

EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF DUAL-LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS: A
HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

by

Ashley Marie Cunningham

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

Sharon B. Farrell, EdD, Committee Chair

April Small, EdD, Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand current practices in dual language immersion (DLI) programming, identify biases, and investigate designs for implementing dual language immersion programs to provide consistency between programs in elementary schools in Georgia. The theory guiding this study was Cummins' threshold theory, as it describes the process of language acquisition for young children and the cognitive effects of bilingualism. Selected public elementary dual language immersion teachers in Georgia participated in an individual interview, focus group, and a questionnaire to collect data. Data analysis was used to interpret the findings to answer the central research question: How can the design of dual language immersion programs promote fluency in language learners? Utilizing van Manen's guidelines for data analysis was imperative to investigate the findings of this hermeneutical phenomenological study. Results of the study uncovered the themes of teacher, parent, and student support which can lead to stronger second language acquisition and, in turn, produce more bilingual learners. Additionally, the data revealed that DLI programs in Georgia are providing equity for all language learners in the programs and cultural differences do not negatively impact the educational experiences of the students. Findings of the study provided a deeper understanding of the benefits and areas for growth of DLI programs, as well as highlight the experiences of the educators involved.

Keywords: dual language immersion, bilingual education, program development, language acquisition

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, without whom this would not have been possible.

To my husband, for picking up the slack when I needed time to work and always supporting me through my years upon years of school.

To my children, Riley, Emery, and Hudson, for inspiring me to continue with my education and be a “boss” mom and teacher.

To my friends and family along the way, Susana, Kara, and my mom, especially, who encouraged me and listened to me complain about grades I didn't like or rules I didn't agree with. You are the real heroes.

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List of Abbreviations

Bilingual Education Act (BEA)

Dual Language Immersion (DLI)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

English as a Second Oral Language (ESOL)

English Language Learner (ELL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Dual language immersion (DLI) programs are increasing in number throughout the United States (Amanti et al., 2022; Bernstein et al., 2021) as educators and parents alike understand the importance of being multilingual in the fast-changing world. This chapter describes the background of DLI programs, including the historical, social, and theoretical contexts surrounding dual language immersion programs and their development. Chapter One highlights the problem and purpose statements as well as the research questions. The significance of the study of dual language immersion programs will be detailed, with definitions of significant terms listed.

Background

As the development of dual language immersion programs throughout the United States continues to increase in number (Amanti et al., 2022; Bernstein et al., 2021; Hamman-Ortiz, 2019), it is critical to investigate the history of the programming, as well as how they currently function. Understanding how DLI programs work and impact the students and educators who participate is equally significant to their success. The following section will highlight the historical, social, and theoretical contexts concerning dual language immersion programs.

Historical Context

The idea of bilingual education re-emerged in the 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States (Bialystok, 2016; Chin et al., 2013; Sinclair, 2016). Years before the First World War, bilingual education was common with localized bilingual schools nationwide (Sinclair, 2016). As more people began immigrating to the U.S., the need for addressing language barriers became apparent, especially in educational settings, where language and

cultural differences inhibited academic growth for students of immigrants. Cummins (1989, 1999), a prominent multilingual education theorist, began pursuing educational reform for marginalized students in the 1970s and 1980s through his writings and ideas concerning language learning. Unfortunately, the concept of “English-only” learning was supported during that time and, in some ways, is still supported today (Sánchez et al., 2021). The “English-only” policies over the past 20 years (de Jong, 2016) not only remove the cultural reflection and identity of minority students but do not benefit them academically (Sánchez et al., 2021). In fact, it makes learning more difficult for English Language Learners (ELL) by effectively pushing through content using English instead of providing support through the utilization of their first language, much like Vygotsky’s (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) concept of scaffolding.

One program that emerged from the need to support English language learners is ELL (English Language Learners) or ESOL (English as a Second Oral Language) classes. In these programs, students learning English are pulled out of their grade-level classrooms to work on developing their English skills (Chin et al., 2013). These classes can be taught in various ways, but most occur in small groups with some support of the student's first language (Chin et al., 2013). However, any student learning English may be placed in an ESOL class, so a variety of languages may be represented. Providing adequate support for the students is difficult, with such a variety of languages possibly being represented. Teachers in ESOL programs also struggle with receiving support in acquiring resources for lesser-used languages or languages with which they are less familiar. This knowledge is necessary in order to develop rapport and trust with students. Often, ELL students are the children of first-generation immigrants who possess little English skills and rely on the students to learn and translate. The need for students to trust and receive support from their teachers is significant.

ELL or ESOL programs are still utilized throughout the United States (Chin et al., 2013; Menken & Solorza, 2012). However, emerging data displays the need for policy change yet again. ESOL programs are simply not as effective as once hoped (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Chin et al., 2013), and dual language immersion programs are proving more effective in achieving bilingualism for students (Cervantes-Soon, 2014). Students in ESOL may feel isolated from other classmates, and much of their cultural identity is neglected (Cervantes-Soon, 2014). At the same time, parents and educators are beginning to understand the immense benefits of being multilingual (Chamorro & Janke, 2020). Knowing and being able to speak another language has become a necessity in certain careers. Additionally, the cognitive benefits of learning a second language, especially beginning at a young age (Bialystok, 2021; Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Chamorro & Janke, 2020; Salomé et al., 2021), have become apparent. There has been a cultural shift from bilingualism being a negative attribute to now being seen as a sign of intelligence or giftedness. In response to the cultural shift, school districts in many states have begun implementing dual language immersion (DLI) programs (Hamman-Ortiz, 2019; Liu et al., 2022).

The concept of dual language immersion programs, sometimes referred to as two-way immersion (TWI), began with the bilingual program of Coral Way Elementary School in Miami, Florida, in 1963 (de Jong, 2016). It was originally designed to meet Cuban refugees' needs, where the idea of learning and maintaining the students' native Spanish was seen as a benefit instead of a deficit (de Jong, 2016). In 1968, the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) of Texas was implemented to aid in issues of nonattendance, underachievement, and high dropout rates for minority students (Bialystok, 2016; Chin et al., 2013; de Jong, 2016). While this legislative act emphasized the need to continue the student's native language, it focused on English proficiency (de Jong, 2016).

Dual language immersion programs were created to benefit minority students learning English as their second language. The concept of DLI programs is that native English-speaking students and English-learning students spend 50% of the day learning in English and 50% learning in another language (Lü et al., 2022; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2021). Students continue to learn the content for their grade level while simultaneously learning a second language (Rodríguez-Valls et al., 2017; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2021). In order for students to be academically successful in both languages, teachers must possess quality knowledge and skills in teaching and learning as well as proficiency in both languages (Dubiner et al., 2018; Durán-Martínez & Beltrán-Llavador, 2017; Hood, 2020; Pérez Cañado, 2014; Rodríguez-Valls et al., 2017).

Social Context

Unfortunately, although DLI programs began with solid intentions, many negative aspects have appeared. The biggest issue facing DLI programs is the lack of equity for minority students (Chávez-Moreno, 2021; Pacheco & Hamilton, 2020). Though DLI programs were created to provide equity for marginalized students (Delavan et al., 2021; Valdes, 1997), the popularity and need for increased bilingual education has instead resulted in representing the interests of white English speakers in many cases (Bernstein et al., 2021; Chávez-Moreno, 2021; Delavan et al., 2021; Dorner et al., 2021; Henderson, 2020; Pacheco & Hamilton, 2020). White students are celebrated for learning an additional language, while minority students are expected to learn and utilize English (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Martinez Negrette, 2020). With increased interest in acquiring an additional language by language majority speakers (White students, for example), the focus has changed from providing equity for language minority students to meeting the needs and requests of native English speakers (Bernstein et al., 2021; Cervantes-

Soon, 2014; Delavan et al., 2021; Martinez Negrette, 2020). While the benefits of being bilingual have been noted for both types of language learners, it is crucial for policymakers, administrators, and educators to look past the allure and focus on the much-needed equity for minority students (Cervantes-Soon, 2014). There is now a need to ensure the development of DLI programs that reject gentrification and focus on the needs of minority students (Bernstein et al., 2021). Decreasing prejudice is difficult to achieve, however, when the curriculum, acceptable content, and values of success have already been determined by years of Eurocentric cultural ideals that are echoed in experiences, language, and the culture of the school and community (Cervantes-Soon, 2014). Further research is needed on effectively designing and implementing DLI programs that enhance the language learning of minority students. In addition, serious consideration of how to incorporate cultural identity and prevent loss of heritage identification is necessary.

Research collected from this project will benefit participants in dual language immersion programs as it seeks to identify the qualities of success for such a program, focusing on increasing equity among minority participants. DLI teachers and administrators will also benefit from the collected data, as they can utilize the results to improve their existing programs or create a DLI program for their school or district. The idea of equity benefits all students involved, especially marginalized groups who may be participating in language immersion programs. Data collected can also be utilized in various language programs and settings to promote equality, acceptance, and cultural appreciation among various students with different ethnic backgrounds.

Theoretical Context

Much research exists concerning the benefits of dual language immersion programs. Studies note the cognitive and academic gains of students who participate in DLI programs versus those who do not (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; de Jong, 2016; Rodríguez-Valls et al., 2017). Lev Vygotsky proposed that culture becomes part of each person (Marginson & Dang, 2016; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). He discussed the prominent role that each person's social life plays in human growth and development. His research focused on the development of a child and, in terms of socio-cultural theory, highlighted the importance of the influence of a child's culture on their development and integration of speech learning (Shabani, 2016). He stated that a child's ability to speak is as important as the goal they are trying to attain; their speech and actions are part of the same function (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). He also noted that speech sometimes becomes so vitally important that young children cannot complete a difficult task if not allowed to use their speech (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Children can create and achieve greater possibilities through speech than actions alone (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978)

According to Vygotsky (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), each culture has varying ways cognitive development occurs, with adults having a considerable influence on children's language and cognitive development. Part of Vygotsky's research includes three phases of speech: social speech, external speech used to communicate with others (from two years old); private speech, directed to self and is a part of intellectual functioning (from three years old); and as children continue to grow and develop, they move to inner speech from seven years old, where speech takes on a self-regulating function (Newman, 2018).

In looking at Vygotsky's (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) work and theories, it was clear to see the vital role that language acquisition plays in a child's cognitive and social development

(Shabani, 2016; Yip, 2021). In having opportunities to learn a new language or practice one's native language, especially with other learners, children are also granted the opportunity to increase their skills and cognitive development (Yip, 2021). In working with other students of varying backgrounds, they are also given a chance to develop the crucial social skills needed for life as an adult and proper language acquisition and cognitive growth.

Many other researchers, such as Chaparro (2021), Cervantes-Soon (2014), and Martinez Negrette (2020), are focused on bilingual education's social and cultural aspects, including dual language immersion programs. They have written about the need for change in DLI programs in order to provide equity for minority students. While the intent behind DLI programs is noble, the focus on white, English-speaking students is a problem that must be rectified. The focus shift from minority students limits multicultural awareness for all students and causes identity loss for minority students, interfering with the intention of the program (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Chaparro, 2021; Martinez Negrette, 2020). To extend the current research, this project seeks to identify what makes quality dual language immersion programs, while focusing on increasing equity among minority participants. In doing so, others may utilize this research to bring change and improvements within their DLI programs and enrich the learners' experiences, especially minority students.

Problem Statement

There is a gap in the literature regarding how to design and integrate dual language immersion programs in schools, resulting in variations in the programming. The problem is that dual language immersion (DLI) programs in Georgia elementary schools yield different results depending on the design and implementation of each program. These differences can be

beneficial but also detrimental to producing students with solid language skills. At the same time, bias and discrimination exist in the programs, which needs to be investigated further.

While much research exists highlighting the benefits of dual language immersion programs, there is little that discusses how to design and implement the programs in schools. Due to limited available research, there is a lack of consistency in program structure and outcomes. While the purpose of DLI programs is to produce bilingual students while covering grade area content simultaneously, it also serves to incorporate multicultural learning (Chaparro, 2019; Esposito & Bauer, 2018; Serafini et al., 2020). Multicultural learning helps to develop a sense of self and pride in students of different ethnic backgrounds, which in turn increases academic success (Cummins, 2000).

Unfortunately, due to increased program numbers and interest in DLI programs, inequity exists in the programs (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2020; Dorner et al., 2021; Hamann & Catalano, 2021; Morales & Maravilla, 2019; Olivos & Lucero, 2018; Palmer et al., 2019; Poza, 2019). Dual language immersion programs were crafted in order to provide better learning opportunities for students of immigrants or whose first language is something other than English. Other programs, such as ESOL or ELL classes, have not provided positive results for students learning English (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Freire et al., 2021); thus, DLI programs were implemented to help bridge the academic gaps between English language learners and their peers. However, the benefits of bilingualism have become obvious to parents (García-Mateus, 2020; Liu et al., 2022; Ryan, 2020) and the focus has shifted from providing equity for minority students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand current practices in dual language immersion programming, identify biases, and investigate designs for implementing

dual language immersion programs to provide consistency between programs in elementary schools in Georgia. At this stage in the research, dual language immersion program was defined as a program that requires students to spend part of the school day (typically 50%) learning in their native language and part of the school day learning a second language. DLI programs allow students to develop skills in both languages while still meeting grade-level standards (Esposito & Bauer, 2018).

Significance of the Study

The study's significance included investigating the study's theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives. The theoretical perspective included how this study will contribute to the theories surrounding it. The empirical perspective encompassed how other studies in this field are linked to this study and what methodology is utilized to enhance the current literature on DLI and language learning subject matter. The practical perspective focused on how what is learned through the study will impact current practices in dual language immersion programs and the population being served.

Theoretical

The theoretical significance of this study was that it will further investigate the benefits of dual language immersion programs while providing insight into necessary methods for effective development and implementation. Much research is present detailing the benefits of DLI programs, but there is a gap in the literature in terms of DLI program development, including a lack of research on teacher training needs (Amanti et al., 2022). This study provided insight into the current procedures of local DLI programs focusing on investigating program development and increasing equity for minority participants.

Empirical

The empirical significance of this phenomenological study was that it will add to the research concerning the benefits of DLI programs. It also indicated that there is inequity in the local DLI programs. Since little research exists regarding the development of DLI programs, this study hoped to provide insight into what is needed for a DLI program to be effective, especially in terms linguistic success and of multicultural awareness and equity (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Chaparro, 2021; Martinez Negrette, 2020). This study found that the experiences of teachers in dual language immersion classrooms in order to better understand the benefits of dual language immersion programs, their design, and investigate if any racial inequity may exist.

Practical

The data collected from this study benefited educators and students who are currently participating in dual language immersion programs, as well as administrators or others working toward creating and implementing a DLI program in their school or district. Information gathered provided a greater understanding of teachers' experiences in DLI programs while also identifying the need for a DLI program to succeed, which is an area lacking in research. The data findings addressed cultural issues and inequalities, which may enhance students' experiences in DLI programs throughout the country.

Research Questions

Little research exists detailing the design and development of dual language immersion programs. More information was needed regarding what aids in making the program successful, especially regarding personnel. Considering the critical role of the educator(s) in dual language immersion programs and their success, priority should be placed on hiring specifically for the needed skills. The experiences of educators currently in DLI programs are crucial to better

understand the makeup of individual dual language immersion programs and their outcomes. At the same time, teachers were able to discuss the possible biases and discrimination that may be present in the students' experiences.

Central Research Question

How can the design of dual language immersion programs promote fluency (speaking, reading, writing) in language learners?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of K-5 educators who teach in DLI programs in Georgia?

Sub-Question Two

How do educators in DLI classrooms in Georgia aid students in reaching a higher-level literacy threshold to achieve cognitive, academic, and linguistic growth?

Sub-Question Three

How have racial or cultural differences influenced student performance and the classroom environment in DLI programs in Georgia?

Definitions

1. *Dual language immersion (DLI)* - an enrichment program that provides grade-level content knowledge through English and an additional language to pursue bilingualism, biliteracy, cultural awareness, and high academic achievement (Valdez et al., 2016).
2. *Fluency* - speech delivery that is speedy and smooth without breaks or pauses, repairs, or repetitions (N. de Jong et al., 2013).
3. *Language acquisition* - learning an additional language when one has basic expertise of one or more already (Dixon et al., 2012).

4. *Bilingual* – challenging to define and contested by many scholars. Some would say the knowledge and use of two languages or people who use two languages daily (Turnbull, 2016). The idea of semi-bilingual should also be noted: one who has some knowledge of two languages (Turnbull, 2016).
5. *Multilingual* - See the above definition, but for multiple languages.
6. *Proficiency* - learning, and mastery of a language, highly associated with culture, socioeconomic status, and level of education (Miteva et al., 2022).
7. *English language learner (ELL)* - students whose first language is a language other than English and who are working toward speaking and reading English (Cervantes-Soon, 2014).
8. *English as a second language (ESL)*- students whose first language is a language other than English and who are working toward speaking and reading English (Cervantes-Soon, 2014).
9. *English as a second oral language (ESOL)*- students whose first language is a language other than English and who are working toward speaking and reading English (Cervantes-Soon, 2014).
10. *Gentrification (in the educational setting)* - pushing out marginalized students amidst the rise of more privileged students and parents (Delavan et al., 2021)

Summary

The problem is that dual language immersion (DLI) programs in Georgia elementary schools yield varying results depending on the design and implementation of each program. There is a gap in the literature regarding how to design and integrate dual language immersion programs in schools, resulting in variations in the programming. These differences can lead to

students exiting the program with varying levels of language proficiency. The cultural or racial divide among students in DLI programs is causing an issue for students within the programs. While these programs were created to provide equity for minority students, that purpose has been overshadowed by the benefits for multilingual non-minority students. In doing so, the experiences of students in the DLI programs have been negatively affected.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to understand current practices in dual language immersion programming, identify biases, and develop a design for implementing dual language immersion programs to provide consistency between programs in participating elementary schools. The hope was to provide better experiences for students and offer solid plans for schools to implement DLI programs within their schools. With clarity in program purpose, proper training, and support from school personnel, dual language immersion programs can function as their intended purpose and provide enhanced learning opportunities for all involved.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs are growing in number throughout the United States. A systematic review of the literature is necessary to explore the problem of designing and implementing a dual language program for elementary students and the benefits associated with completing a DLI program. This chapter presents a review of the current literature related to the topic of study. First, the theories relevant to dual language immersion programs are discussed, followed by a synthesis of recent literature about designing and implementing a dual language immersion program. Then, literature to illustrate how students who participate in DLI programs through elementary school progress in language proficiency and overall academic success is described. Finally, the need for the current study is addressed by identifying a gap in the literature regarding how to implement dual language immersion programs and world language programming for elementary learners.

Theoretical Framework

The ability to comprehend and use language has a significant effect on the development of a child. Without language, it is challenging to communicate and learn. Cummins' (1976) threshold theory offered insight into the complexity of language acquisition from birth to older years and the effects of language on a child's cognition. In investigating this theory, insights into the importance of bilingualism and, in turn, dual language immersion programs were gained.

The Threshold Theory

Cummins' (1976) threshold theory focused on the effects of bilingualism on children and their cognitive development. According to Cummins, there were two thresholds of language acquisition regarding bilingualism, a higher and lower level (Cummins, 1976). Students in the

lower levels of language learning were unable to benefit academically and cognitively within their environment with those languages. It is not until they reached the higher threshold level that students reap the benefits of bilingualism, such as cognitive, academic, and linguistic growth (Cummins et al., 2001; Ramirez, 1987; Uzzell & Ayscue, 2021). When students reach the higher-level thresholds, they have obtained considerable literacy skills in both languages (Cummins et al., 2001). Cummins also discussed the idea of biliteracy advantage, where skills learned in one language transfer to the other learned language, such as reading strategies or cognate knowledge (Ardasheva et al., 2011). For the skills to transfer from one language to another, bilingual students must have significant literacy skills in both languages (Ardasheva et al., 2011; Sung, 2022). One critique of Cummins' studies was that it does not consider the effects of children's upbringing and culture that could influence their language development, especially between bilingual and monolingual groups (Cummins et al., 2001). It was also criticized for not distinguishing between oral language and literacy skills (Ardasheva et al., 2011).

Cummins revisited his theory through the years and continued to advocate for its relevancy in contemporary settings, even when faced with opposing views or research that weakens a point of the threshold theory. He stated:

The central and well-supported finding is that the continued development of bilingual students' two languages during elementary school entails the potential of positive academic, linguistic, and cognitive consequences (Cummins, 2000, p. 38).

Cummins' threshold theory was significant in considering dual language immersion programs because of its focus on developing bilingual students and the skills needed for students to achieve language proficiency. Different levels of language learning and their cognitive effects

supported the idea of DLI programs benefiting students academically and cognitively while outlining general goals for students to progress toward bilingualism.

Related Literature

As dual language immersion programs grow in numbers throughout the United States (Steele et al., 2018; Thane et al., 2022; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2021), from 187 nationwide programs in 1995 to 450 programs in 2011 (Baldwin, 2021), 700 programs in 2016 (Ee, 2016), and over 2000 programs in 2018 (Steele et al., 2018), it has been critical to examine the possible benefits of bilingualism for students utilizing a dual language immersion program and notate any adverse outcomes. The American Councils for International Education cited over 3600 programs, with the majority consisting of Spanish DLI programs with 2,936 programs nationwide (Roberts, 2021). Forty-four states have DLI programs, with the majority offering Spanish (80%), Chinese (8.6%), and French (5.0%) (Roberts, 2021). California, Texas, New York, Utah, and North Carolina have over two hundred DLI programs in their state (Roberts, 2021). Guidance is needed to properly develop dual language immersion programs for the desired products to occur. In reviewing related literature, the topics mentioned earlier emerged, including research gaps.

Dual Language Immersion Programs

The United States educational system and its policies have failed to provide adequate resources to meet non-native English-speaking learners' needs (academic, socio-emotional, and linguistic) (Serafini et al., 2020). This failure has caused a significant gap in achievement on standardized tests and a higher number of dropouts when compared to native English speakers (Serafini et al., 2020; Uzzell & Ayscue, 2021). Minority groups, or groups that have historically been discriminated against, have fallen behind academically in the United States (Ardasheva et

al., 2011; Cummins, 1989; Hamman-Ortiz, 2019; Sánchez et al., 2021). Educational institutions have played a role in negating the importance of minority students' cultural identity (Cummins, 1989). Schools should be responsible for bridging the achievement gaps for learners with differences, whether learning disabilities or language differences (Cummins, 1989). Educators must adapt in order to meet all students' needs (Cummins, 1989). One way that educators have attempted to bridge this gap is through the use of dual language immersion programs.

Dual language programs can vary in model, but the majority consist of students spending 50% of the school day in their native or home language and 50% in the target language (the language they are learning) (Freire et al., 2021; Hill, 2023; Lü et al., 2022). In this two-way model, students cannot only learn the standards necessary for their school grade level, but they are simultaneously learning another language (Burkhauser et al., 2016; Chaparro, 2021; Martinez Negrette, 2020; Preusler et al., 2022). One teacher utilizes English to provide instruction in math and science, for example, while another educator teaches reading and history in Spanish (or another language). DLI is an enrichment program that allows students to gain proficiency in a second language while they develop skills in their native or home language (Esposito & Bauer, 2018; Thibeault & Matheson, 2020). These programs bring together students from a variety of cultural backgrounds and socio-economic situations (Chaparro, 2019).

Academic Considerations

Dual language immersion programs allow students to continue learning the grade level standards while simultaneously learning an additional language (Burkhauser et al., 2016; Chaparro, 2021; Martinez Negrette, 2020; Preusler et al., 2022; Thane et al., 2022; Thibeault & Matheson, 2020). With students spending a portion of each day (typically fifty percent) in their language from birth and the other portion of the day in the language they are learning, they are

able to increase their linguistic and academic skills at the same time (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2007; Esposito & Bauer, 2018). Due to the nature of language learning as well as the development of young children, educators in DLI programs must possess an immense knowledge of both language acquisition and childhood development (Chaparro, 2019; King & Ridley, 2019; Serafini et al., 2020).

Academically, students are expected to work at the assigned grade level and are taught the same content as the general education students of the same grade (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2007; Thibeault & Matheson, 2020). Of course, the major difference is that students in DLI programs receive instruction in multiple languages, while students in the general education setting receive instruction in English. However, in addition to learning grade-level content, DLI classrooms have an additional focus on cultural aspects of the languages being learned (Chaparro, 2019; Esposito & Bauer, 2018; Serafini et al., 2020). In many DLI classrooms, multiple ethnic groups may be represented and are meant to be celebrated in the dual language immersion setting (Djuraeva et al., 2022; Thane et al., 2022).

Typically, students participating in dual language immersion programs perform better academically than their peers (Brannon, 2019; Burkhauser et al., 2016; Chaparro, 2021; Fox et al., 2019; Lü et al., 2022; Neveu et al., 2022; Preusler et al., 2022; Sanders, 2018). However, students of immigrant families assimilating into United States public schools generally struggle to work at the same level as other students (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Chin et al., 2013; Dixon et al., 2012; Li & Peters, 2016). DLI programs work to provide equity for minority students by providing part of their school instruction in their first language, though it does not always function as intended (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2020; Djuraeva et al., 2022; Henderson, 2020; Martinez Negrette, 2020; Morales & Maravilla, 2019). Equity in the DLI classroom bridges the

achievement gap between minority students and their English-speaking peers (Ardasheva et al., 2011; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Chung, 2020; Fox et al., 2019; Steele et al., 2018).

Socio-emotional Considerations

Managing and monitoring students' socio-emotional needs in dual language immersion programs is critical, especially for students entering dual language immersion programs as English language learners and students of immigrant families. Students working to assimilate into a mainly English-speaking society will have issues connecting with others, especially if they have little English language skills (Cummins, 2000). One of the main objectives of DLI programs is to aid minorities and students of immigrant families in finding their place in the world (Fox et al., 2019; Sanders, 2018). Helping students connect with the traditions and culture of their families is an essential piece of the dual language immersion classroom in order to help them keep their cultural identity (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2000; Fox et al., 2019; New Zealand Department of Education, 1988; Pacheco & Hamilton, 2020; Sanders, 2018). Losing the connection to their culture can be detrimental to their emotional well-being and can negatively impact their academic progress (Cummins, 2000).

Minority students typically deal with feelings of loneliness more often than their white peers (de Jong, 2016; Li & Peters, 2016; Talamantes, 2021). Dual language immersion programs seek to aid in changing that by offering a safe place for students to share their cultural identity and traditions (Heiman & Nuñez-Janes, 2021). Unfortunately, this is not always the case, and students may still feel ostracized from their community (Martinez Negrette, 2020; Talamantes, 2021). However, educators of DLI programs and administrators of schools with DLI programs should seek to celebrate the cultural diversity of the programs, highlighting the specific ethnic and racial groups that are represented (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2000; New Zealand

Department of Education, 1988). Parents and the communities that are represented by the school population should be integrated into the classroom and school as much as possible with guest speakers, community engagement, and special programming that allows for students and parents to share and learn about the ethnic or racial groups that exist in their school community (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2000; New Zealand Department of Education, 1988). These activities instill a sense of pride in students and families, allowing them to be more open to learning from others and feeling like a part of a supportive community (Cummins, 2000; Pacheco & Hamilton, 2020).

Linguistic Considerations

Dual language immersion programs exist to enhance and develop students' linguistic abilities, in addition to promoting collaboration among cultural and ethnic differences (Ardasheva et al., 2011; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Fox et al., 2019; Steele et al., 2018). To promote bilingualism and equity between minority students and other students in dual language immersion programs, educators must carefully consider the concepts of language acquisition and language input and output. Educators must be specifically trained in teaching another language and possess essential knowledge of language learning, especially in pedagogy for teaching a world language (Bagwasi, 2021; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2007; Disbray et al., 2020; Morrell et al., 2019; Thibeault & Matheson, 2020).

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition refers to learning an additional language when one has basic expertise of one or more languages (Dixon et al., 2012). Knowledge of language learning is necessary for educators in DLI programs, but aiding students in the successful and proficient attainment of an additional language requires a greater understanding of linguistic pedagogy (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2007; Disbray et al., 2020; Morrell et al., 2019). Language

acquisition has three main elements: the language, the child, and their ability to learn and utilize the language, and the child's environment (Apriana & Sutrisno, 2022). These elements are required for successful language acquisition of a first or second language (Apriana & Sutrisno, 2022).

Additional factors impacting the success of a child acquiring language include psychological factors such as intellectual, memory, and motor capacity (Apriana & Sutrisno, 2022). A child's ability to learn and retain information for repeated use as well as their motivation to learn on their own are examples of psychological factors that influence a student's efforts in acquiring a new language. The social aspect of language learning plays a major role in a child acquiring a first or second language (Apriana & Sutrisno, 2022; Brannon, 2019; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2007; King & Ridley, 2019). Both formal instruction and informal situations allow students to increase their exposure to the language and provide opportunities for students to practice utilizing it (Apriana & Sutrisno, 2022; Brannon, 2019; Dixon et al., 2012). Younger children, such as elementary students benefit most from informal opportunities to learn through play, (King & Ridley, 2019) while older students and adults typically benefit from formal instruction, like in a classroom setting (Apriana & Sutrisno, 2022; Bagwasi, 2021). Other psychological factors impacting language acquisition include motivation and attitude. Motivation, or the internal desire to succeed or complete a task, is critical to successful language learning. A child's attitude also impacts their success in mastering a language; a negative attitude inhibits learning and growth, while a positive attitude pushes them toward independence and achievement (Apriana & Sutrisno, 2022).

Students learning an additional language require explicit instruction with literacy instruction (Brannon, 2019; Dixon et al., 2012). Students typically need three to seven years to

reach proficiency in the second language (Dixon et al., 2012). Students who begin learning an additional language at a young age are more likely to achieve near-native language results as compared to students who begin language instruction later (Brannon, 2019; de Jong et al., 2020; Dixon et al., 2012). As students are immersed in the target language, they experience increased language input, which leads to proficiency (Costa & Guasti, 2021). With more time spent hearing, seeing, and speaking the target language, students have a greater chance of reaching proficient levels of language usage (Brannon, 2019; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Costa & Guasti, 2021; Trebits et al., 2021). At the same time, immersion in the language alone is not enough to reach high proficiency levels. Students must also have opportunities to read and speak the language (Bagwasi, 2021; Dixon et al., 2012; King & Ridley, 2019; Thibeault & Matheson, 2020). When all the pieces are in place (reading, writing, listening, speaking), students are better equipped to utilize the language independently.

Language Input and Output

A concept to consider in developing bilingualism among language learners is the input and output of the language. In a dual language immersion program, students receive increased input of the language as they hear it spoken and see it written or read (Bell'Aver & Rabelo, 2020). The more time spent attending the language spoken, the more students can understand (La Serna, 2022; Ramirez, 1987). Quality input is necessary for students to reach language proficiency (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Disbray et al., 2020; Ryan, 2021). In DLI programs, teachers must be proficient and able to provide quality input, including diversity and complexity of speech, for their students to increase fluency (Ryan, 2021). As students gain proficiency in writing and reading in the target language, they also develop the same skills in their native language, leading to interdependence across the languages (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2007; Lü et al., 2022).

Auditory processing skills are essential to becoming bilingual (Apriana & Sutrisno, 2022; Jones et al., 2021). These skills are necessary for language acquisition and language skills, leading to phonological awareness (Disbray et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2021; La Serna, 2022) or the ability to work with sounds in language. These skills begin at birth and continue as children grow and develop. There are many variations in sounds and patterns between languages, including how speakers stress letter sounds or their inflections of words or phrases (Jones et al., 2021). Due to the variations of sounds and patterns in languages, it may be necessary for students in DLI programs to possess or develop strong auditory processing skills (Apriana & Sutrisno, 2022; Jones et al., 2021). Development of auditory processing skills may be enhanced by increasing exposure to another language (Jones et al., 2021).

At the same time, the output of the language, or a student's ability to produce in the target language, is equally essential in overall acquisition (Sung, 2022). The amount a student can produce or participates in output can determine if they will be passive or active bilinguals. Passive bilingualism refers to someone who understands the language but does not typically speak it, while active bilingualism refers to someone who can speak and understand it (Ryan, 2021). Spending time in the language increases student proficiency with both input and output (Brannon, 2019; Cardoza & Brown, 2019).

While there are differences among the learning processes required to learn a new language, the underlying cognitive and academic proficiencies transfer across the languages (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Côté et al., 2020; Cummins, 2007; Lü et al., 2022; Yip, 2021). This commonality allows for the transfer of skills and proficiency across languages (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Côté et al., 2020; Cummins, 2007). Five major types of skills are transferred in language learning, according to Cummins (2007): conceptual elements, metacognitive and

metalinguistic strategies (Neveu et al., 2022; Pacheco & Hamilton, 2020; Sanders, 2018), pragmatic uses of language, specific linguistic knowledge, and phonological awareness (Cummins, 2007). Conceptual aspects include understanding specific world concepts such as the water cycle (Cummins, 2007). Metacognitive and metalinguistic strategies refer to using graphic organizers and strategies for learning vocabulary (Cummins, 2007; Neveu et al., 2022). Pragmatic language use includes a student willing to utilize the language, take risks and use gestures to aid in understanding (Cummins, 2007). Linguistic knowledge refers to the knowledge of words, and phonological awareness encompasses the knowledge that words have distinct sounds (Cummins, 2007; Hwang et al., 2020). These transfers allow students to not only utilize the knowledge they already possess to learn a new language, but it enhances and increases the current knowledge and proficiency of their native language (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Herdina & Jessner, 2002; Hwang et al., 2020; Lü et al., 2022; Sanders, 2018).

Cultural Considerations

A main proponent of dual language immersion includes highlighting and celebrating the different traditions and cultures represented in the classroom (Fox et al., 2019). Most often, dual language immersion programs represent a vast array of ethnic and racial groups in their classrooms. Due to a large amount of diversity, educators in DLI programs must take extra care to monitor any issues that may arise due to differences in the classroom (Amanti, 2019; Cummins, 2007). Unfortunately, racism and bigotry still exist and find their way into DLI classrooms, making the need for educators to be hypervigilant in exercising caution and showcasing exuberance while discussing the varying traditions and beliefs represented in the classroom (Amanti, 2019; Cervantes-Soon et al., 2020; Djuraeva et al., 2022; Martinez Negrette, 2020; Morales & Maravilla, 2019; Olivos & Lucero, 2018; Palmer et al., 2019).

The DLI classroom should be a safe place for students of varying cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds to collaborate, learn, and practice their language skills without judgment and feelings of shame (Fox et al., 2019; Heiman & Nuñez-Janes, 2021; Salerno et al., 2020). In the ideal DLI situation, students of different language backgrounds help one another learn both languages, taking turns practicing together, celebrating the success of others, and finding common ground in their struggles (Fox et al., 2019; Martinez Negrette, 2020; Salerno et al., 2020). Educators in DLI classrooms must facilitate opportunities for student growth and development concurrently.

Benefits of DLI Programs

Dual language immersion programs and the resulting bilingualism offer challenges for students and educators. Students participating in elementary DLI programs or those who become bilingual go on to perform higher academically, including scoring higher on standardized tests, than their peers, meaning the design of such programming and its effects require careful consideration (Brannon, 2019; Burkhauser et al., 2016; Fox et al., 2019). Students in DLI programs increase their proficiency in their native language and the target language (the second language they are learning). Often, DLI programs pair English speakers with native speakers of the second language, allowing for equity in their learning as well as simultaneous bilingualism for both groups of students (Ardasheva et al., 2011; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Fox et al., 2019; Sanders, 2018; Steele et al., 2018). However, equity is not always present, and instead, discrimination exists where students, typically native speakers of the target language, feel ostracized or overlooked (Martinez Negrette, 2020; Talamantes, 2021).

While students who become bilingual or participate in programming such as DLI programs perform better academically and score higher on standardized tests (Brannon, 2019;

Burkhauser et al., 2016; Fox et al., 2019; Neveu et al., 2022; Preusler et al., 2022; Trebits et al., 2021), there is much to consider in creating a DLI program. Dual language immersion programs aid student language proficiency in the target language and a student's native language (Bell'Aver & Rabelo, 2020; La Serna, 2022; Neveu et al., 2022; Preusler et al., 2022; Shen et al., 2022). As many DLI programs pair English language learners with native English speakers (two-way), bilingualism occurs for both groups simultaneously (Ardasheva et al., 2011; Cervantes-Soon et al., 2020; Fox et al., 2019; Neveu et al., 2022; Steele et al., 2018; Trebits et al., 2021). At the same time, both groups are developing skills and meeting the needed standards for their specific grades (Burkhauser et al., 2016; Esposito & Bauer, 2018; Neveu et al., 2022). Students are provided equity in their language learning and can help one another in their language development (Fox et al., 2019; Martinez Negrette, 2020). Cultural traditions and experiences are shared among students and teachers (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2023), developing students' sense of self and broadening their worldviews (Fox et al., 2019).

For minority students specifically, there are benefits to their overall well-being and sense of self. Minority students' language and culture are integrated into school programming, while the community is encouraged to participate in the educational experiences of their children (Cummins, 1989). The curriculum motivates minority students to use their native language and learn new information (Cummins, 1989). Educators who participate in these programs become advocates for minority students, being certain to aid in their academic successes instead of being roadblocks in their educational journey (Cummins, 1989). When instruction is conducted in a low-stress environment, such as with their native language being utilized, English language learners are better able to learn new information (Cardoza & Brown, 2019).

Students who begin learning a second language in elementary school are set up for future success in the target language and other areas. Students who begin a language program in elementary school are academically more successful, possess greater problem-solving skills, and perform better on standardized tests than their peers who do not participate in the program (Brannon, 2019; Burkhauser et al., 2016; Chaparro, 2021). Students who participate in language learning during their younger years also gain higher proficiency in the second language as compared to their peers who begin learning a second language later in their educational career (Costa & Guasti, 2021; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2021). The skills gained in school subjects are transferred across languages, with proficiency being increased without adverse effects on a child's second language learning (Côté et al., 2020; Cummins, 2000). With support from educators and parents, minority students' sense of self (including language and culture) is incorporated into their school program, influencing positive academic growth (Cummins, 2000).

Looking toward the future of students after high school and university, bilingual students have many opportunities in the workforce and beyond. The benefits of achieving bilingualism include increased employability, especially in areas of commerce and international diplomacy and trade (Burkhauser et al., 2016; Chaparro, 2021; Fox et al., 2019; Uzzell & Ayscue, 2021). Benefits are also noted in healthcare careers and specific occupations (Fox et al., 2019). In the United States, job searching has become limited and competitive, so possessing a skill such as speaking another language could set a student apart from other qualified candidates (Burkhauser et al., 2016; Fox et al., 2019). Bilingualism enhances overall communication skills, a critical asset in the workplace (Fox et al., 2019). Possessing language skills improves relationships with customers of the native language and coworkers while simultaneously increasing growth opportunities for their workplace (Fox et al., 2019).

A student's worldview is enhanced through studying and acquiring a second language, making them more accepting and understanding of people's differences (Djuraeva et al., 2022). They are well suited for leadership positions and working with teams. Bilinguals can better connect and empathize with others due to their global worldview (Djuraeva et al., 2022). Their broader understanding of cultural differences helps bridge linguistic and cultural gaps for others (Djuraeva et al., 2022). Minority students who participate in DLI programs and maintain their native language are better able to communicate with their family members, increase the linguistic competence of those around them and their community, and enhance their academic resources (Cummins, 2000; Djuraeva et al., 2022).

More research is needed in the long-term benefits for students who participate in dual language immersion programs. While some research (Brannon, 2019; Fox et al., 2019; Neveu et al., 2022; Preusler et al., 2022) suggests benefits for success in the workplace, an increase in career opportunities, and an overall better understanding of other cultures and the world, few studies (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Chaparro, 2021; Martinez Negrette, 2020) highlight the experiences of students who participated in DLI programs. Understanding the impact that DLI programs have on the lives of student participants would provide a focus on how to improve the programs and specific ways to make them beneficial for all students involved.

Parental Support

Parents are increasingly choosing to enroll their students in dual language immersion programs as their popularity and number of programs expand (Thane et al., 2022). The trait of bilingualism is now considered a positive (García-Mateus, 2020; Liu et al., 2022; Ryan, 2020). Bilingualism was previously seen as an issue, mainly stemming from minoritized speakers (García-Mateus, 2020; Liu et al., 2022). Now, parents consider bilingualism a resource or advantage, causing many parents to seek avenues for their children to learn another language (de

Jong et al., 2020; García-Mateus, 2020; Liu et al., 2022; Thane et al., 2022). The increase in the number and variety of languages offered in DLI programs not only showcases the need for more programming but also its popularity (Ee, 2016). In the humble beginnings of DLI programs, Spanish was the primary language offered. Now, more than 20 languages are offered in programs throughout the United States (Ee, 2016).

In looking to enroll students in a dual language immersion program, parents often consider the following: increasing bilingual skills, enhancing future opportunities, expanding cognitive skills (Bialystok, 2021; Salomé et al., 2021; Thane et al., 2022), preparing for the future in society, and increasing understanding of other cultures (de Jong et al., 2020; Ee, 2016; Ryan, 2020). Parents of minority students also consider strengthening their ethnic identity, accessing better educational opportunities, and having their child act as a translator for the family (Ee, 2016; Ryan, 2020).

Managing varying parent expectations can be difficult concerning dual language immersion programs. While parents of DLI students understand the benefits associated with bilingualism, their expectations of the program's outcomes vary, sometimes causing friction. One cause for displeasure is the availability of the practice of the target language outside of the classroom (Hwang et al., 2020; Ryan, 2020). Many parents desire for their children to be able to utilize their second language in places outside of the classroom (Ryan, 2020). Practice can be achieved more easily for certain languages, while others lack adequate outside opportunities (Ryan, 2020), i.e., Spanish versus German. In the United States, there are endless opportunities to practice Spanish outside of school, mainly depending on where a student lives. However, there are far fewer places in which to practice using German.

Minority students will be empowered only to the extent that the communities are empowered through their partnership with the school (Cummins, 1989; de Jong et al., 2020; García-Mateus, 2020). When minority parents are involved in their children's education, parents develop self-efficacy skills that are passed on to their children, resulting in positive academic results (Cummins, 1989; Muro, 2023). When educators work collaboratively with minority parents, there are positive changes in a child's school progress (Cummins, 1989; de Jong et al., 2020; García-Mateus, 2020; Muro, 2023).

Negative Implications of DLI Programs

There are possible negative aspects of dual language immersion programs. One problem could be possible resistance by school administrators or teachers (Baca, 2021). Implementing a DLI program requires changing the mindset of teachers as well as recognizing the logistical challenges it would present (García-Mateus, 2021). At the same time, students can have negative experiences within the program, predominantly minority students meant to acquire English as a second language, while other participating students learning a second language are considered exemplary (Hamann & Catalano, 2021; Martinez Negrette, 2020). This type of thinking removes the equity for language learning and education that the dual language immersion programs are meant to provide for minority students.

Another negative aspect of dual language immersion programs involves implementing DLI programs nationwide. While many beneficial outcomes are associated with students participating in dual language immersion programs, it is clear that not every student will benefit from the program as currently designed (Alfaro, 2019; Palmer et al., 2019; Poza, 2019). This lack of equity is due to various issues: inequality through state policies, school district decisions, school community, and even in dual language immersion classrooms, for whom DLI programs

were initially developed (Alfaro, 2019; Hamann & Catalano, 2021; Olivos & Lucero, 2018; Palmer et al., 2019; Poza, 2019). Unfortunately, as time has progressed, political beliefs and gentrification have changed the policies that would support equity for minority learners, especially English language learners (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2020; Dorner et al., 2021; Hamann & Catalano, 2021; Morales & Maravilla, 2019; Olivos & Lucero, 2018; Palmer et al., 2019; Poza, 2019). This shift in ideology is taking the focus away from the students who need extra support in the classroom (Dorner et al., 2021; García-Mateus, 2021; Palmer et al., 2019). Racial bigotry is causing a chasm to form between the minority students participating in DLI programs and their white classmates (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2020; Djuraeva et al., 2022; Hamann & Catalano, 2021; Martinez Negrette, 2020; Morales & Maravilla, 2019; Poza, 2019). White students are praised for their participation in the program, which is viewed as a form of gifted education, while their minority counterparts are not viewed in the same light (Chung, 2020; Djuraeva et al., 2022; Dorner et al., 2021; Martinez Negrette, 2020).

One challenge facing teachers in DLI programs is correctly implementing the target language (Alfaro, 2019). Specifically, The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages suggests that teachers and students in DLI programs utilize the target language at least 90% of the time at all levels of instruction, i.e., verbal, auditory, visual, and reading instruction (Hood, 2020). Providing professional development for educators in DLI settings focusing on oral language activities (Huang et al., 2022), implementing stronger language usage policies in the classroom, and crafting more creative opportunities for teachers and students to use language in the classroom may help to increase the target language usage percentage (Alfaro, 2019; Hood, 2020; Poza, 2019). The design of the DLI program influences the student's investment in the languages they are learning (Ryan, 2020).

A primary concern facing DLI programs concerns the program outcomes. While ideally, the program produces bilingual students from minority and non-minority groups, but that expectation does not come to fruition without proper support inside and outside the classroom. Often, there is no language reinforcement of the target language at home due to parents' lack of exposure to the language and culture (Ayscue & Uzzell, 2022; Brannon, 2019; Porter, 2018; Ryan, 2021) Due to this fact, native English speakers become bilingual with limited cultural awareness from their DLI experience, while native speakers of the target language experience a devaluation of their culture through their DLI experience (Porter, 2018). According to Cummins (2000):

Change in the deep structure will come only when educators walk into their classrooms burdened not by the anger of the past and the disdain of the present, but with their own identities focused on transforming the social futures towards which their students are traveling. (p. 11)

In order to be truly effective and bring positive change, bilingual education should be a transformative and intercultural focus to school instruction that contests the divisive relations of power (Cummins, 2000).

Additionally, since most DLI programs exist in elementary school settings, the resources needed for continuing the education of DLI program participants may vary depending on location and the availability of additional programming post-primary school (Padilla et al., 2022). Due to the variety of settings and resources, outcomes for students who participate in DLI programs vary, with some receiving DLI instruction through middle and high school, with others only having typical world language instruction, with the opportunity to take advanced language courses (Padilla et al., 2022). The main purpose of dual language immersion programs is to build

and develop fluency in a second language for program participants (Ardasheva et al., 2011; Bell’Aver & Rabelo, 2020; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Fox et al., 2019; Padilla et al., 2022; Steele et al., 2018). Fluency in a second language is best accomplished by continued education in the same or similar setting of a DLI classroom, where language usage and experimentation opportunities are available (Hood, 2020; Ryan, 2020). In order to best meet the fluency needs of DLI students, continued education of program participants, including educators, is an essential proponent to the program model and for the prolonged success of its students (Amanti, 2019; Padilla et al., 2022).

English Language Learner Programs

The introduction of English Language Learner (ELL) or English as a Second Oral Language (ESOL) programs was an initial answer to the problem of helping non-native English-speaking students assimilate into schools in the United States. In these English-focused program models, students are typically pulled from their classrooms to work on their language skills (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2007). While these programs can be more cost-effective than dual language immersion models, the sole focus on English does not deliver positive results in closing achievement gaps for minority students (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Freire et al., 2021). The focus on the English language lessens the importance of students’ cultural and linguistic heritage as it glosses over its impact on their lives.

Typical ELL programs include having English learning students pulled out of the general education classroom to receive instruction in a small group setting (Chin et al., 2013; Morrell et al., 2019). ELL students spend a large portion of their day in the general education classroom with English-speaking students and teachers, with another portion of their day receiving small group instruction in English (Chin et al., 2013; de Jong, 2016; Morrell et al., 2019; Sánchez et al., 2021). This focus on English removes the cultural reflection and identity of minority students

and has negative academic consequences (de Jong, 2016; Poza, 2019; Ramirez, 1987; Sánchez et al., 2021). Sometimes, the ELL teacher is a native speaker of a language other than English, though this is not a requirement or a guarantee since the main goal is teaching English to students of another language. ELL students in the small group setting can represent a variety of cultures and ethnicities, or they may be a homogenous group of language learners. For example, some schools have a large Hispanic immigrant population, so most often, ELL groups consist of native Spanish speakers, though a vast array of ethnic groups may still be represented. In other parts of the country, there is more variety in the immigration of different people groups, so that ELL groups may consist of students from Japan, Russia, Mexico, and other European nations.

There are several issues concerning the outcomes of traditional ELL programs in schools in the United States. The focus on English language learning allows for the heterogeneous mixing of these learning groups; however, much of the student's cultural identity is lost. Losing one's identity significantly affects student academic achievement and overall well-being, with many ELL students feeling isolated and ostracized from their classmates (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Talamantes, 2021). While students can be resilient, and there are many positive aspects to language learning through immersion (hearing and seeing/reading only the targeted language), students in ELL programs are not able to perform as well as their native English-speaking peers academically or through standardized testing (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Chin et al., 2013; Li & Peters, 2016; Morrell et al., 2019). Due to language barriers, students cannot process all the language input to which they are exposed, resulting in lower levels of proficiency in language learning in addition to academic skills and content being taught (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Chin et al., 2013). Instead of providing support through utilizing their first language, much like Vygotsky's (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) concept of scaffolding, concepts are glossed over in

English in hopes that the students will gain a percentage of knowledge needed to be moderately successful. Additionally, students cannot speak English at home in many cases, so their exposure to the language is limited to school instruction (Cervantes-Soon, 2014).

Overall, DLI programs are showcasing their ability to provide more benefits to English language learners versus English-only instruction through ELL programs (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Freire et al., 2021; Uzzell & Ayscue, 2021). Teaching a second language requires immense knowledge of language acquisition and how students learn and eventually use the language (Li & Peters, 2016; Morrell et al., 2019). Knowledge of how children learn to read is insufficient in working with English language learners. Educators who work with ELLs either in the general education classroom or as the ELL instructor must have specialized training in order to best help learners in these scenarios (Amanti, 2019; Li & Peters, 2016; Morrell et al., 2019). In addition, teachers must possess some knowledge of the cultural backgrounds of their students in order to connect with them and show their support for their heritage (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2023; Alfaro, 2019; de Jong, 2016; Li & Peters, 2016), even when that is not the focus of the program.

Designing and Developing DLI Programs

More research is needed on designing and developing dual language immersion programs (Grivet et al., 2021). Planning for a dual language immersion program is critical for it to be successful (Grivet et al., 2021). Steele et al. (2018) identified the costs and areas of focus for a budget for a DLI program. The focus is on the per pupil cost, ranging from \$74 to \$258 per pupil in additional expenses for students participating in dual language immersion programs (Steele et al., 2018). Compared to the average cost per student in California (one of the two areas researched), the extra cost is insignificant or even significantly lower (Steele et al., 2018).

In creating a dual language program, more information is needed regarding what aids in making the program successful (Grivet et al., 2021), especially regarding personnel.

Implementing a dual language immersion program does not necessarily require adding language teachers since they will perform the duties of a classroom teacher and language teacher (Steele et al., 2018). At the same time, logistically speaking, it is imperative to know how many teachers must be utilized for each grade level, how to build the program from the bottom, how many students are in each class, how students are selected, and the list continues. These are some of the questions to consider when developing a DLI program. Of course, the answers to previously mentioned questions will vary from school to school.

As students develop in age and enter high school, where two years of a world language are required, most of their language learning ends there. Many will not continue past the two-year requirement (Brannon, 2019). One reason could be how the language class is formatted: more of an academic class with less focus on the cultural aspects of the language and its speakers (Brannon, 2019). This concept is essential when considering how to design a dual language immersion program since retention of students and developing their proficiency is vital for a program to be successful (Thane et al., 2022). Students who matriculate through a DLI program starting in the early elementary years could become proficient or bilingual before entering middle school (Brannon, 2019; de Jong et al., 2020).

While there has been a large influx of immigrant children from Spanish-speaking countries entering the United States over the last decade (Cardoza & Brown, 2019), and the number of dual language immersion programs has increased (Chávez-Moreno, 2021), there are still challenges facing the programs. Teachers meeting the specific qualifications that are needed is extremely problematic (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2023; Alfaro, 2019; Amanti, 2019; Capdevila-

Gutiérrez et al., 2020; Hill, 2023). Teachers must be certified in content-specific areas as well as a world language (Capdevila-Gutiérrez et al., 2020; Hill, 2023). Being a native speaker is also required in order to have successful DLI programs. However, finding educators who meet those requirements is not a simple task (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2023; Amanti, 2019; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Hill, 2023; Neveu et al., 2022).

One-way and Two-way DLI Design

There are varying ways to facilitate a dual language immersion program. The most utilized models are one-way and two-way (Bell'Aver & Rabelo, 2020; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Chung, 2020; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2021). In a one-way model, students of a single language work together to learn a second language (Chung, 2020). English speakers working toward learning French or Spanish when their primary language is English is an example of a one-way model (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2018). The one-way model is the typical model used in middle and high schools as students work toward meeting their two-year requirements for high school graduation. Time spent in the target language varies among individual teachers and schools.

Going further in the one-way model, the direct language learning method includes utilizing the target language exclusively in order to increase student understanding and usage of the language, with little reliance on translation (Cummins, 2007). In this model, students learn the target language much like they acquired their first language through listening comprehension and speaking (Cummins, 2007). However, using the direct method in language classroom is unreliable in that the percentage of the target language is spoken will vary from teacher to teacher and percentage of student usage of the target language (Cummins, 2007). It is difficult to gauge student achievement based on the direct method of language learning because of the variety of time spent listening and speaking the target language and the differences in class time

spent learning the language (Cummins, 2007). Depending on a school or individual student's schedule, they may only have access to the target language once or twice a week, while another school or student's schedule will allow for multiple hours per day in the target language.

The two-way model is used in current dual-language immersion programs. It focuses on providing equity for English Language Learners (ELL) and promoting bilingualism for native English speakers (Ayscue & Uzzell, 2022; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Chávez-Moreno, 2021; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2021). In this model, native English speakers are placed in a classroom with English language learners. Both sets of students spend time learning in each language, allowing both to develop skills and understand content needed for their particular school grade level while also developing skills and proficiency in a second language (Block & Vidaurre, 2019; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Neveu et al., 2022; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2021). While both sets of students grow in language acquisition, this model is constructive for English language learners, as the amount of target language input may vary between students and their home environments (Ayscue & Uzzell, 2022; Brannon, 2019; Ryan, 2021). This model provides equity in their language and general education as they increase their input of the target language while simultaneously receiving support in their native language (Block & Vidaurre, 2019; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Ryan, 2021).

Classroom and School Environment

Cummins (2000) states that the true heart of learning and school is the relationships built between students and teachers. The rapport between teachers and students in the classroom has a direct impact on crafting a safe, supportive classroom environment. Students participating in dual language immersion programs must have the ability to experiment and practice their skills without judgment (Cummins, 2007; Hood, 2020; Ryan, 2020; Sung, 2022). Developing a classroom environment that supports language learning and cultural appreciation is key to a

successful DLI program. However, little research details the design and development of dual language immersion programs, including hiring teachers. More information is needed regarding what aids in making the program successful, especially regarding personnel (Thane et al., 2022). Considering the critical role of the educator(s) in dual language immersion programs and their success, priority should be placed on hiring specifically for the needed skills (Amanti, 2019; Thane et al., 2022).

Educating bilingual or ELL students is the responsibility of the entire school; there are many ELL students in schools throughout the country, and teachers should be equipped to better meet their needs inside and outside the classroom (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2023; Cummins, 2000). The role of the educator(s) in dual language immersion programs is central to making a dual language immersion program successful (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2023; Amanti, 2019; Thane et al., 2022). The educators' role is critical to the academic success of minority students (Cummins, 1989). For students to increase fluency, they need to spend time receiving comprehensible input at their stage of development (Brannon, 2019). Language learning can happen as students spend time immersed and engaged in the language naturally (Brannon, 2019). Ideally, hired educators must be certified in early childhood education and native language speakers (Amanti, 2019; Steele et al., 2018). Administrators and other school leaders should be equipped to provide leadership in investigating issues of underachievement in culturally diverse situations (Cummins, 2000; García-Mateus, 2021).

Schools can promote linguistic pride and cultural identity by reflecting the cultural groups represented in their school with signage incorporating the different languages of their communities (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; New Zealand Department of Education, 1988). They should encourage students to use their first language throughout the school and provide

opportunities for students with similar backgrounds to work or socialize together (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; New Zealand Department of Education, 1988). Tutors or other staff who can support students in their native language should be available, as well as books and other materials accessed in the classroom and library (New Zealand Department of Education, 1988). School staff should utilize greetings and provide information or literature in multiple languages, especially official school information, to increase effective communication (Cummins, 2000; New Zealand Department of Education, 1988). Students should be encouraged to write for school newspapers in their native languages and have the opportunity to study their native language in various clubs or electives (Cummins, 2000; New Zealand Department of Education, 1988). Schools should invite people from the represented minority communities to speak in formal and informal settings, such as guest readers in classrooms or guest speakers in school assemblies (Cummins, 2000; New Zealand Department of Education, 1988). School policies should reflect the importance of meeting the needs of all students, especially those needing additional support (Cummins, 2000; García-Mateus, 2021).

Teacher Qualifications and Administration Needs

Teachers who can communicate with parents in their native language are able to bridge a communication gap and increase parental support and involvement, which positively impact student success (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2023; Cummins, 2000; Muro, 2023). In examining the effects of quality input on language acquisition, native speakers provide richer language input for learners than non-native speakers (Ryan, 2021). However, language proficiency can produce more substantial input/output than native speakers in some instances (Ryan, 2021). Teachers should explicitly discuss and demonstrate the similarities and differences between the two languages while reinforcing effective strategies for learning to achieve productive language learning (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2007). Teachers should also focus on creating a

low-stress classroom environment for language learners, where students are encouraged to use their native language and challenged to try the target language (Cardoza & Brown, 2019). Educators should also be certain to slow down their speech for better auditory comprehension and utilize visuals and cognates, or words that are similar in both languages being taught (Cardoza & Brown, 2019).

Teachers must possess an immense knowledge of student development. Vygotsky's (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) zone of proximal development is an essential concept for teachers in DLI programs to thoroughly understand, as they must allow students some autonomy in their learning while also providing needed support (Brannon, 2019). Teachers must also have expanded knowledge of language learning (Capdevila-Gutiérrez et al., 2020) and what developmental stages students will proceed through. For example, early language learning focuses on meaning, while more complex grammar concepts are learned later (Amanti, 2019; Brannon, 2019; Thane et al., 2022). Teacher preparation for educators in two-way language learning models, such as DLI programs, includes meeting six standards, according to The National Dual Language Education Teacher Preparation Standards: bilingualism and biliteracy, authentic assessment in dual language, dual language instructional practices and pedagogy, sociocultural competence, professionalism, advocacy, and agency, and program design and curricular leadership (Guerrero & Lachance, 2018).

Traditionally, schools have communicated shame in students' bilingualism instead of pride and support (Cummins, 2000; Liu et al., 2022). Effective schools for dual language immersion implementation have teachers and staff who are knowledgeable of the diverse needs of students, study, and practice sociocultural understanding, use inclusive multicultural curriculum and materials, integrate students' cultural beliefs and values into the classroom, and

encourage and celebrate student differences (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2023; Block & Vidaurre, 2019; Palmer et al., 2019).

Teachers should remain neutral if any power struggles between cultural identities exist, and if they feel that they could be a burden to the success of their students, they should seek a way to rectify the situation or remove themselves (Cummins, 1989). Educators should encourage students by promoting their linguistic skills and building confidence in their cultural and personal identity in order to aid in their academic success (Block & Vidaurre, 2019; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 1989; Palmer et al., 2019). Teachers also encourage students to think critically, provide activities to promote social justice, engage students in their learning, and believe that all students can learn (Henderson, 2020; Palmer et al., 2019).

One such way to integrate language learning and cultural awareness is through the use of oral narrative retelling (Huang et al., 2022; Lucero, 2016). In oral narrative retelling, a story is told aloud to students in the target language. The students then must retell the story in their own words using the target language. Retelling forces students to use their auditory comprehension skills to understand what was told, and then they must use their language knowledge to retell the story (Lucero, 2016). If teachers choose stories representing the students' culture in the classroom, this activity will benefit the students across the curriculum as they develop their auditory and verbal skills while learning about other cultures. Activities like retelling promote cultural awareness in the classroom while providing developmentally appropriate instruction (Cummins, 2000; Lucero, 2016).

Teachers in dual language immersion programs must be culturally aware, especially concerning the cultures represented in the classroom. Professional development explicitly targeting how to enhance integration in such diverse classrooms is needed to increase the

effectiveness and positive aspects of DLI programs (Ayscue & Uzzell, 2022; Capdevila-Gutiérrez et al., 2020; González-Carriedo & Esprivalo Harrell, 2018; Thane et al., 2022). While dual language immersion programs focus on language development, the cultural aspect of the program is equally important. Culturally diverse students are encouraged or hindered as a result of their interactions with their teachers, making their impact even more significant (Cummins, 2000). As mentioned previously, inequality may be present in DLI classrooms, causing students to have negative experiences (Ayscue & Uzzell, 2022; Martinez Negrette, 2020). With proper preparation courses and support, dual language programs can provide equal opportunities for native and non-native speakers as they work toward developing their language and learning goals (Ayscue & Uzzell, 2022).

Due to parental involvement and interest in the programs, including purposely enrolling their student in the immersion setting, the programs must become and remain successful. Administrators must support and advocate for the program, including possessing a deep understanding of language acquisition, the DLI program model, and the concept of dual language immersion (Baldwin, 2021; García-Mateus, 2021; Grivet et al., 2021; Olivos & Lucero, 2018; Porter, 2018). In this way, administrators can better support the educators in DLI programs, advocate for the program (educators, students, supplies, etc.), and help parents better with questions or concerns (Baldwin, 2021). Parents often have felt uneducated about the program model, especially concerning how much time students spend in each language and at what age the students exit the program (Olivos & Lucero, 2018). Program orientations or bilingual education counseling could prove helpful in meeting the needs of parents in this area (Olivos & Lucero, 2018).

Leadership and Communication Skills

Leadership skills at the classroom and school-wide levels are critical for successfully developing and implementing a dual language immersion program (Baldwin, 2021; Grivet et al., 2021). Effective leaders must understand the content they are teaching, be invested in providing quality instruction, provide and promote a positive classroom culture, share leadership roles and trust, and possess strong organizational skills (Baldwin, 2021). There are a multitude of leadership styles that one can utilize in a leadership position, such as a teacher in a DLI classroom. As leaders develop teams and relationships among the team, it is critical that they know and understand their personal leadership style. The same is true for classroom teachers. A teacher or administrator's leadership style may need to change depending on the situation. Leaders must be willing and able to change their leadership style if necessary (Northouse, 2018). Forming relationships and trust is crucial to leading a team or a classroom of students.

One leadership theory, the trait theory, is based on the idea that leaders are born with certain traits that allow them to be better suited for leadership roles. Some traits include self-confidence, intelligence, integrity, determination, and sociability (Northouse, 2018).

Another leadership theory is the skills approach, or the idea that skills that aid in effective leadership can be learned or developed (Megheirkouni et al., 2018). Three skills are needed for effective leadership: technical skills, human skills (interpersonal), and conceptual (Northouse, 2018).

The situational approach to leadership states that effective leaders must be able to adjust their leadership style to fit the needs of their environment and the needs of their students (Northouse, 2018). In the situational approach, different leadership styles display different levels of support and directing, much like Vygotsky's scaffolding and zone of proximal development (Brannon, 2019; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). A key piece of the situational approach is knowing the

skills level of the group being led, which is especially critical in a classroom (Brannon, 2019). Teachers must understand the skill level of their students in order to help them reach their goals and provide the appropriate amount of support.

The path-goal theory of leadership places much of the responsibility on the leader to provide a productive and healthy environment to help their students succeed (Northouse, 2018). For an educator, it is imperative to create a safe space for students to learn and share their ideas (Heiman & Nuñez-Janes, 2021; Salerno et al., 2020). In a DLI classroom, it is even more important as students share varying backgrounds and socioeconomic backgrounds (Ayscue & Uzzell, 2022; Block & Vidaurre, 2019; Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 1989, 2000; Heiman & Nuñez-Janes, 2021; Lucero, 2016; Palmer et al., 2019). Learning a new language requires trust and bravery, as trying and failing is a natural part of learning. When students can meet their goals, they feel proud and are willing to try again. According to the path-goal theory, leaders need to choose a style that best suits the needs of their followers (or students) and the tasks they are working on (Northouse, 2018). The path-goal theory focuses on the leader's responsibility in helping the followers meet their goals by removing obstacles out of their way. In the goal-setting theory of motivation, it is important for followers to set high goals, as high goals lead to better skill completion and performance (Latham et al., 2017).

Transformational leadership is concerned with emotions, values, and long-term goals while focusing on the well-being of followers. Transformational leaders push their students to meet their goals (Northouse, 2018). Transformational leadership impacts follower engagement and creativity (Mahmood et al., 2019). Finally, servant leadership is similar in that it takes the needs of followers over the leaders. Some people are naturally servant leaders, while others may learn (Northouse, 2018). Educators in dual language immersion classrooms should identify their

personal leadership style to be effective in their leadership. By doing so and understanding the needs of their classroom, they will be best equipped to aid their students in meeting their language goals.

Proper communication is required for educators and students to progress toward goal achievement. At the same time, communication is crucial to develop relationships and trust among team members and within classrooms (Men et al., 2021). Administrators should develop a communication plan to keep teachers and leaders informed of policies and procedures within the school or program, as well as if any possible problems arise. Communication of cultural needs or differences that impact student needs are critical for DLI classrooms. These factors are important in the DLI classroom but are also needed by the school supervisors and administrators (Baldwin, 2021).

Summary

The benefits of dual language immersion programs in education and the resulting bilingualism continue to be studied. In highlighting the need for more programs in the elementary age group, focusing on cognitive and developmental benefits is critical. Using the threshold theory (Cummins, 1976; Cummins et al., 2001) to guide understanding of this topic, the reviewed literature examined the benefits of dual language immersion programs, language acquisition, classroom environments, teacher qualifications, communication, and the design and implementation of DLI programs. Additionally, background on bilingualism and current practices are explored, including possible adverse outcomes. There is a gap in the literature in terms of developing a DLI program. While some research exists in varying methods of dual language immersion programs, more research is needed to increase the number of effective DLI programs throughout the country.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand current practices in dual language immersion programming, identify biases, and develop a design for implementing dual language immersion programs to provide consistency between programs in Georgia elementary schools. Chapter Three describes the research design of the study investigating the experiences of dual language immersion educators and the outcomes of their programs. This section details the completion of proper approval and recommendations. Chapter Three also describes the process of data collection (van Manen, 1990) including participant interviews, focus groups, and questionnaire, as well as the process of data analysis.

Research Design

Qualitative research is defined as using interpretive or theoretical frameworks to enlighten by researching and studying a human or social problem that relates to individuals or groups of people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, researchers gather data in a natural setting in order to better understand those impacted by the problem and their experiences (Angrosino, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In gathering data on participants' experiences, a qualitative researcher will compile descriptions of the experiences to identify the essence of the experience for all participants, consisting of the what and how of the experience (Angrosino, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This study was seeking to gain a better understanding of dual language immersion programs and how to improve their design and functionality, as well as participant equity, used qualitative inquiry and data collection.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study focused on the experiences of teachers in dual-language immersion programs in order to gain a better understanding of program design and

function. Hermeneutical phenomenology, which can be described as interpreting the “texts” of life or the experiences of people (van Manen, 1990), was appropriate for this study due to the desire to gather data from the experiences of study participants to form conclusions or interpret the findings to possess a clear understanding of the problem and possibly determine solutions for the improvement of DLI programming. Hermeneutical phenomenology goes further within phenomenology by providing themes or descriptions and allowing the researcher to interpret the meaning behind the experiences of research participants (Bernard, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 1990). It was necessary to identify any biases before working with participants, not to skew data in one direction but to engage with participants carefully and learn from their experiences.

Research Questions

The research questions that follow were crafted with the idea of gaining a better understanding of the teacher perspective in dual language immersion classrooms. Looking to Cummins’ (Cummins, 1976; Cummins et al., 2001) threshold theory on language learning, the questions were crafted to identify commonalities to success in elementary dual language immersion classrooms and highlight the important role that culture plays in the lives of students and educators. The questions focused on the teachers’ individual and group experiences in similar roles. The concepts of injustice and educational inequity were included in the research questions as a reflection of current literature.

Central Research Question

How can the design of dual language immersion programs promote fluency (speaking, reading, writing) in language learners?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of K-5 educators who teach in DLI programs in Georgia?

Sub-Question Two

How do educators in DLI classrooms in Georgia aid students in reaching a higher-level literacy threshold to achieve cognitive, academic, and linguistic growth?

Sub-Question Three

How have racial or cultural differences influenced student performance and the classroom environment in DLI programs in Georgia?

Setting and Participants

A critical part of phenomenological research involves getting to know participants and their experiences by observing and interacting with them in their natural setting. In terms of working with educators, or specific to this study, teachers of dual language immersion programs, that indicates a classroom or school setting. Having participants to observe and interview is another crucial part of phenomenological research, as it is necessary to learn about the experiences of those involved in a shared phenomenon.

Setting

The setting for this research was schools with dual language immersion programs in Georgia. Multiple sites in this area were utilized in the study. The purpose of utilizing multiple locations in various counties was to allow for better diversity among the programs and provide a broader range of ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic representation. Counties in Georgia, including Clayton, Fulton, Cobb, DeKalb, and Gwinnett counties, has several school locations with dual language immersion programs, including private and public school settings. These sites were chosen due to the location of the researcher but also due to the demographics of the region. This

region offered a diverse racial and ethnic make-up of students and teachers, allowing for the data collection to reflect the purpose of the study. Originally, the study sought to focus on the Metro Atlanta region, but due to a lack of voluntary participants, the area had to expand to include all of Georgia. Seventy-nine percent of the students in Metro Atlanta schools are students of color, 55% represent low-income families, and 19% are English language learners (*State of Education in Metro Atlanta Annual Report 2022, 2023*). There are approximately 663 public schools in the Metro Atlanta area (Georgia Department of Education, 2023), with varying leadership and school structure due to the differences in geographic location, and variance in funding. There are 60 elementary DLI programs in Georgia and 83 programs in total (Georgia Department of Education, 2023).

Participants

Participants in this study were teachers in dual language immersion programs in Georgia, working within public school settings. DLI teacher leadership roles varied, but most reported to a superior, like the principal or team leader. These participants varied in years of experience, ethnicity, gender, and age. Due to the uniqueness of dual language immersion programs and requirements for teachers, the variety in the demographics was expected. According to a 2020 report, the following percentages represented the racial/ethnic makeup of Georgia educators: Asian (1.3%), Black (26.5%), Hispanic (2.6%), Multiracial (1.6%), Native American (0.2%), and White (67.8%) (Flamini & Steed, 2022). Educators in Georgia represented multiple degree levels: Bachelor's (34.8%), Master's (43.5%), Specialist (18.6%), PhD/EdD (2.6%), and other (0.5%) (Flamini & Steed, 2022). The years of experience of Georgia educators were varied as well, with 4.3% working less than one year, 38.1% working for one to ten years, 32.7% teaching

for 11 to 20 years, 21.2% teaching for 12 to 30 years, and 3.6% working for more than 30 years (Flamini & Steed, 2022).

A total of 12 participants completed the questionnaire and 10 were individually interviewed and participated as part of the focus group. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested 5 to 25 participants in a phenomenological study, but with the focus of phenomenological studies being on individual experiences, a smaller number was preferred. Participants were chosen based on their willingness to participate as well as in hopes of diversifying the group of participants with different schools represented. Participants' requirements included working in a dual language immersion classroom in an elementary setting. Ideally, participants had more than three years of experience in a DLI position, though that was not required for participation.

Recruitment Plan

The sample pool for this study was K-5 teachers of dual language immersion programs in Georgia. The desired sample size was 10-15 participants. Maximum variation sampling was utilized to highlight diversity among participants sharing similar experiences teaching in DLI classrooms. Participants were identified by searching through DLI programs in Georgia to gain access to multiple schools with differing diversity/languages. An email with a recruitment letter (see Appendix C) was sent to possible participants (teachers) with some insight into the study and requesting a response if the person was interested in participating. A consent form was attached to the email, and the participants expressed their consent by participating in the online questionnaire, which was also linked in the email. Teacher email addresses were obtained through the schools' websites. A reminder email was sent after a week to request participation. After two reminders, the potential participants were deemed as non-responsive, and an alternate

participant was asked. Obtaining enough participants was difficult; therefore, compensation of \$50 cash was offered to all participants who completed all three portions of the project.

Researcher's Positionality

While language education has become a part of typical American education for many years, dual language immersion programs, where students learn a second language while simultaneously mastering grade-level skills in their native language, is a much newer concept. Due to my experience as a world language teacher and a parent to three young boys, the immense benefit of language programs like DLI is appealing. I have taught for ten years, and three of those years were spent teaching French to middle and high school students. I studied the language starting in the eighth grade through college. When teaching French in the private school where my children attended, I wished for a better language experience for them. They were getting French and Spanish instruction once a week for 20 minutes. They would spend one semester studying one of the two languages and switch in the second semester. While it was more language instruction than most public elementary schools, it was nowhere near enough to be beneficial. My department chair and I would spend many planning periods discussing the possibilities of building a DLI program at our school, but we could never find any fundamental research or discussion about how to accomplish that. Instead, administrators mostly turned us down due to not understanding the vision or the importance of what we were trying to do. They cited time and lack of finances as being barriers. I would like to see more research about the benefits and challenges of DLI programs, but mainly research into their design and implementation for passionate language teachers to be able to increase age-appropriate and effective language learning in their schools.

Interpretive Framework

If my current desire is to investigate designing and developing dual language programs and the benefits of said programs, I believe the lens through which I view my research is pragmatic. While I appreciate the viewpoints of individuals participating in the DLI programs and the theories associated with them, like social constructivism, I would like my research to bring about change. I would like to help improve the programs to help more students increase their language studies to become bilingual. I am also concerned with providing equity in education for minority students, especially those whose native language is not English. DLI programs help facilitate equity for English Language Learners. I also appreciate the idea that pragmatism allows for researchers' freedom to use multiple methods or procedures to advance my research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Philosophical Assumptions

As I have worked the last four years with teenagers at a private Christian school, I have learned much about my walk with the Lord and what young people search for in their walks. I find it interesting that young people are stereotyped by the older generations, viewing them as apathetic or uninterested in following Jesus. I have found the opposite to be true; they desire a deep and genuine relationship with Jesus, but the examples they have seen from their influences (parents, church members, and other adults) have left a lot to be desired. My students and I have had many discussions surrounding the life and example of Jesus and how believers should reflect Him in their lives. Unfortunately, so many of us fall short in this area, affecting those coming behind us. This realization and the many hours spent discussing the Bible, Jesus, and our roles as believers with my students have altered my relationship with the Lord.

I strive each day to be more and more like Him: to love others when it is hard, keep the Word in my heart and on my lips, and remember that my actions have a Kingdom effect. As I continue in my education journey, I want my impact to not be about what I teach but the relationships I foster in my classroom and beyond. In order for others to come to know Jesus, they need to see Jesus in me, and that is through developing relationships. One of my favorite Bible verses is Micah 6:8, “What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God” (NASB, 1960/2020, Micah 6:8). It is a constant reminder to me of how to impact the world for Jesus.

Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumptions deal with the nature of a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A researcher views the study through multiple realities, specifically through the views of participants and readers of the study. Personally, I believe in God’s description of the world through his Word. I believe that God created us to love one another and live in fellowship with Him. Part of that belief includes knowing that He crafted us individually for a purpose and to fully be able to love another person requires understanding. My love of languages extends to loving the people who utilize them. In learning about different cultures, it is easier to love and understand people who are different from me and believe other things. He has not called us to love the people who believe the same things as us, but to love all His creation. My experiences working in a world language classroom, watching my personal children enjoy learning another language, and my personal passion for language learning will bias my views during this research.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological assumptions deal with knowledge. In this way, gaining knowledge for a study requires getting to know the participants well and learning from them in order to increase

one's knowledge of the study. Part of my research included speaking with educators to learn from their experiences with dual language immersion programs. I also spent time in discussion with DLI teachers to better understand their specific roles and needs for the program. The focus group time allowed for DLI educators to share their experiences and discuss their individual programs.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumptions cover a researcher's values that are interwoven in his or her research. Researchers come with natural biases that should be explained in their research. Personally, my belief in the importance of learning a world language and my experience teaching a world language was bias in my research toward developing dual language immersion programs. I was careful to investigate the opposing views and search for alternate opinions to better understand DLI programs and their true effects, whether positive or negative. At the same time, my belief in Jesus is part of everything I do and certainly shapes how I view people and their differences.

Researcher's Role

In this study, I was a human instrument utilized for collecting and interpreting data. I did not have any authority over the participants in my study; my goal is to learn from them. I attempted to remove any bias I had to clearly see the viewpoints of the participants and accurately analyze the collected findings. As a world language teacher, I have knowledge of language learning but have not been a part of a dual language immersion program. I worked to put my experiences aside in order to get a clear picture of DLI programs, both positive and negative.

Procedures

Procedures describe the steps of the study in order for the study to be repeated in another capacity, if necessary. The ability to recreate data and results provides stronger evidence of the validity of the study. The procedures for this study included gaining needed permissions and Institutional Review Board approval. The steps for the recruitment of participants, as well as the procedures for data collection during the study, are detailed in this section. Data collection included individual interviews, observations, and a questionnaire. Individual data collection procedures were chosen based on the requirements of phenomenological research outlined by van Manen (1990). Procedures for each data collection process are detailed in the following sections.

Data Collection Plan

The collection of data was critical in gaining an understanding of the research problem and its participants. In order to learn about the individual experiences of participants and formulate themes, a key piece of phenomenological research, three varying data collection procedures were conducted. For this study of dual language immersion programs, data collection included individual interviews, observations, and a questionnaire. Individual data collection procedures were chosen based on the requirements of phenomenological research outlined by van Manen (1990). Procedures for each data collection process are detailed in the following sections.

Coding and theming were utilized through all three data collection sources. Codes were identified throughout all three methods of data collection to help identify themes in the data. Once significant themes were identified, I created a visual representation of the data to aid in answering the research questions. I crafted an audit trail throughout the research process by outlining my procedures, memos, notes, and other raw data, data analysis, and the final report of

my findings. Triangulation of the collected data from individual interviews, questionnaires, small group discussions, and personal notes were taken throughout the process in order to support the validity of the findings.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire allowed for quick data collection and helped in gaining crucial demographic information for the researcher. A questionnaire was utilized in order to collect demographic information and general data regarding the participants' experiences in their DLI classrooms. Questionnaires make participants feel more comfortable answering honestly, as they can be completed anonymously, and thought can be given to answering questions. They can also be completed in the participants' free time without causing disruptions to their day. The questionnaire was composed of questions and short responses in relation to the central research question and sub-questions. The questionnaire was sent via email to participants using Google Forms (see Table 1) responses were anonymous and stored in a secure Google account. Google Forms allowed for easy data analysis, creating graphs displaying results from the questionnaire, but will be reviewed to ensure accuracy. Utilizing graphs helped in quickly identifying themes; however, a more specific investigation of the data and triangulation was needed to ensure reliable results.

Table 1

Questionnaire Questions

1. Briefly describe your role in the dual language immersion program, including the grade level(s) and language(s) taught. SQ1
2. List your level of education, including additional certifications, if applicable. SQ1
3. What materials or curriculum are used and/or needed for your DLI program? CRQ
4. Briefly describe how your DLI program functions. CRQ

5. What problems have you seen arise in your DLI classroom? CRQ
6. What positive outcomes have you experienced in your DLI program? CRQ
7. How would you rate your administrator's level of support for your specific role? Scale of 1-10. CRQ
8. What changes or improvements would you make to your program model? CRQ
9. Please detail any other information you think would be helpful in designing a DLI program. CRQ

Information obtained from the above questionnaire allowed the researcher to gather additional data related to the central research question and sub-questions, as labeled above. Questions one and two related to sub-question one (Dubiner et al., 2018; Durán-Martínez & Beltrán-Llavador, 2017; Hood, 2020; Pérez Cañado, 2014; Rodríguez-Valls et al., 2017), referring to the experiences of K-5 teachers in DLI programs. Questions three, four, five, six, seven, eight, and nine related to the central research question (Chaparro, 2021; Martinez Negrette, 2020; Preusler et al., 2022; Steele et al., 2018; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2021) of key design elements for DLI programs that produce fluent language learners.

Individual Interviews

Interviews are an important part of a phenomenological research study, as understanding the viewpoint and experiences of participants is a major component of phenomenological research. An interview allows the interviewer to attempt to understand the participant's view of the world (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interviewer gains meaning from hearing about their experience and gains a glimpse into their lived experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Interviews were conducted via an online platform, Zoom. Semi-structured interviews took place with pre-determined questions (see Table 2), which answer the central research questions and

sub-questions. 12 questionnaire responses were received, and 10 individual interviews were scheduled. One participant did not respond to multiple attempts to schedule their individual interview and one participant completed the questionnaire after the individual interviews were completed. The experiences of educators currently in DLI programs were crucial to better understand individual dual language immersion programs and their outcomes. At the same time, teachers were able to speak to the possible biases and discrimination that may be present in the students' experiences.

Table 2

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and what brought you to this current position. SQ1
2. Describe how the program works and how you plan with your co-teacher. CRQ
3. Describe how the DLI program at this school began. CRQ
4. What professional development experiences have prepared you to work as a DLI teacher?
SQ1
5. Describe the challenges with working with multilingual students and cultural differences in the classroom. SQ1
6. What strategies have helped bridge any issues between students due to cultural divergences? CRQ
7. What methods have you used to develop a strong classroom sense of community? CRQ
8. What else would you like to contribute to this study on DLI programs?

The individual interview questions, see Table 2, allowed me to get a glimpse of participants' experiences in dual language immersion settings while answering the central research question and sub-questions, as labeled above. Questions were reviewed by local

language teachers and qualitative study experts, such as my committee chair and member, before being utilized in the field. Questions one, four, and five related to sub-question one (Dubiner et al., 2018; Durán-Martínez & Beltrán-Llavador, 2017; Hood, 2020; Pérez Cañado, 2014; Rodríguez-Valls et al., 2017), referring to the experiences of K-5 teachers in DLI programs. Questions two, three, six, and seven related to the central research question (Chaparro, 2021; Martínez Negrette, 2020; Preusler et al., 2022; Steele et al., 2018; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2021) of key design elements for DLI programs that produce fluent language learners.

Focus Groups

As mentioned previously, interviews were a critical part of a phenomenological research study to better understand the viewpoints and experiences of participants. The interviews allowed me to attempt to understand the participant's view of the world (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interviewer gained meaning from hearing about their experience and a glimpse into their lived experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Facilitating a small group interview will allow for multiple viewpoints to be expressed while allowing for fluid discussion of shared experiences. The experiences of educators currently in DLI programs were crucial to better understanding the make-up of individual dual language immersion programs and their outcomes. Having the opportunity for discussion among educators experiencing a shared phenomenon allowed for a better understanding of what is occurring in dual language immersion classrooms, highlighting positive outcomes and areas for improvement. An interview protocol (see Table 3) was followed, being certain to stay on target with the study and respect the time of the participants while also allowing time for memoing. There were two different focus group sessions each with four to six participants in order to keep the groups intimate and allow for an easier exchange of thoughts and ideas.

Table 3*Focus Group Questions*

1. Briefly describe your role in the dual language immersion program, including the grade level(s) and language(s) taught. (Ice breaker)
2. What qualifications are necessary for a teacher of a DLI program? SQ1
3. What cultural differences have you observed in your DLI classroom? SQ3
4. What positive cross-cultural collaborations have you experienced in your DLI program?
SQ3
5. What are the biggest academic needs of your students? SQ2
6. What are the biggest language needs of your students? SQ2
7. What changes or improvements would you make to your program model? CRQ
8. If you had a genie that could grant you any wishes for your program, what would you ask for and why? CRQ

Information obtained from the above questions allowed me to gather additional data related to the central research question and sub-questions. Question two related to sub-question one (Dubiner et al., 2018; Durán-Martínez & Beltrán-Llavador, 2017; Hood, 2020; Pérez Cañado, 2014; Rodríguez-Valls et al., 2017), referring to the experiences of K-5 teachers in DLI programs. Questions seven and eight related to the central research question (Chaparro, 2021; Martinez Negrette, 2020; Preusler et al., 2022; Steele et al., 2018; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2021) of key design elements for DLI programs that produce fluent language learners. Questions five, six, and seven related to sub-question two (Brannon, 2019; Chaparro, 2019, 2021; Esposito & Bauer, 2018; Fox et al., 2019; Neveu et al., 2022; Preusler et al., 2022; Serafini et al., 2020) and the outcomes of DLI programs at participants' schools. Questions three and four related to sub-question three (Bernstein et al., 2021; Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Cervantes-Soon et al., 2020;

Djuraeva et al., 2022; Martinez Negrette, 2020; Morales & Maravilla, 2019; Serafini et al., 2020) and the social and racial atmosphere of the classroom.

Data Analysis

Moustakas' (1994) and van Manen's (1990) guidelines for qualitative data analysis, coding, and theming were utilized through all three data collection sources: interviews, focus group discussion, and a questionnaire. I manually analyzed the data through triangulation and outlier data were noted. First, codes were identified throughout all three methods of data collection. Next, I used the codes to help develop themes in the data and cross-referenced with each method to identify any overarching or repeating themes. Notes were also taken into consideration for themes and codes. Once major themes were identified, I created a visual representation of the data. I then used the themes to aid in answering the research questions.

I crafted an audit trail throughout the research process by outlining my procedures, memos, notes, and other raw data, data analysis, and the final report of my findings. Triangulation of the collected data from individual interviews, questionnaires, small group discussions, and personal notes throughout the process were taken in order to support the validity of the findings. I reviewed and reflected on the memos taken in my journal to aid in understanding the data and providing additional clarity and evidence to the themes that arise. Once data was synthesized, I debriefed with language teacher colleagues to discuss the findings.

The questionnaire contained open-ended questions and ranking scales, which provided participants the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences. Participants had access to a consent section at the beginning of the questionnaire, allowing them to understand the study and their rights, as well as opt-out if necessary. Google Forms was utilized to create and collect questionnaire data. Google Forms allowed the participants to submit their answers anonymously

if desired and was notated in the consent section of the form. The consent section of the Google Form was included as the initial question, with participants marking “yes” if they read the conditions and give their consent. The questionnaire began after question one was marked. Following Moustakas’ (1994) guidelines, statements from the participants were analyzed and categorized to uncover themes. A list of significant statements was crafted to help with further coding and theming of statements. A structural description of participants’ experiences was crafted. Finally, a composite description was created to describe participants’ experiences in order to gain a clear understanding of the phenomenon experienced by the participants. I reflected on the data collected from the questionnaire and additional ponderings through this section of the process in my journal.

Using the guidelines provided by Rubin and Rubin (2012), interviews were conducted, and the data was analyzed. First, the interview questions listed previously were used in the interviewing process. They were open-ended and provided participants the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences. The Zoom platform recorded the interviews and helped in the transcription, which was reviewed within two days to correct any misrepresentation. Transcription was critical to go over the interview an additional time or multiple times and be confident that important information was not missed initially, including verbal cues. The transcription for individual interviews was emailed to participants for their peer review. Physical or nonverbal cues were noted via notetaking during the interview. Interviews were conducted via Zoom at a pre-determined time set by participants and me. An interview protocol (see Table 2) was followed, being certain to stay on target with the study and respect the time of the participants, while also allowing time for memoing.

After reviewing the transcriptions, coding was utilized with each participant's interview transcription in order to identify themes (Moustakas, 1994). In keeping with van Manen's (1990) design, I focused on the nature of the participants' experiences and attempted to reflect on the meaning of their experiences and how they relate to any themes. A code for arising themes was used to identify overarching themes through multiple interviews. Codes were created based on a participant's response and notated at the end of each transcription line. Once themes were identified, visuals were produced to aid in understanding the themes and to help understand the findings of the study. I reflected on the data collected from the individual interviews and additional ponderings through this section of the process in my journal (van Manen, 1990).

A focus group was scheduled between the participants and the interviewer. The 12 individual participants representing different schools with DLI programs in Georgia were asked to participate in the small group interview portion of data collection. Two separate focus group discussions took place, each with four to six participants. The group interviews and discussions took place via Zoom. The small group interviews and discussions took approximately forty-five minutes to an hour. The sessions were recorded and transcribed through Zoom, with corrections to the transcriptions being made upon relistening. Notes were taken throughout the discussions to enrich the data collection and allow for fluid discussion during the small group time. As the facilitator, I asked semi-structured questions to the participants and allowed each participant to have an opportunity to share. I asked questions during the discussion to encourage the conversation and addressed any questions of the participants for natural and fluid conversation to continue.

In order to analyze specific data from the observations, themes were found among the notes through the process of coding. Coding is an essential part of qualitative research, as it

allows one to make sense of all the notes and observations from the actual research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Commonalities appeared in notes of participants and their experiences, allowing for codes to be created. From the codes, themes emerged, aiding in the analysis of the research (van Manen, 1990). Once the themes emerged, data was comprised into visuals for better clarity and processing of the information. I reflected on the data collected from the focus groups and additional ponderings through this section of the process in my journal (van Manen, 1990).

Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), to determine the trustworthiness of a study, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability must be considered. This section describes the various aspects of determining the trustworthiness of my study on dual language immersion programs and qualitative methods, following the descriptions of Lincoln and Guba (1985). Though the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are synonymous with terms used in quantitative research, they have distinct meanings when used in qualitative studies.

Credibility

Credibility is confidence in the truth of a study's findings or the extent to which the findings accurately describe reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I achieved credibility in the following ways: (a) triangulation, (b) member checking and (c) peer debriefing.

In this study, I partook in the triangulation of qualitative data collection methods, theories, and sources to investigate the experiences of teachers in dual language immersion programs. The qualitative methods used included narrative inquiry through interviews, questionnaires, and small group discussions. Data collection triangulation was completed through the data uncovered through individual interviews, questionnaires, small group

discussions, and personal notes throughout the process. Theories explored include Vygotsky's (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) socio-cultural theory and Cummins' threshold theory (Cummins, 1976; Cummins et al., 2001). Data analysis procedures of Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), Moustakas (1994), and van Manen (1990) were utilized.

Member checking took place during the individual interviews with participants. In this way, I was able to verify my understanding of the participant's experience. By doing so, my data is richer and more accurate to the actual events of participants in their classrooms. Member checking also allowed for any errors to be corrected in my interpretation of the data.

As mentioned during data synthesis, peer debriefing (Marshall & Rossman, 2015) was used to allow me to discuss findings with colleagues and experts in the field, as they emerged. In referencing other studies related to my area, some similarities arose. Speaking with others in related fields of world language teaching, allowed me to better understand my findings and their implications for dual language immersion programs as well as aiding in support of my findings.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability for findings from the context of a study to be applied to another context or within the same context at another time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability shows that the findings may have applicability in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), largely achieved through thick descriptions when describing research findings (Geertz, 2008). The descriptions I used in describing the experiences of teachers in dual language immersion programs in various classroom settings revealed an overview of successful dual language immersion programs. While such a small sample size does not guarantee transferability, the lack of literature available regarding successful dual language program design

suggests that this study could aid in better understanding DLI programs and what makes them successful.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the idea that a study's findings can be repeated and are consistent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability can be seen through the description of the process of the study, as previously written. The procedures of my study were concisely written and detailed in such a way that they could be repeated in a variety of settings or studies. The concepts are simple enough to be replicated with ease. Descriptions of the methods used were supported by literature as well. The methods were reviewed by my committee and with their approval, should prove sufficient for research.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I utilized an audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity in order to ensure confirmability. An audit trail was created outlining my procedures, memos, notes, and other raw data, data analysis, and the final report of my findings. Triangulation, as described previously, was completed. Lastly, reflexivity, an important aspect of this study, was used throughout. Reflexivity refers to systematically investigating the construction of knowledge of the researcher throughout the research process (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). In order to be reflexive, I kept a journal of my thoughts and ponderings during the study. I made notes during interviews and observations to guide my thoughts. I used these notes to help remove my bias from the subject matter.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are a crucial part of every study. After receiving IRB approval, consent forms were sent to participants ahead of interview and observation times. A section of the questionnaire also included a consent form for each participant. The consent form included details of the study, assured the privacy and rights of the participants, and allowed them to remove themselves from the study at any time. Records of participants were kept in a password-protected file on my personal computer. Descriptors were used to protect the privacy of participants as well. All physical notes were kept in a locked filing cabinet at my home. Little to minimal risks to participants were notated before the start of the study, but I was certain to be mindful and watchful for any risks that may have occurred. Data will be destroyed after three years.

Permissions

The most important approval was the one required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB requires evidence of possible ethical issues for the study and procedures for dealing with any problems that arise, specifically relating to respect for persons, justice, and concern for welfare (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Research could not be conducted without approval from the IRB found in Appendix A. Consent forms (see Appendix B) for participants included a brief detail of the study and its purpose, any risks associated with the study, participants' rights to privacy, and the opportunity for participants to opt out of participating in the study at any time.

Other Participant Protections

All physical data, notes, and memos were kept in a locked drawer; all virtual data was located on a password-protected computer. All data will be stored for three years, after which it

will be destroyed. Risks to participants were minimal but could include discussing past traumatic events that may have occurred in the classroom or past events dealing with racism. Protocol allowed for the participants the option to move on from the questions or remove themselves from the study. Pseudonyms were utilized for participant names and for their school settings (sites).

Summary

This phenomenological study allowed me to gain a clear understanding of dual language immersion educators and their experiences, leading to possible suggestions for designing an effective program for language learners. Phenomenology was chosen because insight can be gained from the shared experiences of people (educators) directly involved in DLI programs. Following the guidelines of van Manen (1990) for data collection and analysis of a phenomenological study enabled me to follow specific guidelines that were designed for studies like mine. Data collection procedures included conducting individual and group interviews as well as utilizing questionnaires. An audit trail was created to aid in analyzing data, and coding helped identify themes in order to answer the research questions. Van Manen's (1990) research guidelines enable data collection and interpretation of the results to be easier and more precise.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter Four highlights the findings from the questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups. Pseudonyms were utilized to protect the identities of the participants. The participants represented schools with dual language immersion programs in the state of Georgia; 11 of the 12 participants represented Spanish DLI programs. Themes and subthemes that emerged through data analysis and will be discussed in this chapter. Outlier data was also identified and will be highlighted following participant demographics and themes.

Participants

All participants who participated in the online questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups were female educators in Georgia public schools. They each had unique backgrounds and experiences. Ten participants were individually interviewed and participated in one of three focus groups, and two participants only completed the online questionnaire. 11 of the 12 participants taught in Spanish dual language immersion programs, with one participant who taught in a French setting. 11 of the 12 participants were teachers in two-way immersion classrooms, with one who taught in a one-way model. 11 of the 12 teachers had advanced degrees as shown below in Table 4.

Table 4

Teacher Participants

Participant	Years taught	Degrees/Certification	Grade/Subject
Angela	2	Master's	First, Spanish: Math and Science
Brittany	2	BS Elementary Education; Certifications in EDL and Bilingual-Spanish education	Kindergarten, Spanish: Language Arts, Math, Social Studies

Cindy	8	Specialist in ESOL; Gifted, Reading, Coaching endorsements	Third, English: Language Arts, Social Studies
Dolores	12	Doctorate and board certification	Second, Spanish
Elena	17	Doctorate in Instructional Technologies & Distance Education, BS in Early Childhood, MEd in Computer Science; Spanish, Gifted Endorsed Certifications	Fifth, Spanish
Franchesca	15	Master's Degree; Licensed to teach Spanish as a Language K-12; ESOL and Gifted Certified	Fourth, Spanish: Math and Science
Gloriana	2	Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages, Master of Arts in Spanish, and Master of Arts in Teaching in Spanish; ESOL certified	Fourth, Spanish: Math and Science
Hayley	15	Master in Curriculum and Instruction and Specialist in Early Childhood Education	First, English
Isabelle	N/A	BS, MEd; Specialist in Education, French Specialist	Third, French
Josefina	20, first in DLI	BS in K-8 Education, MEd in Reading & Literacy, ESOL certified.	Fifth, Spanish: Math, Science, Spanish literature, and writing
Katarina	N/A	MEd in Early childhood	Third, Spanish
Larissa	25	MEd, Specialist, Gifted endorsement	Third, Spanish

Angela

Angela, originally from Panama, was a second-year DLI teacher who was experiencing her first educational setting. Previously, Angela was a stay-at-home mom who was recruited to teach via online recruitment during the coronavirus pandemic. She is a native Spanish speaker with a passion for teaching after spending years teaching her children. Those experiences pushed

her to pursue education, and the ability to utilize her native Spanish was attractive in a career. She was the Spanish teacher for her DLI class of students.

Brittany

Brittany is a first-year teacher from Illinois who recently moved to Atlanta to be closer to her family. She studied dual language education at her university. DLI programs are more prevalent in Illinois. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in elementary education. She also completed an ESL and bilingual education endorsement, specifically in Spanish. She was the Spanish teacher for her DLI class of students.

Cindy

Cindy worked with children for many years before completing her education degree and becoming a teacher. She was a behavior specialist for two years with a company where she was able to gain experience working with children. Next, she worked as a lead teacher at a Head Start program, where she completed her bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in post-secondary education. After she moved to Atlanta, she started working at her current school in the DLI program. She is the English teacher for her DLI class of students and is currently working on a doctorate in education.

Dolores

Dolores originally intended to work as an interpreter in an educational setting. Instead, she decided to use her native Spanish to teach English language learners. She completed a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree, a specialist degree with a reading and ESOL focus, and a doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction. She is the Spanish teacher for her DLI class of students.

Elena

Elena was originally from Puerto Rico, where she taught for 12 years before moving to the United States for a salary increase. She earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in educational computing, and a doctorate in design and online education. When she immigrated to the United States, she began teaching as a middle school connections teacher in Spanish. In order to teach at the elementary level, she had to get certified by the state of Georgia. For the past four years, she has been teaching fifth grade in her DLI program. She is the Spanish teacher for her DLI class of students.

Franchesca

Franchesca, a native Spanish speaker and multilingual (English, Spanish, French), originally from Puerto Rico, completed her undergraduate degree in Boston. She had a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in sociology. She began working as a psychiatric social worker. During that time, she began work on her master's in clinical psychology, but her husband, an educator, encouraged her to pursue education. She completed her master's degree in education with certifications in gifted and ESOL and is certified to teach Spanish for grades K-12. She taught in primarily Hispanic elementary schools before moving to Georgia. Eventually, she began working as a Spanish teacher in a fourth grade DLI program in Georgia.

Gloriana

Gloriana became a DLI teacher through a different path than most teachers. Her background is in foreign language and not education. She earned a bachelor's degree in modern languages and a master's degree in Spanish, and eventually completed a Master of Arts in Teaching degree in Spanish. She was ESOL certified as well. She is working on completing a dual language immersion endorsement at a major university in the state of Georgia. Instead of

having to complete an additional master's degree in early education, she was able to complete the DLI immersion endorsement instead. She has taught Spanish at the high school and elementary levels. She is the Spanish teacher in her fourth grade DLI setting.

Hayley

Hayley is an English teacher in her dual language immersion class. She earned a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, master's degree in curriculum and instruction, a specialist degree in early childhood education, and recently started her dissertation on the parent perspective on DLI programs for her doctoral program. She took some time off nine years ago to focus on her family. She spent most of her career working in kindergarten and first grade. This year, 2024, was her fifteenth year teaching, with about six of those years teaching in the DLI program.

Isabelle

Isabelle only participated in the online questionnaire. She was the only French teacher in a dual language immersion program to participate in the study. She earned a bachelor's, master's, and specialist degree in French. She is a third grade DLI teacher.

Josefina

Josefina most recently decided to return to the classroom after spending 14 years as an instructional coach for teachers of English language learners. Throughout her career, she earned a bachelor's degree in K-8 education and a master's degree in reading and literacy, with an ESOL certification. She started teaching fourth and fifth grade in a private school before moving to public school. At the public school, she taught Spanish for grades kindergarten through eighth, before transitioning to teaching ESOL. During that time, she discovered her passion for working with students learning English. After that experience, she worked with teachers of English

language learners as a coach. This year, 2024, was her first year as a DLI teacher. She is the Spanish teacher for her DLI class of fifth grade students.

Katarina

Katarina only participated in the online questionnaire. I reached out to her multiple times to schedule an individual interview, but she never responded. She taught as a Spanish teacher in a third grade DLI program in Georgia. She received her master's degree in early childhood education.

Larissa

Larissa has been an educator for 25 years. She is originally from Costa Rica where she taught English. For the last 16 years, she taught at the collegiate level in Costa Rica. Once she moved to the United States, she taught Spanish in high schools. She earned a master's degree and a specialist degree with a gifted endorsement. She is the Spanish teacher in her third grade DLI class.

Results

Following the weeks of data collection, including the online questionnaire, interviews, and focus groups, data was analyzed utilizing coding. Coding helped to identify themes and subthemes from the participants' responses. The frequency of the codes was used to help identify the major themes and subsequent subthemes. Outlier data was also noted. The following results represent data collected over a period of one month, utilizing the online questionnaire, online individual interviews, and three online focus groups.

Table 5*Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subtheme				
Teacher Support (T) Frequency: 125	Curriculum and Materials in Target Language (C) Frequency: 13	Special Certifications and Endorsements (Edu) Frequency: 29	Professional Development (PD) Frequency: 15	Planning Time (TT) Frequency: 68	
Parent Support (P) Frequency: 171	Parent Understanding of DLI (PU) Frequency: 106	Help for Parents at Home (PH) Frequency: 65			
Student Support (S) Frequency: 696	Consistency Across Programs (CC) Frequency: 236	Identifying and Meeting Individual Student Needs (SN) Frequency: 232	Foundational Language Skills (FS) Frequency: 46	Determining Student Success in DLI (SS) Frequency: 49	Strong Sense of Community Among Students (Comm) Frequency: 133

Teacher Supports

Throughout the individual interview process, I quickly realized the lack of research on the teacher's perspective. In focusing on each participant, I learned a great deal about their experiences and passion for dual language immersion programs. Although the participants have varied backgrounds, they had similar experiences in their DLI classrooms. Overall, teachers who felt supported by their administrators or had administrators who truly understood DLI and its purpose had better experiences with their classrooms. Josefina commented, "Administrators are super supportive. The assistant principal who oversees DLI, she also is American born, but of Cuban parents and is bilingual...even though she's never been a DLI teacher, you know, she

understands the whole dynamic. She used to be an ESOL teacher, so she understands a lot of the dynamic.” Hayley also felt supported by her administration-sharing, “Our foundation is really built upon relationships, and I think it kind of comes down from what your admin [*sic*] does. And our admin [*sic*] at our school, her passion is dual language. She is a bilingual administrator.”

The teachers who did not feel supported or understood by their administration or school had more negative comments concerning the program. Dolores explained, “...admin doesn't understand.” Every participant showed concern for the needs of their students and tried to meet them better, but lacked materials in the target language, and planning time with their partner teacher. 11 of the 12 participants had at least one advanced degree, with most having multiple advanced degrees and endorsements.

Curriculum and Materials in Target Language

The most common complaint among the Spanish teacher participants was the lack of materials that were readily available for them to use. While their English counterparts receive a curriculum and a plethora of materials to use, they are forced to translate most of their materials into Spanish. Angela articulated, “The expectation is that their worksheets and everything are in Spanish, but we're not provided with anything.” The lack of available and appropriate resources not only requires extra preparation time for each day but also increases their planning time. Often, they are forced to create materials on their own or utilize online resources that may have to be funded by them personally. Larissa described, “I find myself sometimes translating and downsizing the language so they can understand it and it's time consuming.”

Participants mentioned that it does not seem equitable between them and their English counterparts and desire more materials that they can use without extra preparation. Elena described the situation by saying, “It's not like the regular teachers just print out and give it

things to the students. You need to just to analyze all the scenarios. You need to analyze how it is, the length of the word, which is the lens, the kind of vocabulary that they use it... Well, the teachers feel so burnout [*sic*] because it's the regular teacher work and the translator, [the] instructional designer is a lot." Josefina added,

Our math materials are translated as far as, like, the textbook and the workbook. But you know how you'll often have, like, other supportive resources and you can choose from these ten different activities? Well, we don't have that breadth of, you know, resources to choose from that's already been translated. So, I found myself a lot of times having to spend all that time translating.

Josefina also stated that administrators do not understand the amount of work required to prepare for each day. She clarified, "What I think they don't understand, though, is how difficult it is to be teaching academic content and not have the materials already translated. I don't think they quite realize how challenging that is." Angela summarized the issue, "I struggle to teach due to lack of content and resources." In total, coding concerning curriculum and materials, C, appeared 13 times through the data collected.

Special Certifications and Endorsements

While 11 of the 12 participants had at least one advanced degree, many had multiple advanced degrees, with several either having completed a doctorate or in the process of receiving a doctorate. At the same time, the participants had at least one endorsement. Some counties require their DLI teachers to be certified in ESOL and gifted in order to provide those services for the students in the program. Larissa explained, "Either of the two teachers are gifted certified, either the English or the Spanish, like the duo, one of them has to be gifted certified."

Overall, the participants are well-qualified professionals with multiple certifications that display their expertise. Franchesca stated, "...both DLI teachers have to be ESOL endorsed, gifted endorsed, and then the Spanish side needs to have some sort of Spanish certification." Spanish teachers in the DLI program were also certified to teach Spanish and most were native speakers. In total, coding concerning special certifications and endorsements (Edu), appeared 29 times through the data collected.

Professional Development

Due to the special design of dual language immersion programs, professional development was a large area of concern. According to 100% of the participants, annual professional development was provided to them. Depending on the county, some participants were allowed to visit other DLI program sites to get a picture of what the programming entails. Gloriana answered, " We went to [redacted] to go and see schools there. When we were thinking of starting it up in [redacted], we went to [redacted], we went to [redacted], and we went to [redacted] to observe all the counties before we implemented it in our county." All participants received professional development specific to DLI at the beginning and end of each school year, with DLI-specific topics. However, professional development throughout the year varied between counties. Some counties offered DLI-specific professional development throughout the year, while some only offered professional development at the beginning and end of the school year. Cindy explained,

We have training every summer for four days...it's rolling out our new plan for our lessons and what they want implemented throughout our program that year....and we have two visits a semester from our...dual language immersion district leaders. They

come in and observe us and, you know, give us feedback or whatever [*sic*]. We have that every semester, once a semester.

Most counties also provided a DLI instructional coach for their programs, which allowed for teachers to lean on them for additional support. Some participants indicated that sometimes the professional development provided did not work for their specific program but was intended for teachers in general education classrooms. Hayley explained, “PLCs or professional learning has dwindled specifically to DLI. But I do know that for newer teachers in the program that still exists.” In total, coding concerning professional development, PD, appeared 15 times throughout the data collected.

Planning Time

A major component of the DLI programs was centered around the team mentality of the DLI teachers and their partners. One participant, Hayley, described the relationship as a marriage. The teachers must be on the same page in discipline and the way in which the day is scheduled. Most participants mentioned that the two classrooms mirrored each other in all ways, in order to keep the transitions smooth for the students. Hayley stated, “ I think we run our classrooms built on relationships, and then, like, the academics will come, but we plan each week. We communicate daily. In the middle of our day, when we switch, we are still communicating. And I think that, is like, number one to a co-teacher, for sure.”

Due to the unique co-teaching style of DLI classrooms, planning was discussed with each participant. Dolores commented, “It's like you're not just planning for math and science, you're planning for math and science, and then the Spanish content. You have to look for that content to match what the concepts that you're teaching in math and science. It's four preps instead of two.” Many participants indicated that they did not receive enough time to plan throughout the day.

Some also mentioned that administration did not fully understand the amount of planning that is necessary to have a successful program. As mentioned previously, due to the fact that a large portion of the Spanish curriculum and materials are written in English, extra planning time is necessary to provide basic needs for the students. In total, coding planning time (TT), appeared 68 times throughout the data collected.

Parent Supports

Parents have been considered a critical part of student education, but even more with DLI programs. Larissa remarked, "...the parents want them exposed to the language, and some of the parents know the benefit of a second language, of learning two languages, and they know the benefits." Participants mentioned two major areas of concern with parental support. First, parents had unrealistic expectations of the DLI program or did not understand what dual language immersion programs actually were. Dolores explained, "As parents register their kids for kindergarten, they're told about the program and what it entails. And I don't think some of the parents realize what exactly the program is about... I'll get parents saying, well, my child doesn't speak Spanish."

Second, parents did not have enough resources to support the learning of an additional language at home. While participants mentioned that the majority of parents of DLI students were involved, they still wanted to provide additional support for them outside of the school. In total, codes concerning parent support (P, PU, PH) appeared 171 times throughout the collected data.

Parent Understanding of DLI

Participants described the recruitment process of DLI program students, where interested parents would attend an informational meeting describing the program, its purpose, and projected

outcomes. However, parents often still do not understand the program, even if their child had been a student in the classroom for multiple years. Participants desired for clearer expectations for the parents. According to the participants, each year when the program is being advertised and new student recruitment begins, there is a parent meeting that outlines the program. The DLI team, counselors, or administrators (varies by school) are responsible for the presentation. Even though the material is provided in Spanish for parents of non-native English speakers, there have been misunderstandings. With administrators needing a certain amount of students in DLI programs to keep the program and funding coming to the school, it is critical that they recruit enough students. Dolores speculated, "...since some of my parents or my students come from non-native speaking households when they enter the program in kindergarten, it was more of a recruitment, not necessarily the parents choosing for their children to be in DLI..." At the same time, parents of native English speakers did not clearly understand the program either. Cindy expressed, "The parents want them in the program, but it is really too hard for them. They can't handle it. And I just think the requirements needs to be changed for entering the program." Some native English speaking parents even think the program is only meant for English Language Learners. Dolores verbalized this sentiment by saying, "my child doesn't speak Spanish. You need to speak to them [in English] Yes, I will provide them support...but, you're not here for me to teach you in English. I'm here to teach you in Spanish." In total, coding concerning parent understanding of DLI and PU appeared 106 times throughout the data collected.

Help for Parents at Home

Participants in the study mentioned the need for parents to have more resources to help their students at home. Hayley said, "When the parents don't feel supported or that they have a voice, then they're not going to give the program what it needs." Many of the parents of DLI

students were not bilingual, making it difficult for them to help their children with any school work that may be sent home. At the same time, they were not able to reinforce the skills learned at school because of their lack of knowledge of the language and lack of resources to aid them.

Unfortunately, as mentioned by the participants, the lack of resources for home led to language learning only taking place during the school day, which did not aid in the reinforcement of language acquisition and skills. Franchesca opined,

We have a lot of non-native Spanish-speaking parents who do not have the resources at home to support the program. And I've talked to many parents, and I've talked to the DLI program. I've talked to the foreign language program. One thing that I would love...parents who are non-native Spanish speakers to have some sort of resource at home that they can use to help reinforce language acquisition for their child.

In total, coding concerning parent support at home, PH, appeared 65 times throughout the data collected.

Student Supports

The passion of the participants shined through when discussing their students. While they mentioned several areas of concern for themselves, they were most concerned with the needs of their students. While DLI programming was started several years ago, they are considered relatively new to the state of Georgia, highlighting some growing pains that still need to be sorted. Through listening to the participants describe their programs, inconsistency between program models was discovered and confirmed in data analysis. A large portion of the discussions centered around meeting the individual needs of students and how that is handled between counties. At the same time, participants discussed students who did not perform well in the program and what should be done to better help those individual students. Finally,

participants noted the lack of foundational language skills that they were seeing for students not only entering kindergarten but even those matriculating through the program. Hayley clarified,

We have a lot of parents that blame it then being pulled out on the DLI program, which, if you go back to their scores down in kindergarten, their scores through the board would show you they would probably still be this way if they were in a traditional classroom...they're coming in with language deficits. They're coming in with academic deficits, and DLI was just not the right fit.

The data collected revealed 696 codes concerning student support (S, CC, SN, FS, SS, Comm).

Consistency Across Programs

Participants did not directly mention the lack of consistency across the programs, but many of their responses led me to further pursue this idea. Data collected from their individual interviews indicated that there were inconsistencies across the state in how DLI programs function and handle special circumstances. There were even differences between schools in the same district. Some counties require their DLI teachers (Spanish and English) to be certified/endorsed in gifted and ESOL because they are meant to provide those services for their students. Angela commented, “Well, with us it's a requirement because the gifted students don't get serviced outside like in a general ed [*sic*] class. It's a requirement that they remain with their DLI teacher.” Other counties offered pull-out services for gifted and ESOL. Larissa shared, “They do have the program. The once a week they go to the gifted certified program, and we. We as well, service them.” Elena stated, “We cannot pull out the kids because my problem is the school budget.”

Student intake also varied between schools. Some schools only allowed native Spanish speakers to enter a DLI program after kindergarten, while others did not. Inconsistencies existed

between how schools handled students who were not performing well in the DLI program.

Angela articulated,

There isn't a point where you say, okay, this kid needs to come out of DLI, right? Like, their grades are dropping significantly, [and] their test scores are showing, like, at what percent? So, we have I-Ready data, and we have this data. At what percent do we say, this is a kid that needs to come out of DLI, so that doesn't happen. And as a teacher, I can even get in trouble for advocating to a parent that I recommend, you know, a DLI pull out.

In total, coding concerning programming, CC, appeared 236 times within the collected data.

Identifying and Meeting Individual Student Needs

The welfare of their students was the largest concern for the participants. The DLI teachers interviewed spoke about the difficulties in identifying student needs in the program. Since the program moved at a rapid pace, students who struggled for one reason or another would fall behind. When that happened, teachers would follow the tier process to provide the needed aid. However, the process typically progressed at a slow pace and students who had undiagnosed learning differences took a long time to get the needed accommodations. Angela noted, "...they don't get as much support because they don't get the same target time and things that other students have available to them. They don't get those tier three supports that maybe someone in a general ed [*sic*] class."

Due to the nature of the program, it was difficult to identify if there was a learning disability or if it was an issue learning the language. Elena described, "The challenge that we have is like some teachers overseeing student needs, thinking that is a language barrier, especially for Hispanic students... So we need to add some tools to identify when is the language

barrier and when is not.” A few of the participants mentioned the trouble in distinguishing between a learning disability and an issue learning the language. Some students in the DLI program with actual learning disabilities are struggling to get services due to the lack of time available for teachers to provide the tier supports, as mentioned by Elena. She described the situation by sharing, “I need to do the small group...ESOL services and EIP services...EIP services require 45 minutes. So, if I have two hours of instructional time, [and] I teach one hour [of] math, 20 minutes of science...How [do] you expect that I do the educational intervention program if I don't have the time?” Hayley agreed, “I don't think that blaming DLI for learning disabilities is the root of it. It's a learning disability, and they came into DLI with that.” Similarly, students may be mistaken for having a learning disability when they are simply struggling with the learning of the target language. As mentioned previously, it is critical for teachers to have a strong understanding of language acquisition in order to help in differentiating between a learning disability versus trouble with mastering the language.

At the same time, students who needed to be challenged were not always given those opportunities; it would depend on the school and if pull-out gifted services were offered. Some schools did not allow students to be taken out of class because of the tight DLI schedule, making it the responsibility of the teacher to provide any additional services or accommodations. Franchesca clarified, “When Spanish is not your native language and you're struggling academically in your native language, this program is much harder because it goes at such a fast pace and students are switching between languages. That one thing I have noticed is that when kids are academically behind in their native language, they're really struggling within the DLI program. So that's one thing I've really noticed that I would love to change.” In total, coding

concerning identifying and meeting student needs, SN, appeared 232 times through the data collected.

Foundational Language Skills

Participants also noted that students entering or continuing through dual language immersion programs lacked foundational language skills. A lack of strong language skills was noted by several participants, including Brittany, Elena, Cindy, Franchesca, and Gloriana. Not having the foundational skills learned in preschool or kindergarten made learning an additional language even more difficult and did not allow for a transfer of skills from one language to another. Cindy stated, “...those basic foundational skills... are the most important right now that they really, really need to know, and some of them don't. So, they struggle in that area...and it is hard to support it because, you know, of the language barrier with some of them.”

Instead, students were struggling with both languages. Franchesca said, “I also see in kindergarten a lot of kids who come in not knowing their foundational skills, not knowing their colors, not knowing their numbers, things like that, who really struggle throughout the whole program because they didn't have those foundational skills to begin with.” Cindy agreed by stating, “I honestly feel that because those basic foundational skills are needed, you know, in English is needed just as bad as in Spanish, because if you're expecting for them to actually write and know everything in Spanish, then those foundational skills are needed in both languages for them to be successful.” Statements concerning foundational skills, FS, appeared 46 times throughout the data collected.

Determining Student Success in DLI

Students entered the DLI programs in kindergarten, making it difficult to foresee if those students will be successful throughout the program. Participants mentioned that during the first

few years of DLI programs, it is critical to identify students who may not be a “good fit” for the program moving forward. Brittany explained, “...in kindergarten, it's more of like a trial run. And it's in first and second grade that, that it becomes more of like, okay, this kid needs a little more than what we're able to give them, or they would benefit from being in an English-only program or setup...It's a case-by-case basis.” Gloriana discussed the issue once students get in the upper grades, “I think that's been kind of the biggest issue we're grappling with is that it's a great program, it's not for everyone, and you shouldn't be in fourth grade reading at a kindergarten level in both languages. “Oftentimes, parents were the ones who volunteer their children to be in the program, especially since most started in kindergarten. Parents choosing DLI for the children sometimes led to students not wanting to be in the program. Larissa speculated, “...it wasn't their choice, and they start falling behind, not only in Spanish, but they start falling behind in English.” In total, coding concerning determining student success in DLI (SS) appeared 49 times throughout the data collected.

Strong Sense of Community Among Students

The most surprising bit of data was the lack of a sense of inequity among the students in the DLI classroom. My research on DLI programs displayed many negative aspects about the lack of equity in the programs, but that does not seem to be the case among the group of participants interviewed. Franchesca described, “ But in terms of just embracing each other's cultures within our classroom and those types of things, the kids do great with.” All of the participants discussed the strong sense of community in their classrooms, and due to the students being together for many years in the program, the biggest issues that needed addressing usually concerned the children bickering like siblings. Dolores remarked, “I see that they're very

supportive of each other. They're almost like brothers and sisters taking care of each other now because they've been together since, most of them, since Pre-K.”

For the most part, the schools were supportive of the programming, with many hosting heritage days that highlight and celebrate the diversity in their schools and communities. Hayley explained, “We meet outside of the school building to build relationships. We have DLI playdates to be able to speak, and the kids talk to each other outside of the school building.” Each participant discussed how they develop a strong classroom community on an individual level, but most were confused by my question concerning any issues or challenges that occur among the variety of students in their classrooms...it was a non-issue. The lack of cultural challenges was surprising, but great news, as this was a large portion of research found early on. Gloriana stated, “It's been really nice for also my students to kind of interact with different cultures from the different countries that they represent.” In total, coding concerning classroom community, Comm, appeared 133 times through the data collected.

Outlier Data and Findings

Several outlying topics emerged through the data analysis process. They included the number of students in a DLI cohort, a shift in focus from social to academic, the issue of standardized tests, the fidelity of the DLI model, and the idea of a bilingual interventionist.

Number of Students in DLI Cohort

One topic that was mentioned by Larissa was the number of students being placed in a DLI cohort, starting in kindergarten. Due to the fast pace and expectations of DLI programs, the number of students in a DLI program should be kept low. According to the participants, most DLI teachers were responsible for providing additional services and support for students in their classrooms, meaning a lower number would yield better results. Larissa articulated, “In

kindergarten, our school admits 25 students, and it's too big of a class. It's too big of a class. There should be no more than 20 students in the DLI class to be serviced.”

Shift from Social to Academic Focus

According to Hayley, the social aspect of the program has shifted to one of academic rigor as the primary pedagogical focus for language acquisition. Hayley remarked, “I feel like when our program started, it was very, like, social, social turn and talk, talk, talk, talk. And then we got into, like, academics. And so, their academics are very strong now, but now we have to bring back in the social conversational piece as well”. Brittany elaborated further by stating, “I wish that there was less of an emphasis on test scores in third through fifth to provide space for students to learn in a bilingual setting without there being so much pressure on them to perform in English [and] that they were just given more space to learn and develop those skills.”

Standardized Tests are Only in English

In Georgia, elementary students in third through fifth grade participate in the Georgia Milestone Assessment System or Georgia Milestones (Georgia Department of Education, 2023). If they do not score at a certain percentage, then they are not able to move on to the next grade. Students must pass the English section for third grade to progress to fourth grade. Fifth graders must pass the English and Math sections to move on to middle school. Fourth graders do not have to pass to move on to the next grade. Students in DLI programming have to participate in state testing, which are only offered in English. This situation is not equitable for all students. Josefina commented, “So one of the things is like the Georgia Milestones test, and even all of our county tests are done in English. And so here I've been teaching them in Spanish the whole time. And, you know, and sure, my partner teacher makes connections for them, but that's only a piece.” Brittany also said, “We have...no standardized tests in Spanish, so it's very hard to prove

legitimacy as far as, [sic], Spanish fluency when we don't have access to a test where we can test students' progressions through the years..." Dolores agreed, "It's just that they don't have the language yet, so of course, they can't pass the reading portion of the test."

Fidelity of DLI Programming

Fidelity in dual language immersion programs refers to keeping with the procedures and goals of the programming, with the main focus being speaking in the target language 100% of the school day. However, according to some of the participants (Brittany, Angela, Josefina, Gloriana, and Larissa) fidelity is not always possible. DLI teachers try to keep the fidelity of the programming, but certain content and circumstances sometimes alter the plan. Gloriana stated, "But at recess, like, if you run up to me and you tell me something, I'm not going to be like, no, it needs to be in Spanish right now." Brittany agreed, "...with them being so young, they're very confused. And that sometimes puts me in a position where I have to break the fidelity of the program just to make sure that they're on the same page as everybody else..."

Bilingual Interventionist

Due to the demands placed on DLI teachers, it was difficult for them to meet the diverse needs of the students in their classrooms. While most schools had an instructional coach that worked with DLI teachers, Gloriana mentioned the need for a bilingual interventionist who could help provide additional support for students who need extra help. Gloriana described, "Our school and every DLI has already asked for a bilingual intervention teacher who could pull in or come in at any time or segment. Then the DLI schedule wouldn't be an excuse. The language part wouldn't matter. The problem is obviously a budget for that person and then finding that person." If county or district budgets would allow, hiring a bilingual interventionist would not

only benefit the students who need extra help or aid in identifying specific learning needs, but it would also remove the responsibility of those tasks from the DLI teachers.

Research Question Responses

In analyzing the data and uncovering themes and subthemes, it was critical to reflect on the research questions that drove the study. While reflecting on the central research question and sub-questions, it was clear that the questions were appropriate to the study, while revealing areas for further research. The following questions helped to guide the individual interview questions, focus group discussions, and was the framework for data analysis.

Central Research Question

How can the design of dual language immersion programs promote fluency (speaking, reading, writing) in language learners? The participants' perspectives are that increased teacher, parent, and student support would yield better results in DLI programs. Teachers need more planning time, parents need clearer expectations, and students need more individualized support. Hayley articulated, "I do think as a school building relationships and housing that bicultural love...It's more of a love for the language and all cultures in our school. And I think that is built upon the staff and the admin and the families in the community."

Teachers desired more time to work collaboratively with their co-teacher in order to cover more content with their limited classroom time. Due to a lack of provided materials, teachers used a lot of their planning time preparing and translating materials in order for them to be used by students. Participants voiced their desire for parents to have a clearer understanding of the program and for them to receive materials or strategies to work with their students at home to reinforce what they learned at school. Franchesca commented, "I would love for parents who

are non-native Spanish speakers to have some sort of resource at home that they can use to help reinforce language acquisition for their child.”

The largest area of concern for the participants was supporting their students. They indicated that students lacking strong foundational language skills were struggling in their classrooms, but getting help for them was difficult. Participants mentioned a need for students to be assessed (in an appropriate way, including in their native language) in order to determine if they are a solid candidate for the DLI program, due to the rigor associated with the program. The aforementioned concerns of the participants, if addressed appropriately by individual schools and leadership at the district or state level can have a positive impact on student learning and success in DLI programs across the state.

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of K-5 educators who teach in DLI programs in Georgia? Participants agreed that they enjoy their positions in the DLI program and are passionate about language learning, but the lack of readily available resources, extra planning time, and serving in multiple support roles for their students has led to teacher burnout. Hayley remarked, “It’s double the work, and you’re gonna [*sic*] burn out your teachers if you don’t support them.” Teachers who felt supported by their administrators described more positive experiences than those who did not feel the support of their school leadership. Elena explained, “We cannot share ideas. And I feel like I’m here just by myself.”

Participants detailed wonderful experiences in their classrooms working with their students. They promoted positive and collaborative classroom environments by engaging in social activities, such as circle time, where students are encouraged to share about their lives and experiences. Franchesca elaborated, “I want to make sure that they feel empowered to know that

this is a safe space. You can say whatever you want to say in Spanish. We can speak openly in Spanish and be able to just support one another without feeling ashamed or afraid.” They also discussed heritage days put on by the school where students, families, and the community are able to come together and celebrate the variety of cultures represented at their school. Gloriana explained, “Every year, our DLI program has a DLI showcase. And so, at the end of the year, our kids sing songs both in English and Spanish. They put on plays both in English and Spanish, depending on the grade level. The DLI community comes together for that.”

Sub-Question Two

How do educators in DLI classrooms in Georgia aid students in reaching a higher-level literacy threshold to achieve cognitive, academic, and linguistic growth? Participants developed strong classroom communities where students felt safe to practice their language skills by building relationships and appreciating the cultures represented in their classrooms. Franchesca spoke on her classroom community, “They're able to do more. They're able to be pushed more because they're so comfortable with one another and because their thought process is, to me, a little bit more advanced because of that language.” They also worked closely with their partner teachers to provide support for students based on their individual needs. Josefina stated, “My English-speaking partner, she will support the academic language for math and science by hitting on key things...on her side.”

Due to the rigor involved in learning an additional language, participants noted that students' academic growth was seen across content areas. Elena explained, “And then I just heard from other teachers...DLI is a group that keeps the school scores, you know, that they keep the school in good stages of academics.” Hayley agreed, “Our academic language and knowledge in both languages are really good.”

Sub-Question Three

How have racial or cultural differences influenced student performance and the classroom environment in DLI programs in Georgia? Participants did not have any instances where cultural differences impacted their classrooms in a negative way; they spoke of the cooperative attitudes of their students. Hayley reported, "...you are truly not only building, like classroom community, you are building a community of learners and humans." Franchesca added, "I think in my group, like, we are such a huge, like, melting pot. It's insane. I have Indian kids from India. I have different Hispanic countries in my classroom. I have different Asian countries in my classroom, and then I have Caucasian. And so, they all really get along."

As mentioned previously, one way the participants' schools build community and celebrate cultural differences is with special celebrations. Larissa described, "We have a multicultural night as well, and it's a hit as well. And it's not only Hispanic, as you said... it's every culture, like every grade level, every family, not only the DLI families, but families represented in different cultures, so they share with the whole school."

Summary

The preceding results from data collection highlighted the experiences of teachers in dual language immersion programs in Georgia. They revealed the themes of teacher, parent, and student support that, when done properly, can lead to stronger second language acquisition and, in turn, produce more bilingual learners. The participants noted their love for their job, but also the need for more support, materials, and time to plan. DLI parents needed to have clear expectations and resources to work with their students at home. Student support included finding ways to better meet the individual needs of learners, increasing mastery of foundational skills, considering if the DLI program works for each student, and increased consistency among

programs. The results found that contrary to research about the lack of equity in DLI programs in the United States (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2020; Djuraeva et al., 2022; Hamann & Catalano, 2021; Martinez Negrette, 2020; Morales & Maravilla, 2019; Poza, 2019), DLI programs in Georgia are providing equity for all language learners in the programs and cultural differences do not negatively impact the educational experiences of the students.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

Chapter Five discusses the findings from the study and the potential future of dual language immersion programs as well as possibilities for future research. Limitations and delimitations of the study are discussed, as well as my interpretations of the findings from data analysis. Implications for educational policy and practices are discussed. Furthermore, connections between Cummins' threshold theory and the related literature from Chapter Two are revisited to examine and compare to the collected data.

Discussion

Following the data collection process, coding was used to identify themes and subthemes in the data. In interpreting the data and exploring the themes of teacher, parent, and student support emerged. The following sections discuss the themes found in the data as well as how the literature from Chapter Two relates to the findings. Further areas of research are discussed as well as implications for current practice.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Findings revealed the themes of teacher, parent, and student support that when done properly can lead to stronger second language acquisition and in turn, produce solid bilingual learners. While the participants described their passion for their students and teaching in the DLI setting, they noted the need for more support, materials, and time to plan. Participants also noted the need for parents of DLI parents to be provided with a clear understanding of the DLI program and their desire for parents to be provided resources to work with their students at home. The DLI teachers interviewed discussed the need for stronger student support such as finding ways to better meet the individual needs of learners, increasing mastery of foundational

skills, considering if the DLI program works for each student, and increasing consistency among programs. The findings reveal that DLI programs in Georgia are providing equity for students and cultural differences do not negatively impact the educational experiences of the students.

Interpretation of Findings

Separate from the themes uncovered through data analysis, several other concepts were discovered through my research and collection of data. The following concepts will be highlighted: DLI teachers are highly qualified, teacher certifications need to be revisited, a change of focus to better benefit students is needed, and the United States needs a stronger appreciation for bilingual education. The ideas reflect my personal interpretation of the data collected, in addition to the themes found through the data collection process.

DLI Teachers are Well-Qualified

Throughout the interviews and reflecting on the answers to the online questionnaire, it was clear that DLI teachers are extremely well-qualified. Even though most educators continue through higher education in order to advance their pay scale, the amount of advanced degrees represented in this small sample size of teachers was astonishing. The requirements for dual language immersion teachers includes certification in elementary education and for the Spanish teachers, they must also be certified to teach Spanish. Additionally, depending on the county, teachers might be required to obtain additional endorsements such as gifted or ESOL. As mentioned previously, 11 of the 12 participants have advanced degrees, not including the additional endorsements. Three of the 12 participants have completed or are in the process of completing a doctoral degree. Overall, these participants have years of education and experience to make them experts in their field. While some are on their first or second year of DLI programming, they have multiple years of experience working with children or teaching in an

educational setting. Seven of the 12 participants have more than eight years of teaching experience.

Teacher Certification

As mentioned previously, teachers in dual language immersion programs are required to have specific qualifications. Depending on the county requirements, they may also have to be certified to teach gifted or ESOL, on top of their basic qualifications as elementary educators, and possibly Spanish, depending on if they are the English teacher or Spanish teacher. These extra endorsements may seem cumbersome, especially when considering some teachers are expected to provide additional services or accommodations in addition to the heavily packed daily schedule. However, the knowledge of how to differentiate and better provide support for student needs is critical for student success. This knowledge, along with multiple years of experience, makes them better teachers.

Unfortunately, as discussed in the interviews and focus groups, students with learning challenges are struggling in the dual language immersion classrooms, leaving the teachers responsible for helping them through the tier process. The tiering process can be long and arduous and typically elongates the time before the student gets the needed accommodations. Since DLI teachers are often required to have ESOL and gifted endorsements, perhaps they should also have some training of sorts or certification in special education. Moreover, all teachers should be required to have training and/or certifications in special education, ESOL, and gifted areas to better serve their students. Of course, in many cases, additional pull-out services are better scenarios for students, but possessing the knowledge and skills on help the varied needs of students in a teacher's classroom is invaluable.

While it seems improbable and possibly excessive to ask teachers to continue adding to their education and certifications, it is what is currently being required and could be one reason that DLI programs are not more widespread. Qualifications for elementary DLI teachers include a basic elementary education degree and additional Spanish certification for Spanish teachers. As mentioned previously, teachers are then required to be certified in other areas. Finding qualified teachers can be difficult, especially for teachers of the target language.

Change of Focus

The original intention of dual language immersion programs was to provide equity for English language learners in education. Over time, it has evolved to also provide opportunities for native English speakers to learn Spanish and be considered a form of gifted education. However, due to how funding is utilized for DLI programs and the numbers needed for classroom allocations, the focus has shifted from focusing on student needs to making sure numbers are met to secure funding. The shift of focus means that students who struggle in the program, might be kept in it, just to keep the numbers in the classroom in order for the school to continue to receive the additional funding. Conversely, when students do not perform well on standardized tests, or throughout the DLI program, they may be removed. Some students may struggle with certain aspects of the program but could be successful with appropriate support or accommodations. If they are removed without the opportunity to try, they miss out on the unique opportunity to become bilingual.

The idea of changing the focus from allocation, funding, and test scores to meeting the needs of students is not strictly for dual language immersion classrooms. All over the country, teachers are being pressured to have their students perform well on standardized tests not simply to understand their students' learning, but to secure funding for their schools. Instead of working

to develop life-long learners who will become successful, well-rounded adults, teachers are forced to teach for the tests, which do not accurately display student success. Federal and state leaders need to shift the focus to meeting the individual needs of students and discontinue the practice of funding and measures of success being linked to test scores.

United States Needs to Understand Benefits of Bilingual Education

Though the benefits of bilingual education are becoming clearer to educators in the United States, we are still far behind other countries regarding language acquisition. Most other developed countries and many developing countries have their students learning an additional language early on in their education. Due to that fact, students from these countries can pursue careers nearly anywhere in the world, as well as travel with ease. The United States does not put a strong focus on developing bilingual learners, which puts all American students at a disadvantage compared to other countries. As mentioned in the related literature section, the benefits for becoming bilingual or multilingual are massive, especially when considering future careers (Bialystok, 2021; Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Chamorro & Janke, 2020; Salomé et al., 2021). The cognitive benefits are immense as well. American policymakers are concerned with test scores and how the U.S. compares to other countries; perhaps integrating more bilingual education, something which has been proven to increase cognitive skills and standardized test performance would help in that endeavor.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The following sections highlight suggestions for policy and practice in conjunction with the findings from this study. In terms of policy, identifying ways to provide consistency among schools within counties and the state is critical as well as increasing provided resources for Spanish DLI teachers. For practice, it may be valuable to provide increased planning time and

professional development for teachers and administrators. Additionally, utilizing a tool to screen potential DLI students to determine their readiness for the program may prove beneficial.

Implications for Policy

As discussed in Chapter Four, the lack of consistency among county and state dual language immersion programs in the state of Georgia is problematic. Lack of research on the development of DLI programs is partly to blame, but educational leaders need to uncover ways to work congruently in order to provide better experiences for students, especially those who may be transient. At the same time, consistency, specifically in program function (recruitment, student progress, curriculum and materials, teacher planning/support) especially at the county or district level, can lead to increased positive outcomes, e.g. increased bilingual learners, stronger language acquisition, for students and communities.

At the state and county levels, there are department heads for world languages, with DLI programming falling under that umbrella. Most counties sampled have a DLI coordinator who is responsible for examining the school programs, checking in on the teachers and ensuring student progress. Perhaps these leaders could coordinate and allow for DLI teachers to forgo the school-wide professional development in order to participate in professional development for their programs. Collaboration could be accomplished over Zoom or another online platform, allowing time for teachers to learn together, but also share ideas. While there may be statewide programming details and procedures, it appears that they are carried out differently depending on the county. Additionally, some programs have been around longer than other programs, which could explain why they are not functioning in the same way; there is a learning curve with developing a new program. However, ensuring that county DLI coordinators are collaborating

regularly, while also providing professional development for DLI teachers could aid in promoting consistency statewide.

Additionally, county leaders should work to provide improved materials for DLI teachers, especially Spanish teachers. As determined by the findings from data collection, Spanish DLI teachers are spending excessive time in addition to typical teacher planning to translate and create materials they can use in their classrooms. Added work creates further strain on an already stressful job and position, increasing the possibility of teacher burn out. If teachers are provided more usable resources by their county or school, that additional time can be used in more advantageous ways, especially in terms of meeting individual student needs; additional time could also be used to help reduce their personal stress. With more time available to them, they can personalize instruction to better meet student needs, research different strategies to use in the classroom, or use that time to collaborate with their partner teacher. Additional time could also be used for them to get ahead on their planning or grading, which will alleviate the associated stress.

Implications for Practice

Data analysis indicated a few areas for improvement in terms of practice. First, there is a need for increased planning time for dual language immersion teachers. Since DLI teachers on both the English and Spanish sides have to cover a plethora of material and supplement for one another with certain content areas, as well as have mirrored classrooms, the team must work diligently to be in agreement. For Spanish DLI teachers, the lack of appropriate and ready-to-use materials causes them to use additional time to prepare for each lesson. An increase in teacher planning time, could allow them the needed time to complete the translations and preparations of the materials and allow for them to have more time for collaborating with their DLI counterpart.

Currently, DLI teachers are allotted the same amount of planning time as general education teachers, which varies depending on teacher schedules and the school schedule. All teachers are given a planning period, which is not regulated by a certain amount of time. Due to the lack of materials, however, more time is spent having to translate and prepare materials, instead of using the planning time for collaborating with their co-teachers, discussing student progress and needs, or planning ahead. Having more readily available materials would allow for the given planning time to have a greater impact for the teachers.

Second, additional professional development throughout the year could allow for teachers to enhance their skills and gain knowledge to better serve the needs of their students. DLI teachers from differing county schools could benefit from time spent sharing ideas and strategies with one another in addition to hearing from other DLI experts. Administrators should be included in some of the professional development in order for them to gain a better understanding of DLI programming. Since the attitude of the administration directly impacts the successfulness of a DLI program, having an administrative team who understands the value of the program and the struggles of the teachers could prove invaluable. As mentioned previously, school wide professional development is often not applicable to the DLI program, so providing DLI teachers with an alternate professional development opportunity would be beneficial. In Georgia, ongoing professional development, usually provided by the school, is required in order to renew one's certification. Alternatively, if a teacher is enrolled in continuing education, those hours count as professional development. If DLI professional development could be provided by the state, district, or county, it would prove beneficial for DLI teachers.

Finally, as discussed in Chapter Four, there are some students who enter into DLI programs in kindergarten and by second grade, it does not seem to be the correct placement for

them. While kindergarten is the appropriate age in which to begin a language program because it is easier to learn a language at an early age (Brannon, 2019; de Jong et al., 2020; Dixon et al., 2012), it is difficult to determine if students will be able to handle the rigor that comes along with DLI programs. Sometimes students come to kindergarten without any previous school experiences, making it difficult to determine if they will perform well. As mentioned previously, students possessing strong foundational language skills coming into kindergarten would have a greater chance of success, but that cannot be the only determining factor. Additionally, students are entering into kindergarten lacking key foundational skills that cause them to struggle in the DLI setting. Perhaps, a screening tool could be utilized to determine if a student would be a proper fit for DLI programming or if they are needing additional help with some of the skills necessary for them to be successful. An additional screening type tool could later be utilized to determine if a student should remain in the program or needs to be placed in a traditional classroom.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study, based on Cummins' threshold theory, are supported by participant data. The empirical implications include the impact of the classroom environment, administrative support, and parental support on the success of DLI programs. At the same time, the qualifications of teachers and their knowledge of language acquisition directly impact student success. Additionally, communication between co-teachers is critical as well as allowing for students to connect with their heritage. In contrast to the literature, there was no evidence of inequity or friction among cultural groups in DLI classrooms in the sampled classrooms.

Empirical Implications

As indicated by the literature review, the classroom environment plays a major role in the success of a DLI student. Participants discussed the many ways they foster a caring and safe classroom environment by allowing students time to socialize and learn about one another. Teachers allowed time for students to share and spent time collaborating in small groups. Participants worked to provide opportunities to integrate each student's culture and heritage into their learning, while allowing them time to share about their lives. The participants were intentional in knowing their students. According to literature, schools with effective DLI programs have teachers and staff who are knowledgeable of the varied needs of students (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2023; Block & Vidaurre, 2019; Palmer et al., 2019). The participants practice sociocultural understanding, use inclusive curriculum, integrate students' cultural heritage into the classroom, and encourage and celebrate students and their differences (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2023; Block & Vidaurre, 2019; Palmer et al., 2019). Practicing the aforementioned skills and strategies has a lasting impact on student progress and on their cultural identity. Due to the retention of students in DLI programs from kindergarten through grade five, students can create strong bonds with one another which allow them to be fearless in trying new things or practicing using the target language. According to the literature, DLI students need opportunities to experiment and practice their skills without judgment (Cummins, 2007; Hood, 2020; Ryan, 2020; Sung, 2022). Participants had students partake in circle time each day to allow for language practice and community building. Students utilize circle time by sharing about their lives, while also learning skills such as calendar math and being introduced to new vocabulary.

Administrative support greatly effects the outcomes of dual language immersion programs. As indicated by the data analyzed and the literature reviewed, it is critical for administrators to understand the purpose of DLI programs and provide adequate support for the

teachers and students. Administrators must support and advocate for DLI programs, including understanding language acquisition, the DLI program model, and the concept of dual language immersion (Baldwin, 2021; García-Mateus, 2021; Grivet et al., 2021; Olivos & Lucero, 2018; Porter, 2018). Participants who felt supported (Angela, Cindy, Franchesca, Hayley, Isabelle, Katarina, Larissa) by their administrative team were able to provide multiple positive examples of their impact on their programs, students, and schools. Alternatively, participants who did not feel supported by their school leaders (Brittany, Elena, Gloriana, Josefina, Dolores), felt frustrated and overwhelmed. Programs with supportive administrators participated in events that fostered collaboration between parents, students, and teachers, involving the community and celebrating the cultures represented in their schools. Administrators can better support the educators in DLI programs, advocate for the program, and better help parents with concerns, if they possess a true understanding of the program and its purpose (Baldwin, 2021).

Parental support, as indicated by both the related literature and the collected data, is a vital part of the DLI program and the success of the students. When parents are involved in the lives of their students, the students feel supported, are more likely to succeed, and have a greater sense of self-worth. With parent involvement, especially parents of minority students, they develop self-efficacy skills that they pass on to their children, which results in positive academic achievements (Cummins, 1989; Muro, 2023). Parent inclusion in the classroom also has powerful positive consequences, as indicated by the literature. When teachers work collaboratively with parents of minorities, there are positive changes in the student's academic progress (Cummins, 1989; de Jong et al., 2020; García-Mateus, 2020; Muro, 2023). One of the participants, Cindy, explained the importance of parent involvement, "We have some English

language learners that receive more parental support, and with that [parent support], you can see the difference in the learning and ...excelling in subjects.”

Teacher qualifications that are necessary for elementary dual language immersion programs include certifications in elementary education and in the target language for the target language teacher. Additional qualifications may be required depending on the county in which the program is located. Other certifications such as gifted education or ESOL may be requested. 11 of the 12 participants held at least one advanced degree, with several having more than one. Teachers in DLI programs are highly qualified and should be considered experts in their field.

At the same time, teachers need a strong knowledge of language acquisition gained by years of experience and advanced educational opportunities, in order to help their students learn in the target language. Educators in DLI programs must be knowledgeable in both language acquisition and childhood development (Chaparro, 2019; King & Ridley, 2019; Serafini et al., 2020). As mentioned in the data analysis, participants showed concern about the lack of foundational language skills in their current students. Aiding students in successfully attaining an additional language requires a great understanding of linguistic pedagogy, in addition to being knowledgeable of language learning (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2007; Disbray et al., 2020; Morrell et al., 2019).

Teachers working in DLI programs must be excellent communicators. Since DLI language teachers work closely with their DLI English counterpart, clear and constant communication is a necessity. Teachers work as a cohesive unit with mirroring classrooms that contain similar configurations and identical expectations. Co-teachers must communicate to further develop and strengthen their relationship (Men et al., 2021). Their relationship, including shared roles and trust, positively impacts the classroom environment, which in turn, effects

student success (Baldwin, 2021). Much like a marriage, as indicated by participant interviews, co-teachers must be able to step-in when needed, including providing content support between languages.

The impact of a student's heritage on their success in the dual language immersion classroom is significant. Equally significant is the impact of the school on how a student views his heritage, which historically, has been negative (Cummins, 1989). Students who feel connected to their heritage, and celebrated by others increase their self-worth. An essential piece of the dual language immersion classroom is helping students connect with the traditions and culture of their families, to help them keep their cultural identity (Cardoza & Brown, 2019; Cummins, 2000; Fox et al., 2019; New Zealand Department of Education, 1988; Pacheco & Hamilton, 2020; Sanders, 2018). On the other hand, students who feel disconnected from their heritage struggle academically. Losing the connection to their culture can negatively impact their emotional well-being and be detrimental to their academic progress (Cummins, 2000). Losing one's identity negatively affects academic achievement and overall self-worth significantly, with many English language learners feeling isolated from other students (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Talamantes, 2021).

As discussed in Chapter Four, most schools in Georgia with DLI programs are intentional in celebrating and supporting the heritage of the students in their schools. They host heritage days where parents and the school community come together to display cultural traditions, foods, music, and art to share with one another. Participants described how they integrate the cultures of their students into their lessons and how that positively impacts their classroom dynamic. As DLI teachers, they were intentional with celebrating their students' heritages in order to know them better, but also in an educational lens, where the students can learn from each other.

The review of the current literature highlights an unfortunate negative aspect of dual language immersion programs: lack of equity for minority students (Chávez-Moreno, 2021; Pacheco & Hamilton, 2020). An immense amount of research supported inequity in DLI programs, with countless articles and studies describing minority students being treated differently as compared to the white students in DLI classrooms. Unfortunately, even though DLI programs were created to provide equity for minority students (Delavan et al., 2021; Valdes, 1997), the increase in bilingual education has resulted in representing the interests of white English speakers in many cases (Bernstein et al., 2021; Chávez-Moreno, 2021; Delavan et al., 2021; Dorner et al., 2021; Henderson, 2020; Pacheco & Hamilton, 2020).

However, from the sample of participants in the study, inequity in their DLI programs was not present. This small sample of Georgia DLI classrooms did not exhibit inequity or tension between the cultures represented in their classrooms. Teachers described the biggest issue of tension between their students revolved around behavior. Students who have matriculated through the program together have strong relationships, which leads to them acting as siblings. Students and their families are given opportunities to share their heritage and learn from others. Student differences are celebrated, and their classroom environments are full of multicultural love and understanding.

Theoretical Implications

Cummins' threshold theory describes two thresholds of language acquisition, one higher and one lower (Cummins, 1976). When a student is at the lower level, they will not actively benefit academically or cognitively with those languages. They must reach the higher level in order to receive all of the associated benefits with language learning, i.e. cognitive, linguistic, and academic growth (Cummins et al., 2001; Ramirez, 1987; Uzzell & Ayscue, 2021). Reaching

the higher-level threshold indicates mastery of literacy skills in both the native and target languages (Cummins et al., 2001). Similarly, Cummins introduced the concept of biliteracy advantage, where skills learned in the first language will transfer over to the second language (Ardasheva et al., 2011). However, a student must have strong language skills in both languages for the “transfer” to occur (Ardasheva et al., 2011; Sung, 2022).

Participant data directly supports Cummins’ threshold theory. Participants voiced concern over students’ lack of foundational language skills that caused them to struggle in the DLI setting. Native English-speaking students lacking language skills struggled with learning the same concepts in Spanish. Alternatively, native Spanish-speakers who were missing foundational Spanish language skills, struggled with the same skills in English. Since they were lacking the skills needed to master either language, they continued to struggle with both. Additionally, the skills learned in one language could not transfer to the other, since there was no mastery. Additional supports are needed for students to move forward in their language acquisition, specifically in foundational skills and phonemic awareness.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of the study, or things that could not be controlled, included the sample of participants and participants who declined to participate. A change in setting, due to a lack of willing participants, was also a limitation. Delimitations, or intentional boundaries of the study, included limiting the participant pool to teachers in dual language immersion programs in Georgia. Delimitations also included participants who taught kindergarten through fifth grade in public school settings.

Limitations

Limitations to the study included the change of location, limited number of DLI programs in Georgia and a limited number of teachers willing to participate. Additionally, due to the limited and finite number of DLI programs in Georgia, this also became a limiting factor. As I increased the number of schools that could participate in the study, I still did not have enough participants; I had to offer compensation to reach the needed number of participants.

Participants in the study were all female teachers, with 11 of the 12 participants being part of Spanish DLI programs. The lack of gender diversity could skew results simply because no male representation was present. Additionally, while most participants had eight or more years of teaching experience, making them veteran teachers, some had only one or two years of experience. While providing an interesting insight into the differences between new and veteran teachers, it could possibly affect the outcome of the data. However, due to the limited number of DLI programs in Georgia, and low participant interest, further specifications in regards to years of experience were not considered.

Delimitations

Delimitations of this hermeneutic phenomenology study included the participants being aged 18 or older, and a public school teacher in a DLI (K-5) classroom in Georgia. Originally, it was the intention to recruit participants from Spanish DLI programs, but due to the lack of voluntary participants in this setting, teacher participants were solicited from other DLI programs as well. Fortunately, most participants (11 of the 12) still represented Spanish DLI programs.

Originally, the intention was to focus only on DLI programs at schools in the Metro Atlanta area, however, due to a lack of willing participants, it was necessary to increase the sample pool to include all schools in Georgia. No delimitations in regard to years of experience

were in place, due to the limited number of DLI teachers in the state of Georgia. These delimitations were chosen to attempt to keep parameters the same and obtain clear data.

Recommendations for Future Research

For further research, I would like to look at a few different subject areas. First, the screening process for students entering into DLI programs needs to be investigated. If there is no such screening process, research should be completed to see if other schools or counties have one and of what it is comprised. As mentioned by multiple participants, there is a lack of strong foundational skills that are needed for students to be successful matriculating through a DLI program. If teachers or administrators could find out that information before placing a student in a DLI program, it would better benefit the student.

Second, it is necessary to consider what other states are doing to develop consistency between the county programs. If a student were to leave a DLI program in one county and transfer to another, it would be ideal for the programs to be similar in order to help the student transition more easily. At the same time, consistency among DLI programs within a state would theoretically yield stronger results in bilingual students. An exploration of different Georgia counties should be completed to compare teacher requirements, school allotments, student entrance, and student demographics in the programs.

The third area to investigate is student testing. First, research is needed on what standardized tests have been created for DLI students or if the state tests can be made available in Spanish. Second, as discussed by several participants, it would be ideal to see the effect of utilizing placement tests for students entering kindergarten, with another being completed after a year or two, to mainly see if the DLI program is still a good fit for them. There does not seem to be a large amount of data to help DLI teachers gauge the levels of their students aside from their

personal data and state testing data or the game/app type data are not always appropriate for DLI students.

Conclusion

The problem is that dual language immersion (DLI) programs in Georgia elementary schools yield varying results depending on the design and implementation of each program. There is a gap in the literature regarding how to design and integrate dual language immersion programs in schools, resulting in variations in the programming. This hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to understand current practices in dual language immersion programming, identify biases, and develop a design for implementing dual language immersion programs to provide consistency between programs in participating elementary schools.

Using the threshold theory (Cummins, 1976; Cummins et al., 2001) to guide understanding of this topic, the reviewed literature examined the benefits of dual language immersion programs, language acquisition, classroom environments, teacher qualifications, communication, and the design and implementation of DLI programs.

Following the guidelines of van Manen (1990), data collection procedures included conducting individual and group interviews as well as utilizing questionnaires. An audit trail was created to aid in analyzing data, and coding helped identify themes in order to answer the research questions. Data analysis revealed the themes of teacher, parent, and student support. The participants noted the need for more support, materials, and planning time. DLI parents needed clearer expectations and resources to work with their students at home. Student support included finding ways to better meet the individual needs of learners, increasing mastery of foundational skills, considering if the DLI program works for each student, and increased consistency among programs. The results found that contrary to research, DLI programs in

Georgia are providing equity for all language learners in the programs and cultural differences do not negatively impact the educational experiences of the students.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

From: do-not-reply@cayuse.com 
Subject: [External] IRB-FY23-24-671 - Initial: Initial - Exempt
Date: December 12, 2023 at 3:39 PM
To: amcunningham1@liberty.edu, sfarrell4@liberty.edu

D

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 12, 2023

Ashley Cunningham
 Sharon Farrell

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-671 EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF DUAL-LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Dear Ashley Cunningham, Sharon Farrell,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.


Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

IRB Modification

From: do-not-reply@cayuse.com 
Subject: [External] IRB-FY23-24-671 - Modification: Modification
Date: January 25, 2024 at 11:25 AM
To: amcunningham1@liberty.edu, sfarrell4@liberty.edu



[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 25, 2024

Ashley Cunningham
Sharon Farrell

Re: Modification - IRB-FY23-24-671 EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF DUAL-LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Dear Ashley Cunningham, Sharon Farrell,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY23-24-671 EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF DUAL-LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Your request to utilize publicly posted email addresses/phone numbers instead of having district gatekeepers provide potential participants' contact information to facilitate your participant recruitment has been approved. **For a PDF of your modification letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Modification under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. If your modification required you to submit revised documents, they can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.**

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix C

IRB Modification

From: do-not-reply@cayuse.com
Subject: [External] IRB-FY23-24-671 - Modification: Modification
Date: May 9, 2024 at 1:38 PM
To: amcunningham1@liberty.edu, sfarrell4@liberty.edu

D

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 9, 2024

Ashley Cunningham
Sharon Farrell

Re: Modification - IRB-FY23-24-671 EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF DUAL-LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Dear Ashley Cunningham, Sharon Farrell,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY23-24-671 EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF DUAL-LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Your request to compensate participants who complete all three procedures with \$50 sent through an online money app such as Cashapp, Zelle, or Venmo immediately following their participation in the focus group has been approved. Thank you for submitting your revised study documents for our review and documentation. **For a PDF of your modification letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Modification under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. If your modification required you to submit revised documents, they can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

Title of the Project: EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF DUAL-LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Principal Investigator: Ashley Cunningham, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be an educator in a dual language immersion classroom in Georgia. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand current practices in dual language immersion programming, identify biases, and investigate designs for implementing dual language immersion programs to provide consistency between programs in participating elementary schools.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Complete an online survey that will take no more than 30 minutes.
2. Participate in a video-recorded one-on-one online interview that will take approximately 45 minutes.
3. Participate in a video-recorded online focus group that will take approximately one hour.
4. Review transcriptions of the one-on-one interview and focus group session that will take approximately 30 mins.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Benefits to society include identifying biases, discovering ways to enhance equity among minority students in dual language immersion programs, and exploring educators' experiences in these programs.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group. Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored [on a password-locked computer in a locked drawer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. After the focus group, participants who have completed all three study procedures will receive \$50 sent via Cashapp/Zelle/their choice.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this 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.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Ashley Cunningham. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Sharon Farrell at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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 IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is 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.

Your 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. You will be given a copy of this document 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.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix E

Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand a phenomenon. The purpose of my research is to investigate the experience of educators in dual language immersion programs, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be educators in dual language immersion classrooms. Participants will be asked to take an online survey, take part in a one-on-one video-recorded interview, participate in a video-recorded focus group, and review interview and focus group transcriptions. It should take approximately 3.5 hours to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

Additionally, participants who volunteer their time and complete the three sections of the project will receive \$50 compensation sent via Cashapp/Zelle/your choice at the conclusion of our time working together.

To participate, please click here (<https://forms.gle/tyfHgU86tvLoJ1u7A>) to complete the attached survey. If you meet my participant criteria, I will contact you via email to schedule an interview.

A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Ashley Cunningham
Doctoral Candidate



Appendix F
Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Participant: _____

School/Role: _____

Consent Form signed? _____

Note to Participant: Thank you for your participation in this study. The results will help us to get a better understanding of the benefits of DLI programs and how we can better serve the students in these programs. Reminder that your name will be altered, and confidentiality is of utmost importance. If at any time, you wish to end your participation, please let me know. Your time is important, so this interview should last approximately 30-45 minutes.

Interview Notes:

Appendix G

Themes/Codes for Data Collection and Frequency

Theme	Subtheme				Frequency
Teacher Support (T)	Curriculum and Materials in Target Language (C) 13, words like curriculum and materials	Special Certifications and Endorsement (Edu) 29, words like certification and endorsements	Professional Development (PD) 15, words like professional development and PLCs	Planning Time (TT) 68, words like plan, planning, and time	125
Parent Support (P)	Parent Understanding of DLI (PU) 106, words like parent, parent support	Help for Parents at Home (PH) 65, words like support, and support at home			171
Student Support (S)	Consistency Across Programs (CC) 236, words like program, model, and program model	Identifying and Meeting Individual Student Needs (SN) 232, words like student, needs, student needs	Foundational Language Skills (FS) 46, words like skills and foundational skills	Determining Student Success in DLI (SS) 49, words like student, student success	696
				Strong Sense of Community Among Students (Comm) 133, words like community, cultural, culture, heritage	