interviews provided substantial text identifying the study themes, which were further supported by data from the interviews, a focus group, and a review of documents. The latter included score reports from the TEA. The findings of this study revealed four themes related to factors that impact students' performance on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary School. Chapter Five provides a proposed solution to the study problem, along with information about necessary resources, funds, roles and responsibilities, study implications, and a solution evaluation.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to solve the problem of low reading achievement among ELLs at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas. The ELLs at Wiley Elementary School routinely scored low on the STAAR for reading. Wiley Elementary School has struggled to consistently meet the state standard for student achievement in this area. The Texas Academic Performance Report for the 2016–2017 academic year noted that Wiley Elementary needed to improve student performance. Wiley Elementary School students achieved the state educational benchmark during the 2017–2018 academic year. Wiley, however, earned a general D grade for the 2018–2019 academic year. Only 24% of ELLs achieved a meets grade level or higher on the STAAR for reading in 2018–2019. When students meet grade-level performance, it indicates they thoroughly understand the material and are ready to move on to the next grade (TEA, 2021). Numerous variables, including socioeconomic status, race, gender, and community resources, may impact students' test scores, and the school has limited control over these variables (Jones et al., 2020). However, the school did implement a few procedures to enhance student performance, which included improving teacher efficacy, adjusting the curriculum, and modifying teaching methods.

Restatement of the Problem

ELL students at Wiley Elementary School needed to meet the TEA expectations for performance on the STAAR for reading. The STAAR tests assess what students learn in each grade and determine whether they are prepared to move on to the next grade level (TEA, 2021). STAAR performance standards link student test performance levels to the expectations defined in the TEKS. The testing data indicated that ELL students were scoring low on the STAAR for

reading and needed to meet the state's expectations for performance on the assessment at the same level as other subgroups. In this study, the researcher used a multimethod approach for data collection, including interviews with teachers and campus leadership, a focus group, and a review of documents. Multiple themes emerged from data analysis.

During the focus group, teachers mentioned the need for more staff development and training to help improve ELL students' language development. Educators also cited a need for support with instruction in literacy strategies and skills. The data indicated that ELL students struggled with achievement on the STAAR for reading. The data further showed that ELs continued to underperform on STAAR tests compared to other subgroups. Consequently, school leaders understood that the teacher's instruction needed to improve to help students achieve their maximum potential.

During the focus group, the principal explained that the campus was placed on a TIP due to an overall D accountability score from the 2018–2019 school year. The TEA expected campuses that received an overall D or F in 2019 to continue to update their TIPs to identify and analyze areas of growth and areas that require improvement. The district provided additional instructional support to the campus in the form of instructional facilitators from the district math and reading departments, who worked closely with the teachers at Wiley. Although the campus made some improvements, the ELLs continued to lag behind. Data from 2021–2022 showed that the overall campus scores improved; however, ELL students still scored 30% behind their counterparts on assessments. Due to the campus's overall improvement, it received an overall score of B and no longer needed a TIP; however, an achievement gap still existed for ELLs.

Wiley Elementary School ELL students needed to fulfill the state's expectations for performance, as evidenced by the review of STAAR test results. During the focus group,

administrators and teachers stated that many ELLs came from homes or cultures where literacy activities such as storybook reading were not common practice. This finding is consistent with an earlier study that found that Hispanic children raised in low socioeconomic-status households had less oral language processing, production, and reading comprehension than their White peers (Terry et al., 2018). One teacher shared that some families cannot afford children's books in their native language. The teachers in the focus group explained that they try to use knowledge of the student's primary language to understand their students' language development in English. Dual Language Teacher 1 explained that knowing what students know in their native language helps with students' literacy development in English.

Proposed Solution to the Central Question

The central question of this research study was:

How can English language learners' scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas be improved? After analyzing the data presented in Chapter Four, it became evident that improvement had occurred in ELLs' scores on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary School for 7 years. However, more progress was required to close the achievement gap. Therefore, the researcher proposes the following solutions to further improve ELLs' scores on the STAAR.

Goal 1

Wiley Elementary School leaders should provide targeted professional development to teachers to enhance their practice and improve the academic achievement of ELLs. Goal 1 addresses the four themes that emerged during the data analysis. Fostering the development of professional learning communities (PLCs) should be a priority for educational leaders because they enhance teachers' professional development (Fred et al., 2020)

Objective 1

The first objective is to identify how to improve and implement training models to improve teachers' practice and student performance. Several training models or approaches can be used to improve teachers' practice and student performance. One of these approaches includes identifying the strategies and frameworks that could enhance teaching strategies. By identifying these factors, the campus leadership could improve how teachers develop dual language teaching methods. Furthermore, it is imperative to provide relevant workshops, professional development classes, and training sessions to improve teacher practice. The presenters should address the challenges of educating ELLs using dual language approaches in these sessions.

Participants in this study suggested that teachers' feedback could provide a valuable resource for enhancing ELLs' performance on the STARR for reading. They contended that training was necessary because they could benefit from the teaching process. Furthermore, they noted it was essential to learn the critical approaches to implementing the dual language curriculum. Information from the document review indicated that ELLs still performed below their peers. Student STAAR results at Wiley Elementary supported the idea that the achievement gap among ELLs persisted (Garza-Reyna, 2019). Curriculum and instruction, as well as linguistic and culturally responsive teaching, represent areas that should be strengthened among teachers to improve ELL reading scores. This will allow teachers more planning time and more time to review and discuss student data.

Objective 2

The second objective was to develop a team teaching and learning (TTL) framework to improve the outcomes of ELLs. TTL is based on empirical study and employs best practices for teacher and adult learning (DeJong, 2013; Garcia & Sung, 2018; Terry et al., 2018). DeJong

(2013) noted that the lack of professional development programs for the dual language curriculum contributed to a significant part of the problem. At the Wiley institution, one of the critical challenges contributing to the low performance reported was the lack of adequate and reliable data needed to implement professional development. Therefore, such information could aid in improving the objectives set under the PLC, consequently leading to the realization of desired outcomes in the educational community.

TTL represents an essential means of helping teachers learn from each other and design new approaches to address the key challenges that impact their teaching processes (Tong et al., 2017). According to Mutch-Jones et al. (2022), using a TTL approach improves ownership and helps teachers learn from one another. Furthermore, considering the level of interaction and the nature of the relationships among teachers, such a collaborative model could improve the learning outcomes and teaching strategies they develop collaboratively (Townsend & Bayetto, 2022). Implementation of the TTL program within PLCs can incorporate dynamic and specialized approaches to improve student performance. The opportunity to learn from peers with experience in the practice area promotes the adoption of better problem-solving strategies as it allows educators to review the key challenges that contribute to a student's underperformance. The approach would lead to better outcomes as the teachers would have the opportunity to set academic goals for students during PLCs and set timelines to achieve those goals within a specified period. Consequently, educators could determine the impact of the teaching approaches based on their specific goals and objectives (King & Bigelow, 2018).

This study has identified characteristics of successful teacher development as empowering teachers through self-improvement, encouraging reflective practice, extending learning experiences over time, and ensuring teachers engage in hands-on learning (Smith et al.,

2020). All the teachers in the focus group at Wiley Elementary School expressed dissatisfaction with their professional development because they did not receive meaningful insights and experience that could help them improve their teaching strategies and approaches. Many effective characteristics can be integrated into a collaborative, team approach to professional development, which frequently includes student- and teacher-focused objectives. TTL, a self-improvement and engagement program for teachers, has significant potential when research-based qualities are integrated into professional development experiences (Franquiz & Ortiz, 2016). TTL can be used to accomplish a wide range of professional learning objectives. TTL can assist teachers in learning and provide opportunities to practice coteaching strategies and learn to collaborate in a PLC. The PLC comprises a collaborative network in which the educators work together in a structured way to improve their approaches to instruction. The teaching content-based material collaboratively, teaching across the curriculum, and practicing peer observations and feedback. TTL can also help teachers integrate a new curriculum, implement campus and district objectives, familiarize themselves with new testing regulations, or enrich work with special education or ELL teachers.

Goal 2

For the second goal, Wiley Elementary School leaders should provide more planning time for extended PLCs. Participants in the focus group stressed the importance of having more time to prepare lessons and analyze data from the students' work. This approach would help educators identify the key areas that could improve a given lesson. Mutch-Jones et al. (2022) agreed that teachers need ongoing learning opportunities and more time to implement frameworks to enhance their teaching and engagement approaches. The Texas Education Code Section 21.404 guarantees each classroom teacher a planning period. Specifically, each

classroom teacher is entitled to at least 450 min each week for instructional preparation, including parent–teacher conferences, evaluating students' work, and planning. The planning period should be at least 45 min within the instructional day. According to the code, a classroom teacher should not be required to participate in any other activity during their planning period.

Objective 1

The first objective is to establish times for PLCs. The PLC model will be assessed based on the time it takes to develop the PLC, helping it improve the teaching process and develop solutions that will advance learning. Strong connections between teacher quality and student learning outcomes are well-established in the literature (Hiatt & Fairbairn, 2018)

Objective 2

The second objective was to identify conditions and practices essential to productive collaborative planning and PLCs. To address this objective, educational leaders must reinforce the essential conditions that could improve collaborative, planning, and PLCs. Educators can implement these practices before the beginning of the school year to allow room for improvement. One of the conditions includes defining a shared purpose and vision to ensure that all the team members understand their objectives. Trust and respect are also essential to success because they contribute to a more effective collaborative process, and the members realize the goals. Furthermore, members must communicate for a practical collaborative approach to function properly. This aspect could ensure the group addresses all relevant issues and communicates the goals and visions of the process to all relevant stakeholders. Other conditions supporting effective PLCs include administrative leadership, support of collaborative school culture, and professional development for effective meeting practice. These meeting practices in PLCs include focusing on instruction and student achievement, adequate resources, aligned

policies, and shared values and vision (Ferlazzo, 2021). Professional learning serves as a foundational component of teaching and learning because it develops knowledge to help educators improve their practice. Educator knowledge development enables a teacher, a teacher's aide, a principal, or a superintendent to expand their ability to impact learning outcomes for each student in their care (Ferlazzo, 2021).

Resources Needed

To help the PLC process, Wiley Elementary School leaders should consider reorganizing the present scheduling rubric or the classes for the school counselor and librarian. Also, relevant professional development for teachers and the leadership team represents another required resource. For teachers to attend professional development, the school will need a pool of available substitute teachers who can fill in while teachers attend training. The principal and assistant principal must coordinate with each other when they plan to attend training because both administrators are typically only out simultaneously if the district sends an administrator to cover the campus. The use of substitute personnel for campus teaching coaches, librarians, and school counselors is optional.

Part of the team should also include external experts and student representatives who can provide insights into how to realize the best professional development outcomes. Another set of resources consists of the equipment needed to conduct professional development. Some equipment incorporated into the process includes laptops and software with dual language programs. Digital resources should be incorporated into dual language models, which will help educators integrate and improve other teaching models. Part of the technology will include programs that the participant can use on and off campus. Leaders should also secure a collaborative space where effective instructional planning can occur among teachers (August,

2018). Furthermore, educators should partner with the parents because they serve as a critical collaborative resource for developing solutions. Lastly, school leaders must consider the role of funding as they make decisions about relevant purchases of services and items needed to incorporate into the process.

At the time of this study, students at Wiley Elementary School participated in a physical education lesson in the gym with the physical education coaches during the instructors' 45-min preparation period each day. Teachers participated in PLCs once each week during preparatory time. On the other days, teachers planned lessons. This researcher advises school leaders to prolong the PLC to a 90-min session at least once every month. This change will require the help of substitute teachers who can work with students for the extra 45 min. This may require altering the staffing, such as asking the librarian or the school counselor to deliver lessons to students while teachers are in the PLC. To accommodate longer PLC times for teachers, the leadership team will need to modify the master schedule to reflect the change in scheduling for library and counseling classes. A portion of this continuous learning can occur during early release days or PLC time because time is a limited resource, especially once the school year begins. The benefits of this professional development are immediately related to PLC and student learning (Banse & Palacios, 2018). However, rather than replacing the traditional PLC task, leaders must consider it an addition.

Funds Needed

Texas public schools are funded primarily through local district property taxes, state monies, and federal funds. Most financing comes from local property taxes collected by school districts and state money (TEA, 2022). At the time of this study, most schools in PISD were Title

1 funded and received federal funds averaging about $85,000 per campus, depending on student enrollment (Burnette, 2019).

The professional development programming requires the input of sufficient funds to aid in implementing the program. The best approach to funding professional development is through school budget allocation, in which a portion of the school budget is incorporated to cover the implementation process. Also, other sources of funding exist. These include grants and district-level support. Reading instructional methods have been included in similar programs and, consequently, have contributed to the success of the professional development programs. In this approach, the funds could be used to pay for the training workshops and classes and cover the cost of substitute teachers. The overall allocations for substitutes can range from $15,000 to $20,000. At the time of this study, an undegreed substitute teacher in PISD cost $100 per day, $110 for degreed, and $120 for degreed and certified. Funds can also be used to purchase resources such as the program's licensure.

School leaders should allocate Title 1 money to staff development that promotes growth in personnel. For example, all dual language teachers should attend the 2-day West Texas Reading Symposium offered through Region 19. This free reading symposium, typically provided in the summer period, aims to determine the best practice based on each educator's perspectives (Baker, 2017). Last, all bilingual teachers should attend half-day training in emergent bilingual education.

Roles and Responsibilities

Professional development programming requires input from different stakeholders to address the initiative's roles and responsibilities. The principal in the institution represents a critical stakeholder in the process. The principal oversees the budget and determines how the

resources are dispensed to address the critical aspects of the program. Furthermore, the principal leads the purchase process and ensures all the items incorporated within the budget are purchased. Another key stakeholder in the budget includes the campus teaching coaches, who receive feedback and work on the essential items that will be incorporated into the program implementation process. A committee should form to guide the campus and district improvement plans that will be incorporated into the program. The committee members should include teachers, school administrators, and technology integration specialists. Additionally, a district-level representative can be included in the program to provide insights into how to improve the program.

To improve students' scores on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary School, all dual language teachers, administrators, and campus teaching coaches should participate in professional development related to PLCs and content-based literacy. Administrators in the building can organize the effort to implement PLCs and increase content-based literacy efforts in the classroom. Though administrators do not teach classes, their participation and support of teachers as they launch their PLCs will contribute to the long-term success of the intervention because administrators can provide feedback on the process. School administrators must also monitor the progress of PLCs. They can monitor in several ways, including through active participation in PLC meetings and by reviewing notes and resources developed during the meetings.

Along with administrators, campus teaching coaches must also have high expectations for teachers' PLCs and content-based literacy. Aside from the need to secure funds for professional development, teachers have the most significant responsibility for implementing successful PLCs. The work done in the PLC directly results from the efforts of the group members, who

must capitalize on collaborative planning opportunities to see the PLC objectives come to fruition. Teachers can utilize data tracking during their PLC meetings to unpack standards, develop aligned materials, analyze data, and develop interventions to reach students who have not yet mastered the skills and content required in the curriculum. These teachers will also communicate this work with campus teaching coaches and administrators.

Timeline

The researcher recommends the following timeline to implement the study recommendations.

- Spring 2024
    1. In April, educators administer the STAAR for reading to students in Grades 3–5.
    2. In May, teachers receive the preliminary STAAR report.
    3. In May, the principal and campus leadership team meet with grant writers to obtain money for professional development.
    4. Within the first week of May, school leaders inform teachers about the intervention programs, including the specific dates on which the program will commence.
    5. School leaders finalize the planning process in May and communicate details to all individuals regarding when the program commences.
- Summer 2024
    1. Administrators and teachers create PLCs in July.
    2. The campus leadership team evaluates other similar programs that cover the instructional processes.

3. The campus leadership team finalizes the professional development agenda for the school year and includes an evaluation of the program aspects to be integrated into the PLC initiative.
4. In the final 3 weeks of August, school leaders survey teachers to secure feedback on how to improve the PLC program, including the goals and objectives to be met through the program.

- Fall 2024
    1. In September, PLCs continue with teachers, campus teaching coaches, the principal, and the assistant principal meeting regularly, sharing expertise, and working collaboratively to improve students' teaching skills and academic performance.
    2. In October, teachers, campus teaching coaches, assistant principals, and principals attend workshops offered through the Region 19 Education Service Center in West Texas. Workshops will include The West Texas Reading Symposium Understanding RLA Resources.
- Winter 2024–2025
    1. Teachers administer the mock STAAR in November 2024 and February 2025. Provide interventions to students who fail the mock exams.
    2. Campus leadership coordinates the input of teachers and mentors bi-monthly on student progress.
    3. Campus leadership conducts follow-ups to evaluate PLC progress and student performance in November and February.

Educational leaders at Wiley Elementary School should implement the recommended professional development program in 2024. During that time, planning activities should include setting goals and determining the stakeholders who should engage in the process. Sustained professional development programs will likely benefit novice and experienced teachers, helping them build knowledge of literacy instruction, later, finding more profound applications across the curriculum (Mutch-Jones et al., 2022). Before implementing PLCs, school administrators must ensure that dual language instructors plan together for 45 min during their 45-min planning period. Administrators should also schedule monthly 90-min PLCs. All dual teachers must receive professional development on the function and purpose of PLCs. This will begin the community-building process within the groups and help all parties understand the common goal. This training should occur before the start of the school year so PLCs can begin meeting as soon as possible.

During the first three months of September, school leaders must provide dual language teachers with an overview of the bi-literacy framework. In the summer of 2024, teachers returned on July 25, a week before the students started in August. During the first week of dual professional language, teachers attended training on how to effectively instruct ELLs in the bi-literacy framework.

In the subsequent six months, PLC groups should analyze standards, design shared assignments and assessments, and implement student interventions and enrichment opportunities for the first semester and beyond. Administrators should regularly participate in PLCs with dual language teachers. Teachers and administrators should continue with ongoing professional development, particularly in assessing pupils with appropriate rigor and incorporating literacy components. Teachers should use the resources developed by the group outside of PLC meetings

to collect data on student performance for future PLC discussions. Specific to the TEA for reading, PLC members should identify areas of weakness to share with dual language teachers during spring meetings. This information will allow dual language teachers to give students tailored test preparation lessons in the month preceding the STAAR assessment.

Teachers who attend the PLC for teacher development must balance risk-taking, teacher autonomy, and agreed-upon student learning expectations. Teachers in a group must have a clear sense of their purpose so that everyone feels comfortable taking risks. A learning team constantly engages in a cycle of learning that includes data analysis, goal formulation, individual and collaborative learning, and implementing and adapting techniques to meet the requirements of all learners. This technique allows teachers to experiment with various teaching methods and learn what works and what does not (Cunningham & Falk, 2020).

Solution Implications

The implications of this study relate to the central research question: How can English language learners' scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas be improved? Although the study's primary purpose was to improve students' scores on the STAAR for reading, strategies and resources for improving instruction, which would positively impact students' performance on the assessment, are recommended. These positive changes will affect students and the school, including teachers and administrators, the school district, and the greater community.

Students directly benefit from the implementation of PLCs because their learning is closely assessed through the use of data tracking. Data tracking requires analyzing formative assessment data and enhancing student performance through remediation and enrichment opportunities, regardless of whether the student has fallen behind or excelled. This attention to

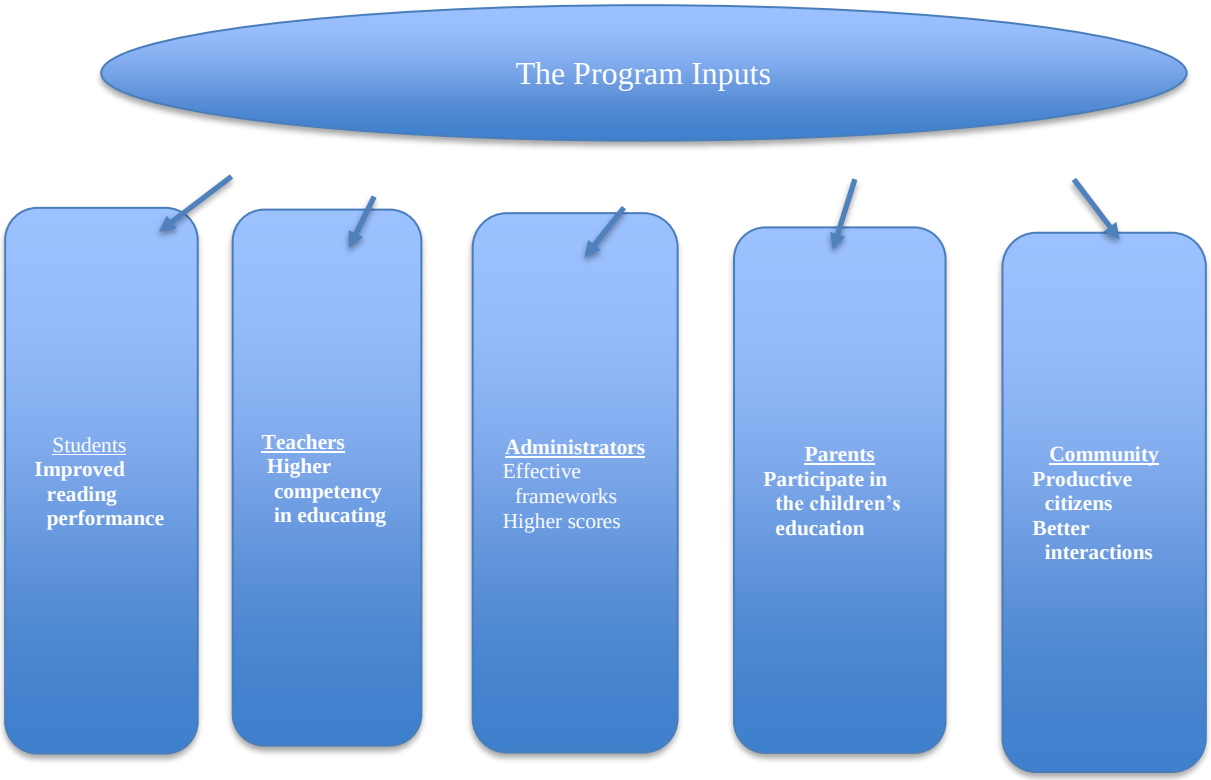
each student's specific learning requirements will improve their understanding and application of skills linked to literacy content measured by STAAR for reading and strengthen the skill set they will bring with them beyond the classroom.

Students' performance on an assessment reflects their learning and the teacher's instruction. When learners perform well, teachers are more likely to feel a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment. This improvement in efficacy can lead to a sustained attempt to enhance educational approaches, resulting in future years of rising student performance. Using PLCs to examine student data, which is then used to make instructional decisions, provides teachers with targeted professional development, including informal peer learning.

Administrators take responsibility for multiple tasks, one of which is ensuring that teachers deliver effective instruction. Evidence of this efficacy and the school's overall quality are measured in part by student performance on standardized assessments such as the STAAR for reading. The implementation of PLCs allows teachers to collaboratively plan instruction and analyze student performance data to improve performance in general and on the STAAR. Nonetheless, administrators and educators will likely encounter challenges in the process. Time could represent a critical constraint in the project, especially considering that teachers will require more time to adapt and implement the program. Therefore, school leaders should work to ensure adequate resources are available for implementation (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Program Inputs



Evaluation Plan

Leaders at Wiley Elementary School must continue to use the STAAR performance results to assess the effectiveness of PLCs and content-based literacy activities. The combination of these approaches will facilitate ongoing reflection by the researcher during the implementation process and during the application of tactics over the course of the school year, and it will provide opportunities to examine the overall success of the strategies. The best evaluation plan to employ in the program should include the following attributes. First, it should consist of the goal identification process, which includes defining the goals and objectives of the professional development program (Babinski et al., 2018). After taking this step, leaders should evaluate the questions. These questions include assessing how the program improves participant knowledge

and skills and how the teachers apply the recommendations to their professional practice. The evaluation should include the most relevant data collection approaches, such as pre- and post-assessment methods, to measure the participants' skills and knowledge before and after implementation. Part of the evaluation's focus should be on the parents, with educators considering parent perceptions regarding program efficacy and improvement areas.

The goal-based evaluation should address teachers' personal goals relating to the literacy component and each PLC's goals regarding meetings and progress. Teachers may use quantitative information to measure their effectiveness in student achievement utilizing these strategies, but the overarching objective should remain focused on implementing literacy-based procedures. Analyzing test scores after students have taken the STAAR for reading in the spring of 2024 is consistent with an evaluation based on outcomes. Once the TEA provides student scores to the district, district leadership and administrators reviews the information. District and campus leadership examines both overall campus and individual student performance. Initially, individual teachers do not see this information; however, this researcher advises altering this practice to enable educators to identify student performance trends.

The limitations of this study included gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and special services received by the students who took the assessment each year. These details can impact students' performance in the evaluation, but these factors were out of the researcher's and the school's control. The number of participants in this study also represented a limitation. Further research is recommended to help solve the problem of low test scores on the STAAR for reading. Recommendations include considering the teacher experience level, and ways to improve instructional practices. Also, identifying how schools most effectively implement reading standards (Barr et al., 2012).

Summary

In this study, the researcher aimed to identify factors impacting students' performance on the STAAR for reading at Wiley Elementary School, an urban elementary school in West Texas. Factors such as teacher effectiveness and aligned curriculum are essential, as the scores on the STAAR for reading are one of the publicly available indicators of students' learning success. By triangulating data from interviews, a focus group, and a review of documents, the researcher identified areas where the faculty at Wiley Elementary School could improve. This study illustrates the importance of creating a uniform approach to planning instruction and assessments among teachers at Wiley Elementary School. By implementing effective PLCs, teachers can work collaboratively to develop content and materials aligned with the standards and the rigor of the requirements for Wiley Elementary School. Participants indicated a need for more planning time, professional development related to instructional practices, and improved student literacy skills. Offering professional development to support collaborative planning efforts is critical to moving the instructional practices forward at Wiley Elementary School in a way that will improve scores on the STAAR for reading. Improving scores on the STAAR for reading can lead not only to enhanced student and teacher efficacy but also to various benefits for the school and the school district, as well as economic gains for the community.

REFERENCES

Adler-Greene, L. (2019). Every Student Succeeds Act: Are schools making sure every student succeeds? *Touro Law Review*, *35*(1), 11.

Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., & Olson, L. (2014). *The long shadow: Family background disadvantaged urban youth and the transition to adulthood*. Russell Sage Foundation

Atlaya, C, Tiebena, N. Hillmertb, S, & Fauth, B. (2019). Instructional quality and achievement inequality: How effective is teaching in closing the social achievement gap? *Learning and Instruction, 63.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2019.05.008

August, D. (2018). Educating English language learners: A review of the latest research. *American Educator*, *42*(3), 4–20

Babinski, L. M., Amendum, S. J., Knotek, S. E., Sanchez, M., & Malone, P. (2018). Improving young English learners' language and literacy skills through teacher professional development: A randomized controlled trial. *American Educational Research Journal*, *55*(1), 117–143. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831217732335

Baker, L. L. (2017). What it takes to succeed: the importance of social support for academically successful middle school English learners. *Youth & Society*, *49*(5), 658–678. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X14553581

Banse, H., & Palacios, N. (2018). Supportive classrooms for Latino English language learners: Grit, ELL status, and the classroom context, *The Journal of Educational Research*, *111*(6), 645–656. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2017.1389682

Barlow, K., Weber, N., Koch, N., & Hendricks, R. (2018). Understanding curricular student expectations in Texas: Readiness standards vs. supporting standards. *Educational Research Quarterly*, *42*(2), 3–43.

Barrow, L., & Markman-Pithers, L. (2016). Supporting young English learners in the United States. *The Future of Children*, *26*(2), 159–183. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43940586

Beachum, F. D. (2018). The Every Student Succeeds Act and multicultural education: A critical race theory analysis. *Teachers College record*, *120*(13), 1-18.

Bickman, L., & Rog, D. (2009). *The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Boosting test scores: "Principal" strategies that work. (2019). *Education World*. https://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin366.shtml

Bowman-Perrott, L., deMarin, S., Mahadevan, L., & Etchells, M. (2016). Assessing the academic, social, and language production outcomes of English language learners engaged in peer tutoring: A systematic review. *Education & Treatment of Children*, *39*(3), 359-388.

Bradley, K. (2022). *The socioeconomic gap in U.S. public schools*. Ballard Brief. https://ballardbrief.byu.edu/issue-briefs/the-socioeconomic-achievement-gap-in-the-us-public-schools

Burch, P. (2020). Federal policy and the push to privatize education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *102*(2), 14–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721720963224

Burnette, D., II. (2019, September 25). States gird for spending reviews of worst-performing districts. *Education Week*, *39*(06), 19.

Burns, D., Darling-Hammond, L., & Scott, C. (2019). Closing the opportunity gap: How positive outlier districts in California are pursuing equitable access to deeper learning. Retrieved from https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Positive_Outliers_Qualitative_BRIEF.pdf

Butvilofsky, S. A., Sparrow, W., Roberson, N. D., & Hopewell, S. (2017). Lotta LARA: A promising biliterate reading strategy. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, *56*(4), 269–289. https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2017.1328005

Caldas, S. J., & Bankston, C. L. (2014). *Still failing: The continuing paradox of school desegregation* (2nd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.

Caldas, S. J., Gomez, D. W., & Ferrara, J. (2019). A comparative analysis of the impact of a full-service community school on student achievement. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, *24*(3), 197–217. https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2019.1615921

Calderon, M., Slavin R., & Sanchez M. (2011). Effective instruction for English learners. *The Future of Children*, *21*(1), 103–127.

Campbell, M. (2019). Tough commute? Try crossing the U.S.–Mexico border to go to school. https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-04-04/tough-commute-try-crossing-us-mexico-border-go-school

Carnoy, M., & Garcia, E. (2017). *Five key trends in U.S. student performance: Progress by blacks and Hispanics, the takeoff of Asians, the stall of non-English speakers, the persistence of socioeconomic gaps, and the damaging effect of highly segregated schools*. Economic Policy Institute.

Case, A. (2015). Beyond the language barrier: Opening spaces for ELL/non-ELL interaction. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *49*(4), 361–382. www.jstor.org/stable/24398711

Cervantes-Soon, C. G. (2018). Race, social justice, and power equity in dual language education. *For the Forum on Equity and Dual Language Education.* https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/language-minority-students/race-social-justice-and-power-equity-in-dual-language-education/Race-Power-in-DL-Edited-CervantesSoon-Report-11-26.pdf

Cherry, K. (2019). The 5 levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-4136760

Cramer, E., Little, M. E., & McHatton, P. A. (2018). Equity, equality, and standardization: Expanding the conversations. *Education and Urban Society*, *50*(5), 483–501. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124517713249

Crawford, J. (2004). *Educating English learners: Language diversity in the classroom* (5th ed.). Bilingual Education Services.

Creswell, J. (2014a). *Qualitative inquiry & research design. Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. (2014b). *Research design. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach* (4th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Cunningham, K. E., & Falk, J. (2020). Professional learning of literacy teachers of specialized populations. *Reading Horizons*, *59*(2), 1.

Davis, L. (2023). ideological foundations, curricular models, and the path of bilingual education. Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue, 25(1/2), 203-340.

DeJong, E. J. (2013). Policy discourses and U.S. language in education policies. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *88*(1), 98–111. https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2013.752310

DeMatthews, D., & Izquierdo, E. (2018). The importance of principals supporting dual language education: A social justice leadership framework. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *17*(1), 53–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2017.1282365

Di Stefano, M., & Camicia, S. (2018). Transnational civic education and emergent bilinguals in a dual language setting. *Education Sciences*, *8*(3), 128. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci8030128

Dong, Y. R. (2017). Tapping into English language learners' (ELLs') prior knowledge in social studies instruction. *The Social Studies*, *108*(4), 143–151. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2017.1342161

Drouhot, L. G., & Nee, V. (2019). Assimilation and the second generation in Europe and America: Blending and segregating social dynamics between immigrants and natives. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *45*, 177–199.

Duran, R. P. (2008). Assessing English-language learners' achievement. *Review of Research in Education*, *32*(1), 292–327. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X07309372

Emeka, A., & Vallejo, J. A. (2011). Non-hispanics with Latin American ancestry: Assimilation, race, and identity among Latin American descendants in the U.S. *Social Science Research*, *40*(6), 1547–1563. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2011.06.002

Estrada, P., & Wang, H. (2018). Making English learner reclassification to fluent English proficient attainable or elusive: When meeting criteria is and is not enough. *American Educational Research Journal*, *55*(2), 207–242. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831217733543

Every Student Succeeds Act: Explained. (2015, December 7). *Education Week*, *35*(14), 17.

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2018). What does research tell us about educating mainstream teachers to work with ELLs? *The Educational Forum: Preparation and Development of Mainstream Teachers for Today's Linguistically Diverse Classrooms*, *82*(2), 227–234. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2018.1420872

Feliciano, C., & Lanuza, Y. R. (2017). An immigrant paradox? Contextual attainment and intergenerational educational mobility. *American Sociological Review*, *82*(1), 211–241.

Ferguson, R. F., Phillips, S. F., Rowley, J. F. S., & Friedlander, J. W. (2015). *The influence of teaching: Beyond standardized test scores: Engagement, mindsets, and agency*. The Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University, Raikes Foundation. http://www.agi.harvard.edu/projects/TeachingandAgency.pdf

Ferlazzo, L. (2021). 10 Strategies for **b**uilding a **p**rofessional **l**earning **c**ommunity. *Ed Week*. https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-10-strategies-for-building-a-professional-learning-community/2021/04

Flores, N., Flores, N., Chaparro, S., & Chaparro, S. (2018). What counts as language education policy? Developing a materialist anti-racist approach to language activism. *Language Policy*, *17*(3), 365–384. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-017-9433-7

Franquiz, M. E., Leija, M. G., & Salinas, C. S. (2019). Challenging damaging ideologies: Are dual language education practices addressing learners' linguistic rights? *Theory Into Practice*, *58*(2), 134–144. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2019.1569379

Franquiz, M. E., & Ortiz, A. A (2016) Co-editors' introduction: Every Student Succeeds Act—A policy shift. *Bilingual Research Journal*, *39*(1) 1–5 https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2016.1148996

Fred, H., Meeuwen Pierre, V., Ellen, R., & Marjan, V. (2020). How to enhance teachers' professional learning by stimulating the development of professional learning communities: Operationalising a comprehensive PLC concept for assessing its development in everyday educational practice. *Professional Development in Education*, *46*(5), 751–769. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1634630

Gandara, P. (2017). The potential and promise of Latino students. *American Educator 41*(1).

Gandara, P., & Escamilla, K. (2017). Bilingual education in the United States. *Bilingual and Multilingual Education*, 1–14.

Garcia, E. (2015). *Inequalities at the starting gate: Cognitive and non-cognitive skill gaps between 2010–2011 kindergarten classmates*. Economic Policy Institute.

Garcia, G. E., & Godina, H. (2017). A window into bilingual reading: The bilingual reading practices of fourth grade, Mexican American children who are emergent bilinguals. *Journal of Literacy Research*, *49*(2), 273–301. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X17703727

Garcia, O., & Sung, K. K. (2018). Critically assessing the 1968 Bilingual Education Act at 50 years: Taming tongues and Latinx communities. *Bilingual Research Journal*, *41*(4), 318–333.

Garza-Reyna, G. L. (2019). The academic preparedness of Latino students in dual language and transitional bilingual education programs. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *18*(4), 340–348. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2017.1394858

Gjelten, T. (2015, October 3). Should immigration require assimilation? *The Atlantic.* https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/10/should-immigration-require-assimilation/406759/

Glover, C. P., Williams, N. N., & Wu, A. F. (2017). It's not hard work; it's heart work: Strategies of effective, award-winning culturally responsive teachers. *Urban Review*, *49*, 279–299.

Grooms, A. A., & Childs, J. (2021). "We need to do better by kids": Changing routines in U.S. schools in response to COVID-19 school closures. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, *26*(2), 135–156.

Hiatt, J. E., & Fairbairn, S. B. (2018). Improving the focus of English learner professional development for in-service teachers. *NASSP Bulletin*, *102*(3), 228–263. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636518789261

Hoff, E. (2012). Interpreting early language trajectories of children from low-SES and language minority homes: Implications for closing achievement gaps. *Developmental Psychology*, *49*(1), 4–14.

Hollie. (2018). *Strategies for Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning*. Shell Education.

Hopkins, M., & Schutz, K. M. (2019). Bilingual teacher leadership: Supporting linguistically responsive practices and parent engagement in schools. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, *9*(2), 96–109. https://doi.org/10.1080/26390043.2019.1589297

Howard, E., Lindholm-Leary, K., Rogers, D., Olague, N., Medina, J., Kennedy, B., … Christian, D. (2018). *Guiding principles for dual language education* (3rd ed.). Center for Applied Linguistics.

Huck, C., & Zhang, J. (2021). Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on K–12 education: A systematic literature review. *New Waves-Educational Research and Development Journal*, *24*(1), 53–84.

Jansen, A., & Rettenmaier, J. (2021). *Sacrificing education to COVID-19: The Texas story*. Private Enterprise Research Center.

Jimenez, T. R., & Horowitz, A. L. (2013). When White is just alright: How immigrants redefine achievement and reconfigure the ethnoracial hierarchy. *American Sociological Review, 78*(5), 849-871. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122413497012

Jones, T. M., Fleming, C., Williford, A., & Research and Evaluation Team. (2020). Racial equity in academic success: The role of school climate and social emotional learning. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *119*, 105623.

Keehne, C. N. K., Sarsona, M. W., Kawakami, A. J., & Au, K. H. (2018). Culturally responsive instruction and literacy learning. *Journal of Literacy Research, 50*(2), 141–166. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X18767226

Kena, G., Hussar, W., McFarland, J., de Brey, C., Musu-Gillette, L., Wang, X., Zhang, Z., Rathbun, A., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Diliberti, M., & Barmer, A. (2016). *The condition of education 2016* (NCES 2016–144). National Center for Education Statistics.

Kieffer, M. J., & Thompson, K. D. (2018). Hidden progress of multilingual students on NAEP. *Educational Researcher*, *47*(6), 391–398. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X18777740

Kim, Y. K., Hutchison, L. A., & Winsler, A. (2015). Bilingual education in the United States: An historical overview and examination of two-way immersion. *Educational Review*, *67*(2), 236–252. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.865593

King, K., & Bigelow, M. (2018). The language policy of placement tests for newcomer English learners. *Educational Policy*, *32*(7), 936–968. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904816681527

Knight, D. S. (2019). Are school districts allocating resources equitably? The Every Student Succeeds Act, teacher experience gaps, and equitable resource allocation. *Educational Policy*, *33*(4), 615–649. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904817719523

Kurt, S. (2020). *Jean Piaget and his theory & stages of cognitive development.* Educational Technology. https://educationaltechnology.net/jean-piaget-and-his-theory-stages-of-cognitive-development/

Lachance, J. R., Honigsfeld, A., & Harrell, G. (2019). Equal educational opportunity for English learners: ESL teachers' conceptualizations on the importance of academic language. *Tesol Journal*, *10*(2), 1-16.

Lara, G. D., Lopez, L. M., Barajas-Gonzalez, R., & Coll, C. G. (2021). COVID-19's impact on Latinx students. *The Learning Professional*, *42*(6), 60–64. https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/covid-19s-impact-on-latinx-students/docview/2619487102/se-2

Larson, A. L., Cycyk, L. M., Carta, J. J., Hammer, C. S., Baralt, M., Uchikoshi, Y., & Wood, C. (2020). A systematic review of language-focused interventions for young children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *50*, 157–178. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.06.001

Leake, D., & Black, R. (2005). Cultural and linguistic diversity: Implications for transition personnel. *Essential Tools*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED495863.pdf

Leavitt, R. R., & Hess, R. S. (2019). School climate and the Latino–White achievement gap. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *18*(3), 270–283. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2017.1384498

Lee, J., & Zhou, M. (2015). *The Asian American achievement paradox*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Li, N., & Peters, A. (2016). Preparing K–12 teachers for ELLs: Improving teachers' L2 knowledge and strategies through innovative professional development. *Urban Education. Vol.55(10), p.1489-1506.* https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916656902

Liberty University, School of Education. (2019). *Doctoral programs dissertation handbook.*

Lindholm-Leary, K., & Block, N. (2010). Achievement in predominantly low SES/Hispanic dual language schools. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *13*(1), 43–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050902777546

Liu, E. (2014, May 30). Why are Hispanics identifying as White? *CNN.* https://www.cnn.com/2014/05/29/opinion/liu-study-hispanics-favor-whiteness/index.html

Lombaldi, D. E, & Behrman, E. O. (2016). Balanced literacy and underperforming English learners in High School.

Lopez, F. (2019). How educational settings inform Latino student identity and achievement. *Policy Insights From the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *6*(2), 170–177. https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732219860859

Lumbrears, R., Jr., & Rupley, W. H. (2019). Educational experiences of ELL educators: Searching for instructional insights to promote ELL students' learning. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, *18*(1), 17–38. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-017-9225-z

MacDonald, G. L., Miller, S. S., Murry, K., Herrera, S., & Spears, J. D. (2013). Efficacy of ACA strategies in biography-driven science teaching: An investigation. Cultural Studies of Science Education, 8(4), 889-903. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-013-9517-

Machado, E. (2017). Fostering and sustaining diverse literacy practices in the early childhood classroom: Reviewing the literature in three areas. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, *66*(1), 309–324.

Master, B., Loeb, S., Whitney, C., & Wyckoff, J. (2016). Different skills? Identifying differentially effective teachers of English language learners. *The Elementary School 117*(2), 261–284.

McLeod, S. (2020). *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. Simply Psychology. https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html

Middleton, K. V. (2020). The longer-term impact of COVID-19 on K–12 student learning and assessment. *Educational Measurement, Issues and Practice*, *39*(3), 41–44. https://doi.org/10.1111/emip.12368

Miller, C. M., & Martin, B.N. (2014). Principal preparedness for leading in demographically changing schools: Where is the social justice training? *Sage Journal 43*(1), 129-151.

Mills, A. J., & Helms Mills, J. (2018). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research methods in business and management. London: SAGE*

Mooney, T. (2018). *Why we say "opportunity gap" instead of "achievement gap*." Teach for America. https://www.teachforamerica.org/stories/why-we-say-opportunity-gap-instead-of-achievement-gap

Murphy, A. F., Torff, B., & Sessions, D. (2019). Educators' beliefs about appropriate pedagogical models for Spanish-speaking ELLs who differ in home-language and English-language literacy abilities in the United States. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *22*(4), 402–413.

Mutch-Jones, K., Hicks, J., & Sorge, B. (2022). Elementary science professional development to impact learning across the curriculum. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 112*, 103625.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and Committee on Population. (2016). *The integration of immigrants into American society*. National Academies Press.

Negron, S. (2015, May 22). *Bill to support dual language education passes legislature*. https://senate.texas.gov/members/d29/press/en/p20150522a.pdf

Ortiz, A. A., Robertson, P. M., & Wilkinson, C. Y. (2018). Language and literacy assessment record for English learners in bilingual education: A framework for instructional planning and decision-making. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, *62*(4), 250–265. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2018.1443423

Pak, C. S. (2018). Linking service-learning with sense of belonging: A culturally relevant pedagogy for heritage students of Spanish. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 17*(1), 76–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192716630028

Palmer, D. K., Cervantes-Soon, C., Dorner, L., & Heiman, D. (2019). Bilingualism, biliteracy, biculturalism, and critical consciousness for all: Proposing a fourth fundamental goal for two-way dual language education. *Theory Into Practice: Re-Imagining Dual Language Education in the U.S.*, *58*(2), 121–133. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2019.1569376

Pew Research Center. (2017). *Statistical portrait of the foreign-born population in the United States*. https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2019/06/03/facts-on-u-s-immigrants/

Piaget, J. (1951). *Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315009698

Piaget, J. (1952). *The origin of intelligence in children*. International Universities Press, Inc.

Piaget, J. (1964). *The early growth of logic in the child*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315009698

Quezada, R., & Alexandrowicz, V. (2019). Developing culturally proficient teachers for dual-language classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, *58*(2), 185–193. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2019.1569398Sanchez, M. T., Garcia, O., & Solorza, C. (2018). Reframing language allocation policy in dual language bilingual education. *Bilingual Research Journal*, *41*(1), 37–51.

Sayer, P., & Braun, D. (2020). The disparate impact of COVID-19 remote learning on English learners in the United States. *TESOL Journal*, *11*(3). https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.546

Schettino, I., Radvany, K., & Wells, A. S. (2019). Culturally responsive education under ESSA: A state-by-state snapshot. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *101*(2), 27–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721719879151

Serafini, E. J., Rozell, N., & Winsler, A. (2020). Academic and English language outcomes for DLLs as a function of school bilingual education model: The role of two-way immersion and home language support. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *25* (2)1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1707477

Shin, N. (2018). The effects of the initial English language learner classification on students' later academic outcomes. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *40*(2), 175–195. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373717737378

Slavin, R. E., & Cheung, A. (2004). How do English language learners learn to read? *Educational Leadership*, *61(6)*, 52–57.

Smith, R., Ralston, N. C., Naegele, Z., & Waggoner, J. (2020). Team teaching and learning: A model of effective professional development for teachers. *Professional Educator*, *43*(1), 80–90.

Soltero, S. (2011). *Creating linguistically and culturally responsive K–12 schools.* Greenwood Publishing Group.

Sosa, T., & Bhathena, C. D. (2019). How students use their cultural and linguistic knowledge to transform literacy goals. *The High School Journal*, *102*(3), 210–227.

Spies, T. G., Lara-Alecio, R., Tong, F., Irby, B. J., Garza, T., & Huerta, M. (2018). The effects of developing English language and literacy on Spanish reading comprehension. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *111*(5), 517–529. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2017.1306686

Steele, J. L., Slater, R. O., Zamarro, G., Miller, T., Li, J., Burkhauser, S., & Bacon, M. (2017). Effects of dual-language immersion programs on student achievement: Evidence from lottery data. *American Educational Research Journal*, *54*(1). https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216634463

Sugarman, J., & Lazarin, M. (2020). *Educating English learners during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Migration Policy Institute. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/english-learners-covid-19-pandemic-policy-ideas

Swanson, H. L., Orosco, M. J., & Kudo, M. F. (2017). Do specific classroom reading activities predict English language learners' later reading achievement? *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 33(3), 199–210. https://doi.org/10.1080/10573569.2016.1145563

Taggart, A. (2018). Latina/o students in K–12 schools: A synthesis of empirical research on factors influencing academic achievement. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, *40*(4), 448–471. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986318793810

Terry, N. P., Gatlin, B., & Johnson, L. (2018). Same or different: How bilingual readers can help us understand bidialectal readers. *Topics in Language Disorders*, *38*(1), 50–65. https://doi.org/10.1097/TLD.0000000000000141

Texas Education Agency. (2019). *LPAC* framework manual *2019–2020*. https://projects.esc20.net/upload/page/0211/docs/Placement.pdf

Texas Education Agency. (2020). Language and literacy development of English learners. https://www.tealearn.com/courses/828/pages/1-2-dot-8-language-and-literacy-development-of-english-learners?module_item_id=180763

Texas Education Agency. (2021a). *STAAR student expectations tested*. https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/testing/staar/staar-student-expectations-tested

Texas Education Agency. (2021b). *Texas teacher evaluation and support system*. https://tea.texas.gov/texas-educators/educator-evaluation-and-support-system/texas-teacher-evaluation-and-support-system

Theoharis, G., & O'Toole, J. (2011). Leading inclusive ELL: Social justice leadership for English language learners. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *47*(4), 646–688.

Tong, F., Luo, W., Irby, B. J., Lara-Alecio, R., & Rivera, H. (2017). Investigating the impact of professional development on teachers' instructional time and English learners' language development: A multilevel cross-classified approach. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *20*(3), 292–313. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2015.1051509

Townsend, T., & Bayetto, A. (2022). Leading reading improvements through professional learning. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *25*(4), 548–566. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1708474

Uchikoshi, Y., & Maniates, H. (2010). How does bilingual instruction enhance English achievement? A mixed-methods study of Cantonese-speaking and Spanish-speaking bilingual classrooms. *Bilingual Research Journal*, *33*(3), 364–385. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2010.525294

U.S. Department of Education. (2015). National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/

Valdes, G. (2018). Analyzing the circularization of language in two-way immersion education: Restating two cautionary notes. *Bilingual Research Journal: The Bilingual Education Act of 1968: Revisiting 50 Years of Challenges and Possibilities*, *41*(4), 388–412. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2018.1539886

Valdez, O. (2018). *The second-generation American: "Who am I?"* Impakter. https://impakter.com/second-generation-american/

Van Roekel, D. (2011). *Professional development for general education teachers of English language learners*. National Education Association. http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB32_ELL11.pdf

Wood, C., Wofford, M. C., & Hassinger, A. (2018). Acknowledging challenges and embracing innovative instructional practices in response to cultural and linguistic diversity. *SAGE Open*, *8*(2), 215824401877111. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018771110

Wu, H., Shen, J., Spybrook, J., & Gao, X. (2021). Closing achievement gaps: Examining the roles of school background and process. *Education and Urban Society*, *53*(8), 909–937. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124521989447

Young, M. D., Winn, K. M., & Reedy, M. A. (2017). Every Student Succeeds Act: Strengthening the focus on educational leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *53*(5), 705–726. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X17735871

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 18, 2021

Narichica Handy
Susan Quindag

Re: IRB Conditional Approval - IRB-FY20-21-1061 SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF THE READING ACHIEVEMENT GAP AMONG SPANISH SPEAKING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN A WEST TEXAS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: AN APPLIED STUDY

Dear Narichica Handy, Susan Quindag:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been **conditionally** approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Conditional approval means that your complete approval is pending our receipt of certain items, which are listed below:

Documented approval from each research site you are enrolling in your study. Acceptable forms of documentation include a letter on official letterhead or a time-and-date stamped email from a person with the authority to grant permission.

Please keep in mind that you are not permitted to begin recruiting participants or collecting data until you have submitted the above item(s) and have been granted complete approval by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board.

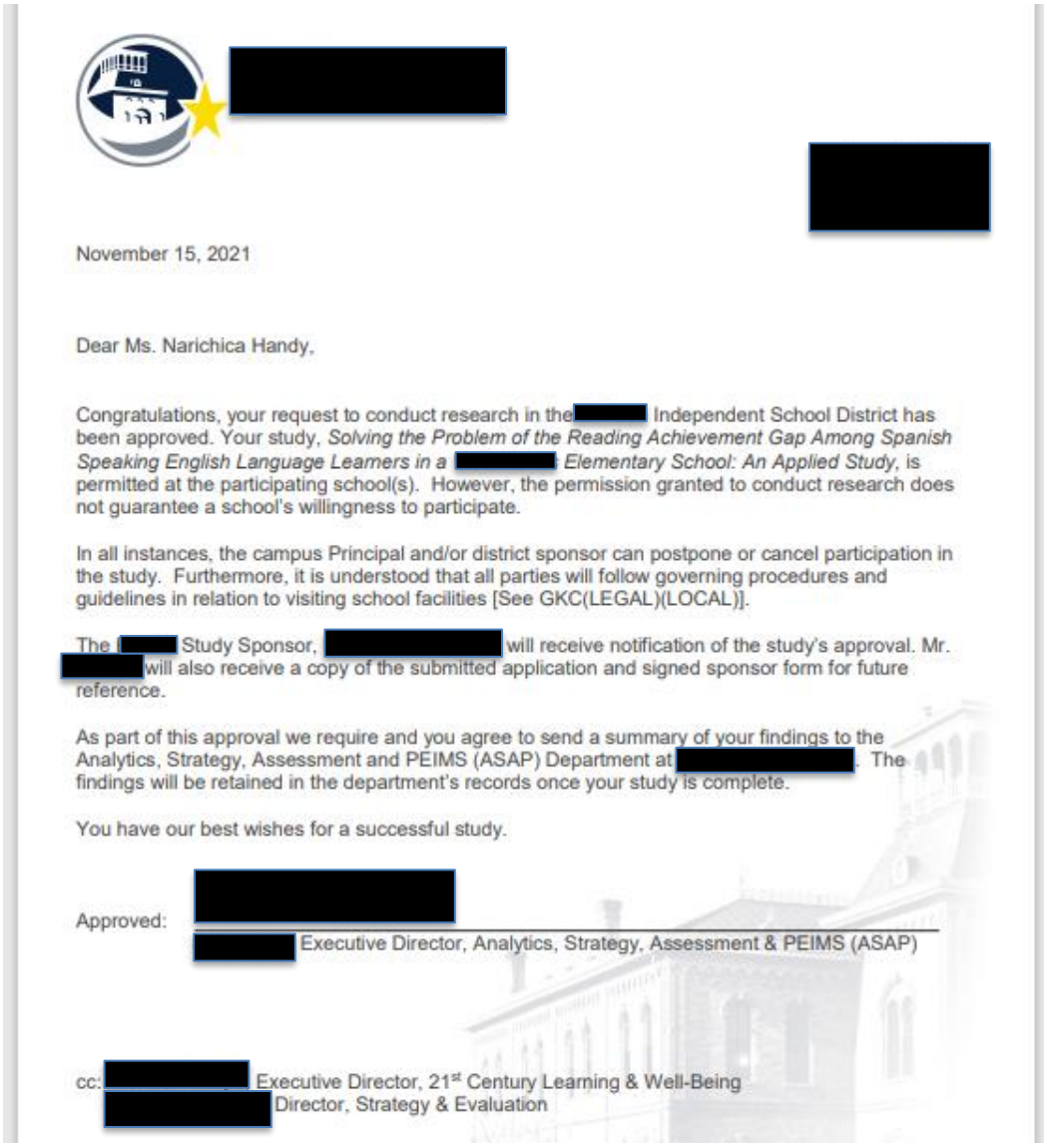
Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well as you continue working toward complete approval.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



[redacted]

[redacted]

November 15, 2021

Dear Ms. Narichica Handy,

Congratulations, your request to conduct research in the [redacted] Independent School District has been approved. Your study, *Solving the Problem of the Reading Achievement Gap Among Spanish Speaking English Language Learners in a* [redacted] *Elementary School: An Applied Study*, is permitted at the participating school(s). However, the permission granted to conduct research does not guarantee a school's willingness to participate.

In all instances, the campus Principal and/or district sponsor can postpone or cancel participation in the study. Furthermore, it is understood that all parties will follow governing procedures and guidelines in relation to visiting school facilities [See GKC(LEGAL)(LOCAL)].

The [redacted] Study Sponsor, [redacted] will receive notification of the study's approval. Mr. [redacted] will also receive a copy of the submitted application and signed sponsor form for future reference.

As part of this approval we require and you agree to send a summary of your findings to the Analytics, Strategy, Assessment and PEIMS (ASAP) Department at [redacted]. The findings will be retained in the department's records once your study is complete.

You have our best wishes for a successful study.

Approved: [redacted]

[redacted] Executive Director, Analytics, Strategy, Assessment & PEIMS (ASAP)

cc: [redacted] Executive Director, 21st Century Learning & Well-Being
[redacted] Director, Strategy & Evaluation

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

Solving The Problem of The Reading Achievement Gap Among Spanish Speaking English Language Learners in A West Texas Elementary School: An Applied Study

Narichica Handy, Ed.S
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study regarding solving the problem of low reading scores on the STAAR for reading. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a principal, assistant principal, school counselor or instructional coach at Wiley Elementary School who is familiar with the STAAR for Reading and reading instruction at the school. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Narichica Handy, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to solve the problem of low test scores on the STARR for Reading and to formulate a solution to address the problem by answering the question, "How can the problem of English language learners low scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas be solved?"

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an interview. The interview will ask questions appropriate to the first subquestion, "how teachers and administration would solve low scores on the STAAR for reading. Follow-up questions during the interview will be developed on the spot. Interviews will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be recorded for transcription purposes.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to

identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.
I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other
Researchers. If I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation,

- Data will be stored on a password-protected computer in password-protected files and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic files will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a passwordprovided computer as password-protected files for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in the study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Narichica Handy. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Susan Quindag.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd. Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or

alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Statement of Consent: By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation
in this study.

_____
Printed Participant Name

_____
Signature & Date of Participant _____
Printed of Researcher

_____
Signature & Date of Researcher

Liberty University

IRB-FY20-21-1061
Approved on 12-13-2021

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

Solving The Problem of The Reading Achievement Gap Among Spanish Speaking English Language Learners in A West Texas Elementary School: An Applied Study

Narichica Handy, Ed.S
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study regarding solving the problem of low reading scores on the STAAR for reading. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a certified dual language teacher in grades 2nd- 5th or a resource teacher at Wiley Elementary School who is familiar with the STAAR for Reading and reading instruction at the school. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Narichica Handy, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to solve the problem of low test scores on the STARR for Reading and to formulate a solution to address the problem by answering the question, "How can the problem of English language learners low scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) for reading at Wiley Elementary School in West Texas be solved?"

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a focus group. The focus group will be audio by the researcher and should take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other
Researchers. If I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants who participate in the focus group will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the focus group in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected computer in password-protected files and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic files will be deleted.

- The focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-provided computer as password-protected files for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- While I can assure that I (as the researcher) will maintain confidentiality during the focus group, I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with person outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in the study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Narichica Handy. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at nvhandy@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Susan Quindag at srquindag@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher you are encouraged to contact the

Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd. Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Statement of Consent: By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participationin this study.

_____
Printed Participant Name

_____
Signature & Date of Participant _____
Printed of Researcher

_____
Signature & Date of Researcher

Liberty University

IRB-FY20-21-1061
Approved on 12-13-2021

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

At the beginning of each interview, the purpose of the study will be explained to the participants to ensure that they understand the risks associated with the research as well as the purpose of the study results. The same questions will be asked of each participant. Following participants' permission to participate in the study, the following 10 questions will be asked:

(1) How many years have you been a teacher, counselor or administrator/instructional coach?

This question will allow the researcher to evaluate the experience level of the principal (Master, Loeb, Whitney, & Wyckoff, 2016)

(2) What are your philosophies about teaching reading and literacy to your students at the elementary level?

This question will be provided insight into teachers' instructional strategies (Swanson, Orosco, & Kudo,2017)

(3) How do you make closing gaps a school-wide responsibility?

This question will allow the researcher to examine the principal's role in the educational improvement in all ELLs because principals are responsible for being the instructional leaders on their campus. Principals must use data to help teachers with instructional decisions based on student performance. (Burns, Darling-Hammond, & Scott, 2019).

(4) What are some language barriers ELLs face that other students may not be faced with?

This question may provide the researcher insight into relationships that administrators and instructional coaches build with students and their families (Case, 2015). The term "English language learner"—foregrounds language even though it encompasses native languages, cultures, socioeconomic levels, and educational backgrounds (Case, 2015).

(5) How would you use test data and other research on students' performance to inform instruction? Several reports have been published for building a reading research base on effective reading skills that include word study and text comprehension that should be present in instruction so that children can become successful readers (Swanson, Orosco, & Kudo, 2017)

(6) How would you involve teachers in the literacy curriculum that fosters inclusiveness and cultural awareness? This question calls for the development of skills and strategies critical for providing a positive learning environment for a highly diverse student population (Miller & Martin, 2014).

(7) What specific reading preparation is provided to students before taking the STAAR? This question seeks to ascertain what review and spiraling strategies are used with students to prepare for the STAAR reading test. This can help reduce test anxiety, boost confidence, and prepare students more effectively, ensuring that all students succeed (Adler-Greene, 2019).

(8) What process do you use to analyze English language learners' unit assessments and benchmark assessment results?

This question will provide the researcher with insight into how the administrators and instructional coaches use data to guide instruction. The purpose of the inquiries related to how teachers use instructional strategies and best practices to help close the achievement gap among ELLs (Durán, 2008).

(9) What do you believe the next steps should be for teachers after the assessment results are shared with them? The goal of this question is to find out how teachers used test data to make instructional decisions. When teachers collaborate to analyze test data, they can

gain a better understanding of their students' overall strengths and weaknesses, leading to changes in instructional practices that will help students perform better in the future. (Adler-Greene, 2019).

(10) How do the instructional resources available, including textbooks and other campuses, district and in-class materials, and electronic tools, support daily instructional practices? This question is intended to determine the extent to which the current instructional materials support daily classroom instruction. Appropriately aligned resources are essential for student success but must be aligned to the course content, the rigor of the standards (Ortiz, Robertson, & Wilkinson, 2018).

(11) What other feedback about how students' scores on the STAAR could be increased at Whitaker could you add? This final question allows participants to provide any other thoughts about the STAAR for reading and why scores are as low as they are. This open-ended format for this question allows for more extensive data to be collected than the close-ended questions (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP

The second sub-question for this study will investigate how dual language teachers participating in a focus group solve the problem of low STAAR reading test scores at Whitaker Elementary School in West Texas. Focus groups are a method of gathering data that considers the interaction and sharing of information in a larger setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This focus group provide me with information about the topic as well as data on the participants' similarities and differences on educational practices for ELLS. The focus group, like the interviews, will require me to select three different teachers from Whitaker Elementary School. I will use the same procedures as described above for individual interviews (video recording), and I will keep the focus group to 1 hr. Before the focus group begins, I will have all participants sign a consent form.

The focus group responses will aid in determining whether Whitaker teachers use culturally and linguistically appropriate instructional strategies (Dong, 2017).

1. How do dual language teachers regularly participate in meaningful data analysis conversations? This question seeks to identify the level of engagement between teachers specifically related to data analysis. When teachers discuss the data gathered from common lessons (Adler-Greene, 2019)
2. Describe how teachers at this school are try out new teaching methods in their grade/content area that can help underperforming students meet school standards. One of the important considerations of educational settings that explain the gap in academic achievement has been identified as teaching quality. This question determines whether teachers attempt to use high-quality

instructional practices to help ELLs achieve higher levels of achievement (Atlaya et al., 2019)

3. How does this school implement change to meet the needs of its diverse population? This question elicits information about how teachers and administrators foster cultural responsiveness, educational equity, and social justice on their campus (Miller & Martin, 2014).
4. Describe how information gleaned from assessments is used to plan future instruction. This question assists in determining how assessment data is used to plan instruction. When formative and summative tests are used to determine students' conceptual understanding, teaching can be tailored to students' needs, increasing performance on state exams (Barlow, Weber, Koch, & Hendricks, 2018)
5. Describe how the school's teachers share a vision of rigorous expectations for all English Language Learners and have high levels of academic engagement. This question seeks to determine whether teachers encourage Els' academic success and set high standards (Uchikoshi, & Maniates, 2010).
6. Does assessment data show that the English language learners make good progress on outcome standards? This question aims to identify is teachers implement effective bilingual instruction (Barlow, Weber, Koch, & Hendricks, 2018).
7. Does professional development consist of new instructional strategies for dual language teachers? This question is designed to determine the frequency with which new instructional strategies are introduced to teachers. While there are

several instructional methods available, teachers must be well-versed in various approaches, including those that are less common in the district and those that are new to the educational world (Van Roekel, 2011).

8. Describe how teachers participate in the process of data analysis conversations regularly. This question seeks to measure the level of involvement among teachers in data analysis. When teachers analyze the data gathered from common lessons and assessments, the discussions can provide insight into which teaching strategies have been useful, allowing teachers to learn from one another and improve their practice (Barlow, Weber, Koch, & Hendricks, 2018).
9. Are students prepared and happy to learn in class every day? This question seeks to determine the level of excitement among Wiley Elementary School students as perceived by the teachers (Pierson, 2014).