

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF THE BILINGUAL TEACHER SHORTAGE  
IN ONE TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICT

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**Dissertation Abstract:** Texas, like many states, has seen a rapid rise in the number of students in its schools who are not fluent in English, the majority of whom have Spanish as the home language (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us>, 2011). With the convergent research pointing toward the long-term benefits of providing native language instruction to such students as they acquire English (Collier & Thomas, 2009), demand for teachers who are certified in Spanish bilingual education is becoming acute in many areas of the United States, and particularly in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2010). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the issues contributing to the persistent teacher shortage in the area of bilingual education and to investigate how stakeholders within one Texas school district perceive, experience, and respond to the bilingual teacher shortage. The overarching research question explored was:

How do stakeholders in one Texas school district perceive, experience, and respond to the Spanish bilingual teacher shortage?

The research design of this study was qualitative with an exploratory, single case study approach. The case study school district was a mid-sized suburban district in central Texas that utilizes a dual language enrichment approach to educating its Spanish bilingual learners and houses its own alternative certification program (ACP) expressly designed to certify bilingual teachers for district hire. The sample, selected to provide a variety of perspectives on the problem, included members of the human resources department in the case study district, bilingual campus principals, and aspiring bilingual teachers. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews conducted individually and with a focus group, as well as through a web-based interview and

was triangulated with contextual data. Findings from the study affirm that the bilingual teacher shortage is a problem that significantly impacts school districts, at times to the detriment of the bilingual students they serve. Findings further underscore the fact that misalignment between educational policy, educator preparation program curriculum, and school district bilingual programming serve to exacerbate the bilingual teacher shortage problem by increasing district recruiting and retention challenges. The findings of this research provide makers of educational policy, administrators of educator preparation programs, and leaders in school districts with a deepened awareness of the need to adopt a collaborative and differentiated approach to bilingual teacher certification that empowers a greater number of quality bilingual candidates to gain certification, enter the field, and persist in the profession.

### **Implications for Practice**

The number of English Language Learners attending public schools whose home language is Spanish is increasing in Texas and throughout the country. In addition, research emphasizes the importance of providing native language instruction while students acquire English as a means for promoting high levels of academic achievement. The need for bilingual teachers continues to grow while the supply of appropriately skilled and certified bilingual teachers remains constant. The result is a bilingual teacher shortage which negatively impacts students and student achievement. To address the bilingual teacher shortage, leaders in school districts and educator preparation programs must come together with policy makers to devise systems and processes that will ensure that sufficient numbers of highly skilled bilingual teachers become available to serve this at risk and expanding segment of the student population.

Recommendations to implement for practice include the following:

## **Educational Policy Makers**

1. Develop systems that track, report, and acknowledge shifts in student demographics, particularly with regard to ELLs whose home language is Spanish, and provide funding at the national, state, and local levels to implement research-validated programs that meet the unique academic needs of this student population.
2. Collaborate with leaders of educator preparation programs and school districts to identify, acknowledge, and examine the unique factors contributing to the bilingual teacher shortage and develop systems at the national, state, and local levels to encourage and facilitate expansion of the Spanish bilingual teacher pool, in terms of both number and quality.
3. Identify, develop, and refine strategies at the national, state, and local levels to increase the ability on the part of educator preparation programs and school districts to actively recruit, certify, develop, and retain Spanish bilingual teachers.
4. Examine educational policy defining teacher certification requirements and standards for bilingual educators, including program admissions standards, to identify, adjust for, or remove potential barriers for aspiring bilingual teacher candidates, including first-time-college students and international students.
5. Develop systems for collaboration between school district personnel, educator preparation program personnel, and state departments of education to align efforts to ensure that bilingual teachers are being produced in sufficient quantity and with the skill set required to serve in a variety of school district and bilingual program settings.

### **Educator Preparation Program Administrators**

1. Seek out opportunities to collaborate with leaders of educator preparation programs as well as policy makers in order to align efforts aimed at eliminating the bilingual teacher shortage.
2. Design program to meet the needs of local applicant pool, including implementation of convenient scheduling and class locations, reduced class sizes following cohort model, and attention to affordability, convenience, and ongoing support extending from the application process through final stages of certification testing.
3. Develop systems of collaboration with school districts in order to identify specific curriculum and preparation requirements to ensure that programs produce bilingual teacher candidates who possess the bilingual teacher skill set, including oral language and literacy skills, required for hire in local school districts.

### **School District Administrators**

1. Seek out opportunities to collaborate with leaders of educator preparation programs as well as policy makers in order to align efforts aimed at eliminating the bilingual teacher shortage.
2. Develop systems to communicate district need to local educator preparation programs with regard to curriculum and preparation requirements to ensure candidates graduate with a specific bilingual teacher skill set.
3. Engage in a variety of recruiting strategies, including: collaboration with local educator preparation entities; participation in job fairs and recruiting trips that target the bilingual teacher pool; participation in programs at the local, state, national, and international levels that promote bilingual teacher pool expansion; provision of

stipends and other bonuses aimed at attracting bilingual teachers; implementation of district-housed bilingual certification programs.

4. Implement a variety of retention strategies, including: collaboration with local educator preparation entities to ensure that bilingual educator program curriculum matches district program requirements; provision of bilingual teacher screening and interview protocols designed to determine candidate- district “fit;” provision of professional development and ongoing support for bilingual campus principals and staff; provision of adequate funding for equitable instructional resources in Spanish and English.
5. Provide a variety of supports to encourage bilingual paraprofessionals to consider pursuing bilingual teacher certification.

### **Bilingual Campus Principals**

1. Develop effective interview protocols and screening questions to identify fit between bilingual teacher candidates and campus needs and to increase likelihood of bilingual teacher retention.
2. Acquire a deep understanding and knowledge of bilingual education theory, program models, and best practices and use this knowledge to articulate a clear campus vision.
3. Involve all faculty and staff in professional development activities that emphasize theories of bilingualism and multiculturalism and build capacity with regard to best practices in differentiation for culturally and linguistically diverse learners.
4. Provide equitable instructional resources in Spanish and English.