

# IMPROVEMENT IN LITERACY SKILLS

Bilingual Education: Improvement in Literacy Skills of Non-U.S. Born Students by Providing  
ESOL Support and Parent Workshops

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate literacy outcomes of non-U.S. born students to better support ELL parents, specifically, kindergarten and first-grade students in a public school in the state of Maryland. The measurement tool was a revision of scores from the time of enrollment and a year after attendance in schools. In this descriptive study, a pre/posttest design was utilized in kindergarten and first-grade students in one of the largest school systems in the country. The participants in this study were 12 bilingual students receiving ESOL services in a public school system. The group consisted of six male and six female students enrolled in kindergarten and first grade. These students, originally from Central America and Mexico, arrived in the United States during the 2019-2020 school year. In addition to these students, their parents were also participants in this study. Findings showed each family is from either Central America or Mexico and moved to the United States after their children were born. The researcher concluded that these monolingual speaking Spanish children, later enrolled in a public school, demonstrated improvement in their reading, speaking, writing, and comprehension skills in English. Further research must be conducted with a larger group of participants; also, it will be imperative to include educators and administrators to determine how their understanding of ELL families' cultures and values could have an influence on the students' learning.

*Keywords: monolingual, bilingualism, literacy, bilingual literacy, family involvement, early identification*

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Based on the US Census and reports, the Hispanic population and the population of other races has grown significantly in recent years in the state of Maryland. A considerable number of these people, referred to as English Language Learners (ELLs), speak a language other than English. Many ELLs come from countries with a low percentage of literacy and a lack of primary education. Upon arrival to the United States, they face culture shock, confronted with a country of culture and customs completely different from their own. In addition, ELLs struggle reading school materials and other educational resources provided to them not only in English but even in their own language. Parents of ELL students attending public schools in Maryland are not familiar with school policies, procedures, literacy, and other important concepts required to understand their child's education.

Federal Title III Funds are utilized for ELL parent workshops which focus on relevant school district concepts, resources, and other relevant information. The most important policy ELL parents tend to overlook is that sending their children to school is the law of the land. Another important point to take into consideration is that these parents force their children to speak English only, even at home, which then becomes a major issue in their family values.

In public schools in the state of Maryland, ELL students require academic language instruction (ESOL services). This academic language is higher level and more abstract than everyday language is (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2010b; Cummins, 1979; Cummins, 1980; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2016; Wright, 2012). ELL students need to use both oral and written forms of academic language to understand complex academic concepts and communicate their understanding to others (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2010b; Cummins, 1980; Ernst-Slavit &

Wenger, 2016). ELL students acquire academic concepts as they develop new vocabulary knowledge through oral discussions at any grade and in print, especially in upper grades (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2010b; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2016; Lee et al., 2013; Wright, 2012).

Parents of ELL students are desperate to understand what to do to successfully support their children with school assignments and to be better partners beyond the household walls. These parents would benefit from activities offered to them through Title III parent workshops and other Title III outreach activities offered by schools or ELD programs. Once this group of parents can understand the significance of bilingualism in the home and in school, they may learn to appreciate the positive outcomes of improving the literacy in their bilingual children. The more time and effort are offered throughout the year by schools to parents of ELL students, the greater degree of family engagement and student success will be reflected in the years to come.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study is to investigate biliteracy outcomes of elementary-level students to better support ELL parents, specifically, kindergarten and first-grade students.

### **Hypothesis**

ELL students' literacy scores will improve following ESOL support and parents' participation in school activities. An increase of English language skills will grow over time with the active participation of parents through school-sponsored activities throughout the school year and during the summer.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following variables are examined in this study. A variable in this study is the group of students selected to participate in this survey, which were a mix of 12 non-U.S.-born Hispanic male and female students in kindergarten and first grade, enrolled within 12 months in the school system. In addition to this variable, the following concepts are relevant to this study.

**ELL**, English Language Learner, is the term used to describe students and parents whose primary spoken language at home is not English. Their English proficiency varies from limited to fluent, which is discussed in the literacy review.

**ELD Programs** are instructional programs for students and parents who are developing proficiency in English. ELLs refer to the students who are enrolled in ELD classes or educational programs offered by school systems and other educational agencies.

**ESOL**, English for Speakers of Other Languages, is a widely used term for an English language development program. Literature and school districts across the nation also use the term ELL or EL to identify ELD programs for ESOL students. For the purpose of this study, the term ESOL will be used to refer to ELL students and identification of ELD programs.

**Title III**, Title III of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 provides federal financial support to state and local educational jurisdictions to supplement English language development (ELD) programs within their schools. These ELD programs ensure that all ELL, including immigrant children, youth, and their parents, attain English proficiency and develop high levels of academic language achievement in high levels in all academic subjects so that



each English Language Learner (ELL) can meet the same challenging academic standards that all children in public schools are expected to meet.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The purpose of this review is to examine the outcomes of literacy in bilingual elementary grade level students, specifically kindergarten and first-grade students. This literature review is comprised of four sections that will first define monolingualism, bilingualism, and their differences in section one. The second section explores the misconceptions and benefits of bilingualism, which will lead into a third section that reviews of early identification and barriers. The final section will describe and compare the different strategies to support families and elementary level students in promoting literacy in bilingual students.

#### **Introduction and Definitions of Monolingualism and Bilingualism**

Many writers on monolingualism and bilingualism make the point that there are estimated to be far more bilingual and multilingual speakers in the world than there are monolinguals (Reetzke et al., 2016). For the purpose of this research, monolingual is defined as the ability to speak only one language and to write or understand only one language.

When referring to bilingualism, it is important to note that it is the psychological state of an individual who has access to more than once linguistic code as means of social communication; the degree of access will vary along the number of dimensions which are psychological, cognitive, psycholinguistic, social psychological, sociolinguistic, sociocultural and linguistic (Maxwell, 2016).

One of the largest bilingual groups in the United States is the Hispanic population. This group has grown significantly compared with the national total from the 1970 Census to the conclusions of the 2016 Census. It now represents the nation's largest, and youngest, minority

group. Nearly one third of the Latino population is under 18 years old, and almost half of U.S. born Hispanics are younger than 18. Currently, one quarter of children in the United States are Hispanic, and demographers predict that by 2050, one third of all U.S. children will be Latino. Two thirds of Hispanic children also live in or near poverty; their well-being has important implications for the future of the country. In addition, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 20% of Americans can converse in two or more languages, compared with 56% of Europeans. Experts estimate at least half of the human race is bilingual (Maxwell, 2016).

The bilingual population is growing in many areas across the United States, specifically, the Latino or Hispanic population. Students from this population entering kindergarten may be fluent only in English, or proficient Spanish-English bilinguals, or fluent only in Spanish; however, the heritage language of their ancestors is Spanish, or Spanish and English. It is known that these group of students acquire grade-level school curriculum through English (Gandara, 2017).

Most Latinos live in what are known now as seven traditional settlement states: Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas. However, recently there has been a dramatic shift in where Latinos reside (Maxwell, 2016). New pockets of immigration have resulted in concentrations of Latino students in places that have not had a substantial number of Latino immigrants before. The Latino population is growing faster in the South than anywhere else in the country (Gandara, 2017). Between 1990 and 2014, the South's Latino school-age population grew by a factor of 10. Meanwhile, the Latino school-age population grew only about a third in the traditional settlement states. Today, Latino children fill classrooms in areas where a generation ago there was no Latino presence. This creates an imperative for

schools to understand and recognize their needs to ensure success in schools, including developing literacy skills.

### **Misconceptions About Bilingualism**

Nemeth (2014) noted there are several common misconception of bilingualism, including that the two languages a bilingual person speaks are separate and distinct systems, as if a bilingual student was two monolinguals in one; languages can be simply added or subtracted from the minds of bilingual speakers; restricting the use of the home language or only using it temporarily will transition students as quickly as possible to the dominant school language; and students' native languages in school, if used at all, should be strictly separated by time, day, or subject. Decades of research have shown that these beliefs are misconstrued. There are, in fact, cognitive, social, and economic benefits to being bilingual and biliterate (Domenech, 2016). Biliteracy is a greater and more complex form of literacy than mono-literacy.

Another misconception is that the early-developing preferences for native-language speakers as friends may serve as a foundation for later-developing preferences and conflicts among social groups (Maxwell, 2016). Although the use of more than one language in a culture has often been seen as socially divisive, early bilingualism in the form of native or near native proficiency in two languages has been shown to mitigates such conflicts by contributing to an awareness of what it means to communicate effectively with speakers of different languages.

With regard to early childhood, Lu (2020) states that between the ages of zero to three, the brains of young children are uniquely suited to learn a second language as the brain is in its most flexible stage. In fact, bilingually exposed infants excelled in detecting a switch in language as early as six months old. They can learn a second language as easy as they learned to walk and learn their primary language. Bilingual children may have a superior ability to focus on one thing

and change their response, indicating cognitive flexibility. Both traits require self-control, a very desirable trait in the early childhood classroom as well as life. Brisk (2012) says when a bilingual toddler attempts to communicate, the languages in the brain compete to be activated and chosen. Lu (2020) states the child must select one and suppress the other, which requires attention and the ability for the brain to be flexible, which is possible at this early age. The interference forces the brain to resolve internal conflict, giving the mind a workout that strengthens its cognitive muscles. Thus, bolstering the vocabulary being developed within the child's brain, and readily available for retrieval for communication.

Bilingual individuals consistently outperform their monolingual counterparts on tasks involving executive control. Bialystok's reviews some of the evidence for this conclusion and relates the findings to the effect of bilingualism on cognitive organization and to conceptual issues in the structure of executive control. Evidence for the protective effect of bilingualism against Alzheimer's disease is presented with some speculation about the reason for that protection (Bialystok, 2011).

Siegal (2010) states that consistent with evidence that exposure to more than one language facilitates children's metalinguistic awareness, that bilingualism confers an advantage on children's conversational understanding through accentuating their ability to appreciate effective communicative responses. Regardless of what language is a person's second, the bilingual advantage is remarkable. This statement is a reflection of what ESOL teachers and administrators realize within a year of providing language support and extracurricular services to their students.

Because immigrants cannot rely on the normal routines of their homelands and must be adaptable to new circumstances and expectations, children learn to be resilient, to persist in the

face of adversity, and to keep trying until they get it right. This persistence leads to deeper learning. Research has also shown that first- and second-generation immigrant students tend to outperform subsequent generations academically, in spite of language differences and cultural barriers. As Gandara (2017) acknowledges, a phenomenon has been labeled immigrant optimism, in which these students, taking a cue from their immigrant parents, come to be true believers in the American dream and strive to realize it, exhibiting extraordinary motivation.

Hopewell and Escamilla (2014) provide a brief review of their research in the area of biliteracy in immersion contexts which culminate by setting a research agenda for the coming decade. Three critical areas for research are identified: creating a comprehensive theoretical framework for biliteracy development, identifying, and clarifying trajectories to biliteracy, and developing better pedagogical practices to accelerate biliterate competencies and improve qualities of instruction. It is imperative that school systems across the United States continue to improve language support to ESOL students and innovate professional developments available to teachers and school staff.

### **Early Identification and Barriers to Bilingual Literacy**

DeJesús (2017) states monolingual families whose children are exposed to other languages seem to believe there is something wrong with their child when they are not able to understand what the child says. During conversations with pediatricians and other health professionals, parents tend to express frustration and disappointment with their child's language development. Families do not realize at first that their child is being exposed to more than one language at the home. Some of the exposures in the child's natural environment could be that they are listening to their older school-age siblings converse and play, also what is being played on the radio and what is shown on television. In many cases, after meeting with their health

providers, parents realize for the first time their child might be bilingual. To ensure children are not under-developing in the areas of communication, pediatricians and health providers refer families to local agencies for formal assessment.

Typically, in the educational setting, there are at least two ways to refer families for an assessment and identification of their young child's language skills (Howard et al., 2004). Most school systems within the United States offer early childhood education services through their Infants and Toddlers and Child Find Programs. Families seeking support from these two agencies rely on the veracity of the early identification of speech and language disabilities or delays. In addition, families and childcare providers depend on the direct and indirect instructional provisions offered by these educational programs. DeJesús (2017) also shares while some agencies are ready to provide bilingual evaluation and instructional support, others are not. Agencies with on-site bilingual staff are better prepared to identify and provide support to bilingual children and their families and strengthen the child's language development.

Unfortunately, as in other fields, there are barriers to early identification. On one hand, are the family's ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It is relevant to recognize that some parents believe that if their children are exposed to more than one language, it will have an adverse impact in development and education (Domenech, 2016). Therefore, they do not support or embrace bilingualism at home. Bilingual education has become de-valued over the years, despite a growing population of non-English speaking immigrant children. However, opposition to bilingual education is unreasonable when so many of these children lack basic literacy in their native tongue.

Another barrier is financial. Local and state governments encounter difficulty in advocating for and financing bilingual positions, as well as investing in instructional materials to

support bilingual education. Even in the most Latino-populated states, there is a struggle to find quality public bilingual education programs. Domenech (2016) finds that staffing is a continual challenge and that's despite the fact that some schools boast a high starting salary in the country and the possibility of six figures after seven years. It is important for local, state, and federal partnerships with international organizations to continue to create a pipeline for bilingual teachers, but many of these teachers depend on visas that expire after three years or so.

In addition, many school leaders have little experience working with young, multilingual children. Federal and state departments are increasing their focus on early childhood education and school administrators may assume that working with young, multilingual children is the same as working with older multilingual students which is not necessarily the case. Nemeth (2014) believes that there are developmental, social, emotional, and cognitive differences between very young learners and older children. It is imperative for school leaders to learn what is available for them and good sources of information are the many resources, educational policies, program guidelines of educational organizations such as The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and Head Start, just to mention a few.

### **Effective Strategies to Support Bilingual Families and Students**

#### **Policy and Resources**

Currently, several educational agencies and nonprofit organizations support efforts to promote bilingualism (DeJesús, 2017). They provide families with effective strategies to enhance the mother tongue at home. Some local agencies such as the public library system, provide families with resources and strategies at no cost to them. The most popular resources are bilingual books and bilingual instructional playgroups, where social and communication skills are the primary focus. Librarians share vast collections of instructional materials of instruction



for families to take home and work on with their children. Other agencies such as Colorín Colorado, a non-profit organization with a premier national website serving educators and families of English language learners (ELLs) in Grades PreK-12 also have helpful resources. Colorín Colorado has been providing free research-based information, activities, and advice to parents, schools, and communities around the country for more than a decade. This agency is known to receive major funding from the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association.

### **Curricula**

Many school districts across the United States have adopted a dual language education system in their schools. Their vision of linguistically diverse students to become bi-literate, globally competent participants in society, post-secondary institutions, and the workforce has resonated in the communities they serve (Cobb et al., 2009). Some states with higher population of Hispanics and other ethnic backgrounds have added adjusted their English Language Acquisition program to provide asset-based (the strengths that diverse students bring to the classroom) linguistic, academic, and socio-emotional support to English learners and their families to ensure equitable, appropriate, and inclusive educational practices for linguistically diverse students.

Hopewell and Escamilla (2014) reflect on biliteracy, or the development of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking competencies in more than one language, is the outcome of a complex and dynamic process. It is made that much more complex because language acquisition takes place in a wide range of social contexts in which variation is the norm, and languages and literacies are in a state of constant evolution. School-based research in biliteracy has focused primarily on reading, oral language, and metalinguistic awareness. There

is a lack of research regarding biliterate writing; nonetheless, researchers have evidence that emerging bilingual students experience a period of inter-literacy in which they use language strategically to compose, students' biliterate writing is best examined side-by-side (Hopewell & Escamilla, 2014). Also, researchers have recognized that teachers need greater guidance on how to read and interpret biliterate writing. When researchers examine students' writing side-by-side it enables us to observe inter-literacy strategies and other types of cross-language transfers.

### **Family Involvement**

It has been discovered that in order for educators to successfully support bilingualism in classrooms and in other educational settings, it is imperative to have the parents full support for any strategy to work. One first step would be parent engagement. Braiseth et al. (2015) states that parent engagement begins ideas are elicited from parents by school staff in the context of developing trusting relationships. They emerge from parent/community needs and priorities. More parent energy drives the efforts. It is clear that this approach is more sustainable than asking staff to plan numerous parent activities, take on extra responsibilities, and dig even deeper into their energy reserves. The more parents have the opportunity to shape activities and programs that help their families, the more invested they will be in seeing those efforts succeed in their child's education.

One of the most important considerations for student success is to provide parent education (Braiseth et al., 2015). These can be through trainings, workshops, conferences, and other activities where immigrant parents learn new ideas, strategies, and concepts to assist with their children's education at home. School should be flexible in providing these parent activities after school hours, evenings, and weekends if necessary. Schools have access to Title I and Title

III funds, funds that are designated to support low-income and immigrant families in and outside of the school setting.

Brisk (2012) states biliteracy means not only being able to listen and speak in two or more languages, but also the ability to read and write proficiently in two or more languages. Children growing with biliteracy skills have more success in their education and in their professional life. Unfortunately, it is impeded mostly by a general sense that it's more important for immigrant or international families to learn English than to maintain their first language, and that these are somehow in conflict with one another. This is helped by local agencies such public school systems supporting biliteracy inside and beyond the classroom walls, working with the students but also with parents who are not fluent in English. Many of these supports are parent workshops, trainings, and hands-on activities which enhance their mother tongue as well as their biliteracy skills.

Future research should be on immigrant parent involvement, education, and support. Also, for school systems to be more flexible with these parents by offering these direct supports at their own pace and at their own time.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the outcomes of literacy in bilingual elementary level students show improvement by supporting English Language Learner (ELL) parents through workshops, and by the ESOL support these students receive in schools.

#### **Design**

In this descriptive study, a pre/posttest design was utilized in kindergarten and first-grade students in one of the largest school systems in state of Maryland. These international students were initially assessed upon enrollment and within a year of receiving ESOL services in schools.

#### **Participants**

The participants in this study were 12 bilingual students receiving ESOL services in a school system in the state of Maryland. The group consisted of six male and six female students enrolled in kindergarten and first grade. These students, originally from Central America and Mexico, arrived in the United States during the 2019-2020 school year. In addition to these ESOL students, their parents were also participants in this study. ELL parents were identified as Spanish-speaking adults with little or no knowledge of English language skills prior attending parent workshops.

#### **Instrument**

This study used scores and additional data from the WIDA Screener, an English language proficiency assessment given to new students in grades K–12 to help educators and screeners identify whether they are English language learners (ELLs). It is a flexible, on-demand

assessment that can be administered at any time during the school year. WIDA Screener is available in two formats, online and paper.

School staff used the WIDA Screener to assess these students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Recorded responses are scored centrally by trained screeners, then added to the WIDA calculator, which provides with an overall score, literacy score, and language score. These overall scores determined eligibility and appropriate ESOL level of support at their assigned school. These levels are known as Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, Level 4, and Level 5. where Level 1 is the entry level.

### **Procedure**

The researcher had two major roles: the identification of the appropriate study participants, and the analysis of the collected data. The identification process started with the proper communication with school staff. The recruiter sent an email requesting the names of 12 kindergarten and first-grade students enrolled during school year 2019-2020, specifically from Central America and Mexico. These names were selected randomly.

Once the students were identified, the researcher accessed WIDA Screener scores from time of enrollment in the school system. Subsequently, the researcher accessed current scores and additional information through the English Language Acquisition Application (ELA App). The ELA App is the ESOL student database us for screeners and ESOL teachers to use. In addition, the researcher accessed parent information including background, and active participation in school Title III activities and workshops. Once the parents were identified, a paper survey was shared to confirm this data. The researcher shared the purpose for the survey and established each participant's understanding of the study. Five questions were included in

this survey. The researcher then recorded WIDA Screening scores, iReady, Dibels results, student and parents' backgrounds, and the type of parent workshops each of these families participated during school year 2019-2020 and part of 2021.

These parents had two primary goals in mind: first, to learn basic English skills, and second, to learn specific information related to what their children were learning at school. Their indication was the desire to successfully support their children with school assignments.

### **Demographics**

The data collected for this section is from the "Background Information," which confirms the demographic information of students and their families. For the first data, question 1, participants had to select yes or no to confirm they were the parents of an ELL Student in the school system. For the second question, parents had to select yes or no to confirm their student was not born in the United States, and with an option to add the name of the country of birth. For the second segment of the survey, "Family Engagement," participants had to answer with a yes or no to two questions, one question about their active participation in the one of the following activities designed exclusively for ELL parents: Reading and Writing Workshops, Homework Help Workshops, English Classes, and School Programs Workshops. The last question is to confirm with a yes or no response their active participation in Parent-Teacher Conferences. Responses to these questions confirmed the following:

#### **Background Information:**

1. 12 YES responses.
2. 12 YES responses. Countries: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico.

Family Engagement:

1. 12 YES responses. English classes, Reading and Writing Workshops, Homework Help Workshops, Behavioral and Mental Health Workshops, STEM Programs.
2. 12 YES responses.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This study investigated how the outcomes of literacy in bilingual elementary grade-level students, improved by supporting English Language Learner (ELL) students in schools and their parents through workshops during the school year.

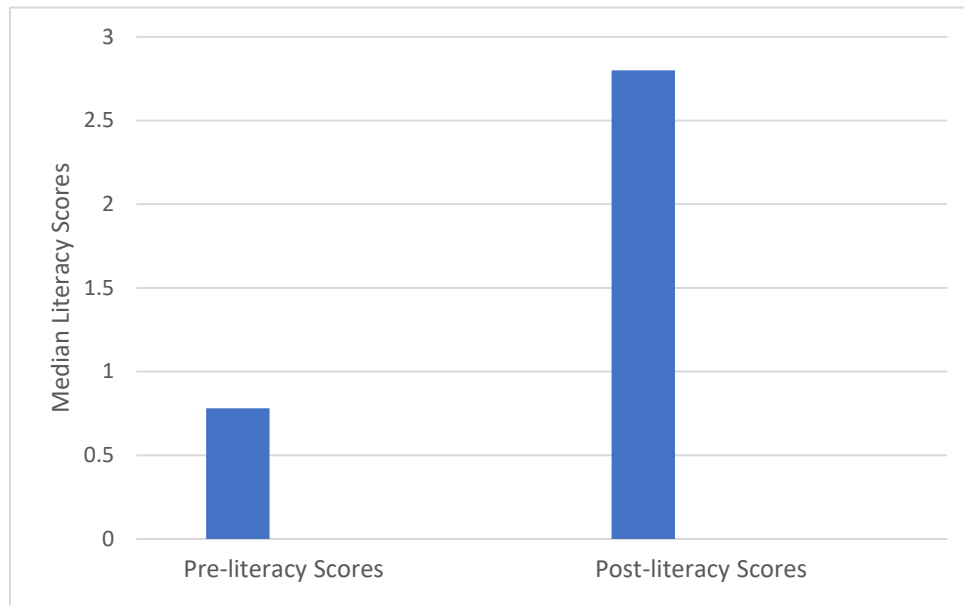
#### Findings

Twelve ELL students and their parents were identified for this study. WIDA and other scores for each student are shown in this study. In addition, parents responded to a short survey addressing two sections: Demographics and Parent Engagement. The findings in the Demographics section show that each family is from either Central America or Mexico and moved to the United States after their children were born. With regard to the Parent Engagement section, these group of parents confirmed active participation in English courses, parent workshops, and attendance at parent-teacher conferences.

A dependent groups *t* test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in pretest scores on literacy ( $M = 0.78$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ,  $n = 12$ ), as compared to posttest scores on literacy ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ,  $n = 12$ ) following ESOL support to students and parent workshops with strong effect size,  $t(11) = -5.97$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = 1.83$ . On average there was two-point difference.

As shown below in table 1, WIDA Screening (pre-literacy) and iReady (post-literacy) scores reflects the trend in which each bilingual student improved their literacy skills a year after their first assessment.



**Figure 1***Bilingual Students' Literacy Scores*

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to examine improvement of literacy skills in bilingual students born outside of the United States enrolled in prekindergarten and first grade in public schools in Maryland, receiving ESOL support, and whose parents participated actively in school activities by learning techniques and strategies to support their children's education at home. Specifically, this study explored literacy scores in the areas of speaking, listening, and language comprehension. These individual scores were from initial assessments taken during enrollment in school as well as a grade later. These students were born in Central America and in Mexico, with little or no English language skills. There was a mix of male and female students enrolled in prekindergarten and in first grade during school year 2019-2020.

Parents of these ELL students were participants in this study. Parents were selected based on the student's birthplace, date of enrollment, and active participation in school activities, either through Title III Parent Workshops or parent-teacher conferences. Of these parents, 100% responded to the invitation to participate and were provided with relevant information to conduct the completion of this study. From all participants, three groups of parents were classified as both parents (father and mother), the mother, and the father.

Overall, the majority of students significantly improved their literacy skills when assessed in oral language, listening, and language comprehension, while a few others gained some literacy skills in these areas.

### **Implications**

Each parent believed that actively participating in their child's education through school activities and learning techniques and strategies would be beneficial in a short term. The data

utilized for this study determined that these students were part of a disadvantaged community, having a greater negative impact on the child's language development. These students attended a Title I school and were identified as part of a low-income group.

This study revealed an improvement in each student's literacy skills by comparing the scores from initial enrollment with the scores from a grade later. ESOL support in specific content areas was not provided. There is no information about literacy gains in areas such as Physical Education, Fine Arts, and Technology. This finding implies that researcher's lack of access to reports of these additional educational areas may contribute to not having a full picture of each student's literacy progress in school. Thus, future studies should investigate scores and progress level in additional content areas regarding supporting ELL students' literacy skills as this study shows that there is a positive correlation between additional supports in schools and support from parents at home.

### **Threats to Validity**

Most research studies suffer from threats to both internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to the design used in the study, and external validity refers to the ability to generalize from the study.

One threat to internal validity is apparent in the approach and scoring of the English language in each student, where most students had no knowledge of the targeted language at the time of enrollment in schools.

One example of a threat to external validity is the sample size. This study was conducted with a very small group. Although the school system used to complete this study serves a large diverse community, the numbers are too small in each of the grade levels of this study to provide a more concise data collection to reflect the entire school system. Another external threat is the

possibility of a response bias due to the survey being distributed to only one small population group via selection bias.

### **Connections to Previous Research**

There are connections between this study and previous research. Hopewell and Escamilla (2014) provide a brief review of their research in the area of biliteracy in immersion contexts which culminate by setting a research agenda for the coming decade. Three critical areas for research are identified: creating a comprehensive theoretical framework for biliteracy development, identifying, and clarifying trajectories to biliteracy, and developing better pedagogical practices to accelerate biliterate competencies and improve qualities of instruction. For example, the development and the support in the areas of reading, speaking, listening, and thinking competencies in more than one language of these students is reflected in their latest assessments. It is made that much more complex because language acquisition takes place in a wide range of social contexts in which the variation is the norm, and language and literacies are in the state of constant evolution in the student's life.

Research has also shown that first- and second-generation immigrant students tend to outperform subsequent generations academically, despite language differences and cultural barriers. Gandara (2017) explicitly shares that this phenomenon has been labeled immigrant optimism, whereby these students, taking a cue from their immigrant parents, come to be true believers in the American dream and strive to realize it, exhibiting extraordinary motivation. In this study, it was demonstrated that this first generation of immigrant students are already advancing toward a better generation, educationally speaking.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study examined the improvement of literacy skills in bilingual students who were not born in in the United States, for whom English was not their mother tongue or the household language, and in whose early childhood years only the Spanish language was spoken. Information from other research in relation to the language support of students in schools and support to parents through parent workshops and additional programs designed to them corroborated beliefs and perspectives indicated on this study. Parents of bilingual students who responded to the survey displayed an interest in learning more about this study as well as pride and satisfaction in their students' progress. Similarities with the findings of the survey to other researchers' studies were found in the connection to the environmental factors that most embraces students' literacy beyond the classroom walls. The perspectives of the parents in this study regarding the environmental factors that most affect students mirrored findings in previous research. However, While there is an agreement on the relationship between providing appropriate ESOL support to students and providing support to parents in schools, there is still much more to do to bring this relationship more equitable to all ELL families across all school systems. Each of these parents was extremely grateful for the parent workshops, English classes, and the language support provided by school during meetings and parent-teacher conferences. This group of parents believes that the more they are supported, the more independent they will become. Therefore, further research must be conducted with a larger group of participants; also it will be imperative to include educators and administrators to determine how their understanding of ELL families' cultures and values can affect their bilingual students' performance in schools, inside and outside the classroom walls.

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