ABSTRACT

LEWIS, BETHANY PATRICIA. Advancing Elementary Multilingual Learners:
An Investigation of Writing Research, Teacher Experiences, and Genre-Based Compositions
(Under the direction of Dr. Angela M. Wiseman & Dr. Jackie E. Relyea).

A wealth of research has emphasized that advanced writing skills are crucial for students' future academic and career success. At the same time, findings from the National Literacy Panel (2006) have long highlighted that elementary students are not achieving at writing levels considered proficient. More problematic, the growing population of multilingual learners (MLs) struggle to perform at writing levels compared to their monolingual peers. These discrepancies indicate that MLs require distinctive instruction to fully develop their entire linguistic repertoire, including for the domain of writing. Through a three-article approach, this dissertation investigates elementary MLs and their development of the crucial writing skills needed for lifelong literacy success. The first article sought to understand the empirical landscape of writing instruction for MLs using systematic literature review methods. This study synthesizes the existing research and provides additional insight into how literacy scholars are studying elementary multilingual writing. The findings illuminate gaps in the research corpus, which guided the completion of the other two studies included in this dissertation. The second article used phenomenological methods to understand novice teachers' experiences as they navigated a scripted literacy curriculum to support their MLs' literacy development. The results showed that the teachers had insufficient guidance to navigate the curriculum effectively and support their multilingual student's literacy development with the provided materials. Furthermore, novice teachers were critical consumers of curriculums, and they identified additional curriculum factors and contextual barriers that led to inconsistent implementation. Finally, the third article investigated first- and second-grade MLs' argumentative writing samples in the content areas of social studies and science. This

research explored the relationship between oral language proficiency, early reading abilities, and domain-specific vocabulary skills with argumentative writing quality for elementary MLs. Results provide tentative support for the conclusion that specific foundational literacy skills may be related to the advancement of ML's writing abilities. Practical applications of this research involved emphasizing early reading abilities, oral language skills, and domain-specific vocabulary in classroom instruction, which were associated with increased ML's writing outcomes in both content areas and literacy spaces. Together, these three articles expand literacy and writing research, providing clear implications for MLs, teachers, and researchers.

Advancing Elementary Multilingual Learners: An Investigation of Writing Research, Teacher Experiences, and Genre-Based Compositions

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Teacher Education and Learning Sciences

Raleigh, North Carolina
2025

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Matt, and my son, Jackson, who are always my biggest supporters. I am grateful for your endless love.

BIOGRAPHY

Bethany P. Lewis grew up on a small family farm outside Athens, Georgia. She was raised by two veteran special education teachers who fostered her early love for children, schools, and education. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education and a teaching certificate from the University of Georgia. During her first year of teaching, she continued her education at the University of Georgia, earning a Master of Education in Early Childhood Education. Her teaching experiences in first through third grade in Georgia public schools further increased her passion for students and literacy, which led her to pursue a doctorate. Her research interests include elementary writers, diverse literature, multilingual learners, and preparing teachers to be effective literacy educators for all students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This degree has only been achievable through the support of many others. First, I thank my family because no part of this journey would have been possible without them. To my husband, Matt, thank you for your unwavering support. You have been my teammate, problem solver, and voice of reason when I most needed support and encouragement. Thank you to my son Jackson, who joined our family in the third year of this journey. You have brought so much happiness to our family with your smiles and giggles. Seeing you learn and explore the world has been one of my greatest joys. Through this accomplishment, I hope you recognize that you can attain your dreams, whatever they may be. Upon completing this dissertation, I look forward to spending more time with both of you.

I would not have accomplished what I have without several of my peers in the doctoral program. Thank you to Briana, Cassie, Rachel, Sarah, and the little Raleigh family we have assembled. I appreciate your willingness to listen at crucial moments, provide a wealth of advice and support, and share constant reminders of "you got this." Each of you made graduate school extensively more enjoyable. Thank you for distracting me when I needed a break and reminding me what matters most. I would also like to thank my cohort mates, Corrie and Janell, for their collaborative nature and the opportunities they have given me to expand my notions of literacy. I learned so much from working with you on our projects and teaching and from your inquisitive, relevant, and insightful feedback on my research. I am grateful for both of your friendships during this journey.

I must thank an exceptional set of committee members. Without them, I certainly would have not accomplished this goal. Dr. Wiseman, I am thankful to you for being an outstanding advisor throughout these four years and agreeing to co-chair my committee. You have provided

endless amounts of meaningful advice and feedback, making me a better teacher and qualitative scholar. Thank you for inviting me to assist on significant projects and pushing me forward in my thinking. You have always seen me first as a human, and I feel incredibly grateful that you were my graduate advisor. To my co-chair, Dr. Relyea, I am so grateful you agreed to join my committee and guide me in all things quantitative. You have provided valuable research insights and writing opportunities and always encouraged me to see my writing through a lens of publish-ability. I am so grateful you encouraged me to go the divergent route with a three-article dissertation. Thank you for sharing extensive career advice, asking tough questions, and being open to every research idea I have ever brought you.

I am also grateful to Dr. Grifenhagen, who provided valuable research and writing opportunities. Thank you for being our fearless leader for ELM 430. I have learned so much about instructing and engaging with undergraduates in the classroom and in research. Finally, thank you to Dr. Davis. Not only have I learned from you as an instructor, but I have also absolutely enjoyed collaborating with you on ED 311 and ED 312. Your ideas have pushed me as an instructor, improving my practice and engagement with students. You have asked important questions about my work, and for that, I am grateful.

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CHAPTER 1

"*In all my life, I have never been free. I have never been able to do anything with freedom, except in the field of my writing*."
- Langston Hughes

INTRODUCTION

Over the past century, the United States has experienced a national demographic shift, and the country has become increasingly more culturally and linguistically diverse (U.S. Census, 2020). For the youth population, this diversity includes multilingual learners (MLs) or students learning English simultaneously with another language. Because diversity is increasingly a characteristic of children within U.S. schools, educators must be prepared to knowledgeably serve and educate culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners.

Despite the rapid growth of the multilingual population within schools and classrooms, too often, bilingualism is seen as a deficit or an obstacle to English acquisition, and MLs are defined by what they cannot do rather than being acknowledged for the benefits of their dual language abilities (August & Shanahan, 2006; Cummins, 2021). Instead, seeking ways to reframe multilingual language usage through an asset lens is essential. Educators and researchers must strive to counter dominant deficit perspectives of multilingualism in educational contexts, recognizing multilingualism as a cognitive strength deserving of nurturing and support, especially for learning literacy in classroom spaces.

Rationale

Current Literacy Practices and Their Impact on Multilingual Learners

Political and social constructs have long played an impactful role in defining language and its usage in educational settings for students (Otheguy et al., 2015; Wei & García, 2022). However, these arbitrary language constructs have had significant consequences on the education

MLs have received. Despite the extensive benefits of multilingualism (Fox et al., 2019), students who speak multiple languages have traditionally been viewed through an English-only deficit lens rather than through the asset lens of linguistic diversity (Nieto & Bode, 2017; Padilla et al., 1991). A historical focus on English acquisition has been predominant, and additional language skills have been seen as a secondary goal or even a hindrance to English language learning. Today, it is still extensively standard for multilinguals to experience solely monolingual literacy instruction.

While prior U.S. Supreme Court rulings have dictated (see Castañeda v. Pickard, 1981; Plyer v. Doe, 1982) that multilingual students have legal rights to an appropriate and equitable education, regardless of their documentation status, disparities within assessment data show that ML students are far from receiving equitable educational experiences. Only 47% of fourth graders in the United States are considered proficient in the domain of writing. However, these numbers are even bleaker for MLs. For the linguistically diverse population, only 11% are deemed proficient in writing, meriting cause for considerable concern (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Specifically, these existing literacy achievement scores highlight that current classroom instructional practices are neither *appropriate* nor *equitable* as they have failed to adequately prepare multilingual students for success within the domain of writing.

Proficiency in writing still determines future academic and career success (Graham, 2019; Graham et al., 2018). Writing is interdisciplinary and plays many roles in educational settings as students use composing skills to support both literacy and content-area learning (Graham et al., 2020). Writing skills also become more paramount as students progress through elementary schools and into secondary spaces, and most post-school contexts – careers, workplaces, and higher education- call for a sophisticated level of writing skills. The significance

of writing for literacy development and overall learning indicates that if multilingual students are going to be successful outside of school settings, they will need robust writing abilities.

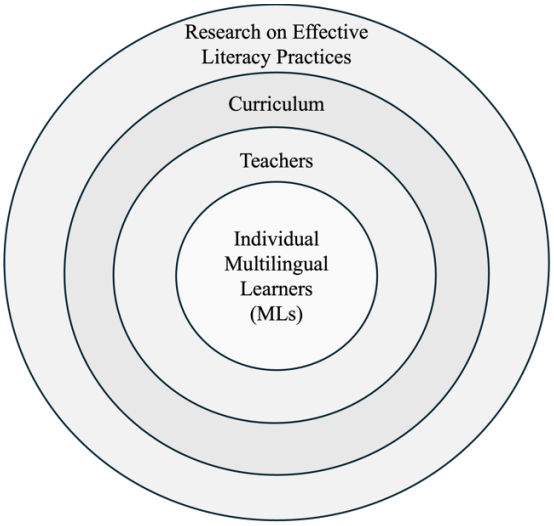
Despite the critical need for advanced writing skills (Graham et al., 2018), the discussed assessment scores foreshadow the probability that MLs will be unable to reach their full literacy potential if current classroom writing instructional practices persist. This gap in achievement for multilingual students bolsters the need for additional research, such as the three studies included in this dissertation. MLs must possess strong writing skills as they transition into their adult lives, and these studies each aim to advance research by exploring new avenues for best supporting the literacy development of young, multilingual writers.

Multilingual Learner's Literacy Development: Connections Across Studies

As for all students, numerous factors impact MLs' success in literacy classrooms. For this dissertation, Figure 1 is a visual depiction of how I understand and consider research on MLs as interconnected across students, teachers, and classroom contexts.

Figure 1

Multilingual Learner's Literacy Development: Connections Across Studies.



At the center of effective literacy education for MLs are the individual learners; therefore, instructional practices must be tailored to the students themselves. Beyond the individual learner, teachers play a crucial role in ML's literacy education through both knowledge transmission and skill development (Hattie, 2009; Kim et al., 2019). Teachers help to develop learning environments, directly interacting with MLs and making pedagogical decisions to tailor instruction to individual students' needs. Furthermore, teachers engage learners, shaping and influencing students' language and literacy skills by implementing effective literacy practices. Also seen in Figure 1, beyond teachers, contextual factors are related to ML's literacy development, specifically literacy curriculums and the skills and materials included within these resources selected at the state and district levels. While teachers are responsible for implementing effective literacy practices, literacy curriculums can influence and guide these instructional practices. Therefore, understanding and identifying which evidence-based skills have the strongest associations with MLs' literacy development is crucial. When successfully identified, these skills can subsequently and intentionally be incorporated into curriculums and their accompanying instructional materials.

As such, this three-article dissertation investigated gaps in research at the intersection of MLs and their literacy development. The primary goal of these studies was to examine current literacy instructional practices used in research and by classroom teachers while also identifying additional literacy skills related to improved writing outcomes for MLs. For effective literacy instruction, it is important to identify both evidence-based pedagogies and how teachers implement these practices within classroom spaces.

Specifically, this dissertation begins with a systematic review to investigate evidence-based practices that have already been indicated as crucial for supporting MLs' writing

development. Then, the second article explores teachers' experiences with a literacy curriculum as they sought to support MLs' literacy development. Finally, the third article investigates the predictive relationships between specific language and literacy skills and writing outcomes for young MLs. These skills are foundational literacy elements that must be considered for future curriculum development and incorporated into teacher's instructional practices. Teachers, curriculums, and the continual identification of evidence-based practices are inextricable as avenues of research if MLs are to reach their full potential in the domain of literacy. While each of the studies included in this dissertation uses a unique approach and methodology, as a body of work, this scholarship provides essential knowledge about MLs and the writing instruction they are presently receiving and will continue to need within elementary literacy settings.

ML-ELs Student Population

Across this dissertation, the terms multilingual learner (ML), English Learner (EL), and multilingual learner identified as English Learner (ML-EL) are used interchangeably but intentionally. These terms each reference the same growing population of learners who are learning English simultaneously with another language; however, unique terms are still used at the state level, federal level, and across multilingual research. As such, the term selected in each of the following articles represents the individual data, period, and context in which it was collected (Kanno et al., 2024).

Identification of ML-ELs

Most commonly, public school students are identified as ELs within North Carolina first through the usage of a home language survey completed by their guardian(s) during the school registration process. Then, the student is assessed using a computer-adaptive screener English proficiency assessment such as the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA)

ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 (2020) to determine their language learning status. Students who score below a proficiency threshold in one of the four assessed domains (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening) largely receive additional language support through English language instruction educational programs ([LIEPs], Irwin et al., 2024), which are commonly school-based English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Once students successfully reach proficiency in all four domains of English language learning, they are exited from the ESOL program and receive mainstream literacy and language instruction.

Regardless of the terminology used, English proficiency identification, such as the WIDA assessment, can downplay the number of multilingual students who deserve additional language and literacy support throughout their educational journeys. All students are life-long language learners. If students are to become multilingual and fluent across all four language domains, additional language instruction will be needed for their entire linguistic repertoire, even after they achieve proficiency on the WIDA assessment. While federal data agencies report that 5 million students are considered ELs (Irwin et al., 2024), there is an estimated total of 12 million students who speak an additional language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). As such, this potential underreporting can deemphasize the amount of funding and personnel support needed to fully support this population of learners' successful literacy development. Multilingual students who speak additional languages at home are equally deserving of language support beyond those necessary to learn English, even though they are no longer labeled as ELs.

Theoretical Framework

For this dissertation, two primary theories framed the research, and the amalgamation of these theories gives a broader understanding of MLs and how they develop as proficient writers.

Both of these theories are outlined below, and a discussion of how the theories intersect and inform my positionality, as well as serve as a foundation for this dissertation, is presented.

Translanguaging

The first theory guiding this research is translanguaging, a sociocultural theory of language learning. As a theory, translanguaging focuses on the role of social interaction and cultural tools in learning and knowledge construction. García and Wei (2014) describe translanguaging as an approach that "considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems... but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been socially constructed as belonging to two separate languages" (p. 2). Translanguaging privileges an unbounded vision of language, and speakers are encouraged to use their full linguistic repertoires for communication and learning, including during reading, writing, and speaking (García & Kleifgen, 2020; Wei & García, 2022; Wei, 2022). Furthermore, translanguaging maintains an asset lens on language and bilingualism. It views the speaker's movement between named languages not as a sign of deficit but instead defines the shifting as intellectual fluidity, creativity, and choice (Otheguy et al., 2015; García & Wei, 2014). This perspective counters the "myth of a pure form of language," rejecting the notion that one usage of a specific language is prioritized over another (Wei, 2017, p. 14). Language and its usage are not viewed according to the rules, grammar, or definitions of political and social institutions – such as schools. Specifically, the *trans* of translanguaging is for transcending named languages, freeing the speaker from the confines of socio-political constructs and discourse expectations. Instead, language usage is seen as deeply personal, wonderfully complex, and even messy. Translanguaging seeks to liberate the language practices of multilinguals by recognizing the rich

intricacies of the speaker and their language and no longer requiring the use of specifically labeled language categories (García & Kleifgen, 2020).

Translanguaging offers a vital lens for better understanding the cognitive processes of multilingual individuals, highlighting the dynamic nature of communication and centers on the rich literacy practices of linguistically diverse individuals. Approaching research with a translanguaging lens means that researchers deny the categorization of languages and people and instead celebrate the speaker bringing their full linguistic abilities into the conversation (Wei, 2022).

For this dissertation, the translanguaging framework was specifically relevant because of its potential beyond simply theorizing; instead, scholars of translanguaging argue that it has power as a pedagogical practice when implemented in classrooms and literacy spaces (García & Kleifgen, 2020). Wei (2017) argues for connecting translanguaging back to its historical roots as a pedagogic theory, stating, “The process of theorization, or knowledge construction, involves a perpetual cycle of practice-theory-practice” (p. 11). Instead, a translanguaging perspective offers an opportunity for teachers to guide classroom instruction away from language restriction and instead legitimizes the usage of all language skills to enhance learning and literacy development (García & Kleifgen, 2020; Wei & García, 2022; Wei, 2022).

García and colleagues (2017) outline three underlying principles for successfully pulling translanguaging into literacy classrooms to create linguistically supportive spaces for multilinguals. Primarily, translanguaging frames ML’s languages as a singular entity, which García et al. (2017) call a translanguaging *stance* for teachers. In literacy classrooms, this stance is more than simply recognizing students' multiple languages. Instead, educators must deeply

understand that historically defined named languages cannot separate multilingualism, and therefore, teachers must view their students' linguistic repertoire as one unit.

Second, is the importance of a translanguaging *design* for instruction and within classroom spaces. At the foundational level, translanguaging as a pedagogical practice encourages multilingual speakers to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire to compose conversations and written texts. Classrooms must be transformed into spaces that support and promote the hybridity of language and learning (Wei, 2017). Diversity and language blending in classrooms should be legitimized, and no restriction on language usage should exist (García & Kleifgen, 2020).

Lastly, teachers must be prepared to support translanguaging *shifts* or "the 'moves' that teachers make that respond to students' language, questions, and critique, none of which can be predicted" (p. 36). When working with MLs, teachers must strive for a fluid instructional approach, acknowledging the spontaneous needs of the learners and adapting their instruction as necessary (Parsons et al., 2018).

Finally, Wei (2017) uses the term translanguaging *space* to argue that there is a transformative power for learners when translanguaging becomes interwoven into the nature of the literacy learning experience. Children learn to challenge dominant literacy views in these spaces by critically questioning the power relationships that define language usage. Teachers play an important role in creating a translanguaging *space*, welcoming students' cultures, backgrounds, and full linguistic repertoire into both literacy instruction and the learning context. Translanguaging encourages collaborative learning that builds upon the individual learner and highlights the benefits of simultaneously learning languages within literacy instruction (Salmerón, 2022).

Direct and Indirect Effects Model of Writing

The second theory that guided this research is the Direct and Indirect Effects model of Writing (DIEW), which was primarily developed by educational psychologist Young-Suk Grace Kim (Kim & Graham, 2022; Kim & Park, 2019). The DIEW model builds on previous writing theories, particularly the Simple View of Writing (SVW, Berninger et al., 2002), to emphasize the cognitive complexity involved in learning to compose text. The DIEW model provides greater focus on how young children develop the compositional elements of their writing while also suggesting particular literacy skills that may relate to advanced writing output.

Notably, Kim and Park's (2019) theory contends that learners draw on numerous language skills and certain cognitive resources to write effectively. At the foundational level, this model hypothesizes that dimensions of executive functioning, including working memory and attention, support and are required for writing output. Building upon these fundamental abilities, learners must also employ transcription abilities and discourse oral language skills to produce written compositions. Each of these skills works tangentially with higher-order oral language skills (e.g., inference, perspective-taking, monitoring), motivation, and a learner's background knowledge to produce written compositions. As these underlying skills are advanced, children can construct more refined written texts in terms of quality and complexity. For teachers and researchers, DIEW provides insight into the complexities of learning to write while also suggesting particular language skills that will need development to advance students' writing compositions. When considering writing curriculum materials and classroom pedagogies, these skills will need explicit instruction if MLs are to become proficient writers.

An Intersection of Theory for ML Writing Development: My Positionality

The intersection of the translanguaging theory and the DIEW model gives a more dynamic understanding of how multilingual students become proficient writers, and I argue that these theories must intentionally co-exist for effective literacy instruction. Language and literacy are not developed in a vacuum; instead, learning is influenced by social interactions, learning contexts, cultural identities, and teacher experiences, and thus, instruction must be adapted to represent these factors. Students are culturally and linguistically diverse, and their instruction must reflect who they are as people (García & Kleifgen, 2020). Meanwhile, teachers play a significant role in the learning experience, influencing how students encounter instructional material and develop as learners (Hattie, 2009; Kim et al., 2019). From both a theoretical and a praxis perspective, translanguaging theory places students and their languages central to their literacy learning.

However, in addition to focusing on students' backgrounds and the influence of the learning context, identifying specific skills related to literacy development and outcomes is just as necessary as hypothesized by Kim and Park's (2019) DIEW model. When specific language skills that have a predictive relationship with advanced literacy learning are identified, these skills can be incorporated into curriculums and teachers' classroom instruction to further advance MLs' learning. In other words, if only specific foundational skills are identified for writing development, then additional questions will continue to exist about how teachers utilize and experience classroom materials that support the instruction of these skills. Conversely, if the context and teachers' experiences are only explored, educators may not have enough direction regarding which specific skills relate to advanced literacy outcomes. As such, within this dissertation, these theories work jointly. Because writing is being taught in a learning context,

influenced by teachers and students, researchers must seek to understand these experiences while *also* investigating and identifying specific evidence-based skills that may advance students' literacy development.

As such, the first and second articles included in this dissertation are framed using the translanguaging theory perspective. In the first study, translanguaging theory guides the systematic review that synthesizes the current corpus of research focused on MLs' genre-based writing development. In the second study, I build upon translanguaging theory, acknowledging that student learning is influenced by social factors within the learning context, to investigate teachers' instructional experiences as they navigate implementing a literacy curriculum for MLs. Then, in the third study, I explore elements of Kim & Park's DIEW model, examining predictive relationships between foundational literacy skills and MLs' writing outcomes. Each article included in this dissertation is discussed in more detail below.

Overview of Articles

The first article included in this dissertation consisted of a systematic literature review. The primary aim of this article was to synthesize the current research focused on elementary MLs and writing instruction. The second aim was to provide educators with an overview of clear empirical-based strategies that can be implemented in their classrooms to aid in the writing development of MLs. Finally, the third aim was to highlight gaps in the research corpus for scholars, illuminating avenues for future studies. Completing this study added to the rich body of research underscoring targeted interventions and high-quality instructional practices that MLs will need to become proficient writers.

The second article used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate how novice teachers experience supporting MLs in a school context that has elected to use a scripted

literacy curriculum. While scripted curriculums have been widely chastised for ignoring diversity and lacking inclusion of specific supports for diverse learners (e.g., Rigell et al., 2022; Thomas & Dyches, 2019), teachers commonly are required to use these materials to guide their literacy instruction (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020; Timberlake et al., 2017). However, despite being the most likely to rely on curriculums for instructional guidance (Cobanoglu & Capa-Aydin, 2015; McCarthey & Woodard, 2018), little is known about novice career teachers' perspectives of these materials, specifically when it comes to supporting MLs' literacy needs. Unanswered questions exist about how novice teachers navigate implementing these resources into classrooms, their barriers to doing so, and their adherence to the provided resources. This study investigated how novice teachers experience a specific literacy curriculum and the extent to which they perceive these resources as usable for enhancing MLs' literacy development.

The third article investigated first-and second-grade multilingual writers' argumentative compositions in the disciplines of science and social studies ($N = 633$). While research has produced compelling evidence emphasizing the importance of advanced oral language and early vocabulary skills for developing MLs' reading capabilities (August & Shanahan, 2006; Kieffer, 2012; Relyea & Amendum, 2020), more research is needed to create a robust understanding of how these variables relate with the quality of students' written compositions. As such, quantitative measures of oral language proficiency, early reading abilities, domain-specific vocabulary skills, and writing quality were analyzed using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). This study provides insight into foundational literacy skills and their predictive relationship with young MLs' writing outcomes.

When combined, these articles give insight into teacher experiences while also identifying specific foundational skills that should be included in curriculum materials to advance MLs' literacy development.

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CHAPTER 2

Writing Strategies for Elementary Multilingual Writers: A Systematic Review

Lewis, B. P., (2024). Writing strategies for elementary multilingual writers: A systematic review. *Education Sciences, 14*(7), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14070759

Abstract

Because of the Common Core State Standards (2010), all elementary students across the United States, including multilingual learners, must learn to compose written texts in opinion, informational, and narrative genres. By nature, writing also plays many diverse roles in educational settings, and advanced writing skills are needed for students to reach interdisciplinary success. Specifically, writing can be incorporated into content-area learning in subjects such as science, social studies, and math to support genre-based writing development. While advanced writing can be challenging for any student to master, multilingual students may need additional support to develop these crucial composition skills because of the complexities of learning two languages simultaneously. Furthermore, while many educators understand that multilingual students have distinct literacy needs, not all teachers are prepared to meet these specific writing instructional demands. This article presents the results of a systematic review guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach. This study investigated literacy-based empirical research used to support multilingual learners since the inception of the Common Core (2010–2023) genre-based writing standards. In characterizing effective writing supports, seven themes emerged: (a) the role of the teacher, (b) writing mentor texts, (c) the creation of multimodal texts, (d) writing scaffolds, (e) authenticity, (f) specific teacher instruction, and (g) multilingual language approaches. While this body of research is literacy-focused, these findings provide elementary teachers with specific strategies to

support developing multilingual writers when implemented into traditional literacy spaces or content-area instruction.

Keywords: multilingual learners; writing (composition); supports and interventions; genres (opinion/persuasive; informational/expository; narrative); elementary

1. Challenges Faced by Multilingual Learners and Teachers in Writing

Since the inception of the Common Core State Standards (CCSSs) [1], teachers in the United States have been under immense pressure to increase students' literacy scores in reading and writing. As a sweeping initiative, the CCSSs in English and Language Arts were originally adopted by 41 states and outlined specific expectations for students' literacy acquisition [1]. Today, these rigorous standards still widely hold teachers accountable for the writing performances of their students and have repercussions for both educators and students, including multilingual learners (MLs).

To further complicate matters, the population of multilingual learners in public school classrooms is rapidly increasing across the United States [2]. The most recent U.S. Census [3] reports that, for the youth population, people of color now comprise the majority, and nearly 53% of Americans under the age of 18 identify as a race other than White alone. This population often includes multilingual learners or students learning English simultaneously with another language. Because diversity is increasingly a characteristic of those under 18, schools must be prepared to knowledgeably serve and educate culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners.

Despite this population's rapid growth, linguistically diverse students struggle to score at proficiency levels comparable to their monolingual peers in reading and writing While the CCSSs [1] acknowledge that multilingual learners need unique instruction and that all students must have opportunities to "access the knowledge and skills necessary in their post–high school lives" (p. 6), the Common Core also states it is "beyond the scope of the Standards to define the full range of supports appropriate for English language learners and for students with special needs" (p. 6). Herein lies the challenge. It is crucial that multilingual students receive an

equitable education, and the CCSSs have clear ramifications for MLs and teachers nationwide. However, educators are not provided with specific strategies to incorporate into their instruction, and teachers are traditionally underprepared to support culturally and linguistically diverse learners [5,6]. In other words, a significant portion of students in elementary literacy classrooms face standardized assessment pressure and a lack of teacher knowledge, both of which can block the path to literacy success for multilingual students.

While there is a need for research on successful instructional methods for compositional writing among all student populations, there is a pressing need for research with a specific focus on multilingual students. This study begins by acknowledging a gap for practitioners. Even if educators seek instructional measures to support their multilingual learners, they may not have full access to materials or have the extended time needed to explore potential resources. Furthermore, while previous systematic reviews and meta-analyses have investigated writing instruction [7] and the relationship between writing and MLs [8], no studies could be located that focused on multilingual compositional writing abilities while also considering the Common Core writing genres and standards. Nevertheless, these broadly used standards are a reality for teachers and multilingual students within the United States, so researchers must investigate effective instructional practices and scaffolds that work within these writing-genre expectations.

2. The Importance of Writing Skills

It is potentially overlooked how much writing is a part of our daily lives as adults. However, in post-school contexts, like careers, workplaces, and higher education, sophisticated writing skills are a necessity [9]. From composing emails and grocery lists to drafting briefs and presentations, writing is a tool for communication, memory retention, and emotional well-being. In addition to being an essential aspect of higher education, careers, and daily life, a robust body

of research suggests that students must write effectively to reach academic success [10]. Primarily, when students receive instruction for specific writing skills, corresponding skills in reading likewise improve [11]. However, writing also has a crucial interdisciplinary role when students use writing to support content learning in areas such as science, social studies, and math. Proficient writing skills become more integral as students progress through elementary schools and into secondary spaces, where students are required to engage with and compose more complex texts [12].

Given the paramount importance of nurturing successful writers in elementary settings [10], it is crucial for teachers to be equipped to integrate evidence-based writing instruction throughout the school day for all learners, including multilingual learners. In particular, incorporating genre-based writing tasks can be a powerful tool for enhancing learning in both literacy and content areas. For example, when students undertake writing tasks, such as crafting informational research in science or expressing opinions about social studies topics, writing enables learners to process information. Writing offers opportunities for learners to develop a deeper conceptual understanding of the content-area material while enhancing and improving literacy skills. However, despite the need for students to develop robust writing skills, studies show that teachers are often underprepared to teach writing, and writing instruction in many classrooms is limited [13].

Because difficulty in writing could impact success in school and beyond, this study seeks to investigate the current body of research and illuminate strategies that elementary teachers (K-5) can incorporate into their classroom instruction to support multilingual learners as they compose texts in opinion, informational, and narrative genres. Despite the importance of this topic, there are significant gaps in the current research, particularly in identifying clear, effective

instructional strategies for teachers of MLs. This study aims to address these gaps while guiding scholars to new avenues to further investigate supportive measures for MLs as they develop into proficient writers based on the standards outlined by the Common Core [1].

3. Theoretical Framework

Grosjean's [14] holistic bilingualism perspective guided this literature review. Holistic bilingualism acknowledges both the complexities of multilingual language acquisition and focuses on the totality of language development. Rather than viewing language development as separate monolingual processes, this perspective emphasizes that literacy development is a unified, entwined process [14]. Cross-language transfer theory is also central to holistic bilingualism [15]. This theory postulates that learning in one language scaffolds learning in a second language, as well as the inverse [16,17]. Holistic bilingualism favors using all of a child's linguistic repertories to support literacy development and encourages movement away from monolingual instructional practices. Thus, the intentional integration of meaningful writing opportunities to develop all of a student's languages is vital for the acquisition of literacy skills for young readers and writers. Furthermore, monolingual views can limit educators' understanding of their students' literacy abilities. Since the goal for students is biliteracy, evaluating students' literacy abilities through more than an English-only lens is necessary [18]. Holistic bilingualism frames multilingual language use through an asset lens and directly counters the dominant deficit perspectives on multi-language use in classrooms and schools. This perspective provides a lens for understanding instructional practices that can be incorporated into literacy and content-area spaces for students' multi-linguistic literacy development.

However, despite the importance of holistic bilingualism, political and social constructs have long played an essential role in defining language and its usage in educational settings,

significantly impacting the education MLs have received [19,20]. Students who speak multiple languages have traditionally been viewed through an English-only deficit lens rather than through the asset lens of multilingualism [21,22]. A historical focus on English acquisition has been predominant, and additional language skills have been seen as a secondary goal or even a hindrance to English language learning. Today, it is still extensively standard for multilinguals to experience solely monolingual literacy pedagogies that do not fully support the development of a ML's writing abilities.

4. The Current Study

This systematic review focuses on supporting elementary (K-5) MLs as they compose genre-based texts in the CCSS genres of narrative, informational, and opinion genres. Thus, the following questions guided the analysis:

> **Research Question 1:** what research has been completed since the inception of the Common Core State Standards [1] about multilingual learners and genre-based writing?
>
> **Research Question 2:** within this research, what strategies and insights have been identified that can help elementary educators support multilingual students with their development of compositional writing skills?

Answering these questions offers insight into the practices that educators can incorporate into their instruction to support linguistically diverse students while additionally highlighting future avenues of research that are necessary to explore for a deeper understanding of elementary MLs as developing writers.

5. Methodological Approach

For this systematic review study, the PRISMA (preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses) approach was employed for the reviewing process [23,24]. The

selection process involved several steps, including predetermined criteria that guided the inclusion process. Specifically, studies were required to:

1. be peer-reviewed with original findings and written in English;
2. be participants that were multilingual elementary-aged children (K-5);
3. be completed in a United States context;
4. include data collected between the years 2010 and 2023;
5. have multilingual genre-based writing (e.g., opinion/persuasive, informational/expository, or narrative) development as the focus of the study.

The initial search focused on electronic databases with publications in education and psychology. These included the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), PsycARTICLES, and PsycINFO databases. Broad search terms were used to ensure the inclusion of all available peer-reviewed studies on writing in elementary schools. The Boolean search terms included: (ELL or "English Language Learner" OR bilingual OR multilingual) AND (writer OR writing OR write) AND elementary.

These beginning search terms generated 677 results from the three databases. Out of a concern that "elementary" could have limited the results, the exact search was recompleted; however, the term "elementary" was replaced by a list of grade levels, including kindergarten OR grade 1 OR grade 2 OR grade 3 OR grade 4 OR grade 5. This secondary search uncovered an additional 265 studies that aligned with the selected search terms. After removing the duplicate studies (n = 147), a total of 795 results were transferred to a Microsoft Excel chart for further evaluation.

As displayed in the PRISMA flow diagram (see Figure 1), each study was first evaluated at the abstract level during the screening process, and 638 articles were eliminated during this

first step, leaving a subset of 157 articles that were marked as needing further evaluation. For each potential study, the full text was downloaded and read so that the article could be evaluated. Any studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were eliminated. A substantial portion of the studies (n = 202) were excluded because the participants were not identified as elementary MLs—for instance, secondary contexts (e.g., [25]) and higher-education research-focused studies. Furthermore, studies completed in international settings (e.g., [26]) were excluded. While these articles could give insight into instructional practices that support ML writers, the CCSSs only have direct implications for students within United States contexts. Additionally, because of the interdisciplinary nature of writing, a significant number of studies (n = 255) used writing to investigate other phenomena. Many studies used writing to explore reading comprehension, evaluate scientific understanding, or assess mathematical instructional methods. Because these studies did not provide insight into supporting compositional writing, they were excluded from this systematic review. After a close reading of each empirical article, 43 studies were identified as meeting the outlined inclusion criteria.

Data Extraction and Analysis

To understand the characteristics of the research at the intersection of MLs and genre-based writing instruction, the selected studies were coded using Saldaña's [27] conception of first- and second-cycle coding. During the first coding round, each study's discrete characteristics were recorded. Specifically recorded were the theoretical framework, if included, the research methodology, the grade level, the number of participants, the focused writing genre, characteristics of the intervention, and the outcomes for students. Analytical memos were recorded during this process, and commonalities across the corpus were noted. For the second analysis phase, pattern coding occurred to derive meaning from similar codes, condense the data,

and identify cross-data themes [27]. Each code was recorded into the digital coding frame, and the codes were later collapsed into seven thematic categories presented in the subsequent section. Example subcodes for each identified thematic category are presented in Table 1.

6. Findings

The following section presents an overview of the characteristics of the 43 studies included in this systematic review. A synthesis of each theme is outlined, and a discussion of how these instructional approaches can support MLs in classroom writing contexts is provided. This review readily addressed the research questions, highlighting tangible strategies that elementary teachers can incorporate into their classrooms as multilingual students become proficient writers.

6.1. Overview of the Articles

Presented in Table 2, the studies in this systematic review used various methodological approaches, including quantitative (n = 11), qualitative (n = 28), and mixed methods (n = 4). While many studies (n = 15) investigated writing instruction across age levels, some investigated individual grades. First, second, and fifth grades were the most common elementary contexts (n = 6), while fourth grade (n = 2) was the least common context. As for writing genres, the studies were diverse and included narrative (n = 14), opinion/persuasion (n = 9), and informational/expository texts (n = 8). Three additional studies had the student participants compose poetry. The final studies (n = 9) incorporated a mixture of writing texts spanning the CCSS's three genre categories. The following sections discuss the seven themes identified across the studies that were selected for the current review: (a) role of the teacher, (b) writing mentor texts, (c) creation of multimodal texts, (d) writing scaffolds, (e) authenticity, (f) specific teacher instruction, and (g) multilingual language approaches.

6.2. Role of the Teacher

Because of their considerable role in classrooms, teachers' knowledge of identity affirming literacy practices is crucial for multilingual students. In these studies, the educators either chose to create spaces that supported multilingualism and multilingual writers, or they disregarded the advantages of multilingualism and viewed linguistic diversity through a deficit lens (e.g., [32]).

As seen in Machado and Hartman's [35] work, many teacher participants in these studies were committed to building upon students' cultural and linguistic resources within the classroom spaces. With the educator's willingness and guidance, students experienced diversity-supportive instructional practices to evolve as writers because their identities and experiences were welcomed foundations for their writing compositions. In the majority of the reviewed research, the teachers intentionally pursued methods that were in the best interests of their multilingual students (e.g., [30,31,33]). These teachers deeply considered their classroom practices and strove to select pedagogies that moved beyond the dominant monolingual instructional tactics. Specifically, the teachers welcomed bilingual literacy practices into the classroom by incorporating multilingual mentor texts, encouraging translanguaging, and providing technology that supported bilingual language development. Additionally, the practitioners provided students with choices on writing topics, saw families as linguistic experts [30], and prized multilingual genre-based compositions.

However, teachers were only sometimes prepared to support the development of students' multilingual writing skills or view dual language skills as assets. For example, during Fisher-Ari and Flint's [32] qualitative study, the scholars' "early conversations with the teachers indicated that they (the teacher participants) felt their ELs (English Learners) were coming to

school with linguistic, cultural, experiential, and familial deficits" [32] (p. 359). Yet, after three years of collaboration, the practitioners better understood their students' multilingual writing competencies, and they conceived the benefits of initially developing students' multilingual literacy abilities within classroom spaces. This transformation for educators was complex, and the process highlighted a need for professional development, which was apparent in three other studies included in this systematic review [33,36,37]. Access to professional development or higher education gave teachers the instructional support to visualize their MLs' lives as "complex and rich" [32] (p. 369). The teachers could see students' lived experiences as valuable for guiding writing compositions and instruction.

This first theme was an essential underlying principle for the subsequently discussed themes. For linguistically diverse students to reach their compositional writing potential, teachers must actively choose to incorporate multilingual writing practices into their classroom spaces. The following themes outline specific strategies from the reviewed research studies that content area and literacy elementary teachers can incorporate into their classrooms to support multilingual genre-writing development.

6.3. Writing Mentor Texts

Another theme that emerged was the usage of mentor texts to guide multilingual writers as they composed genre-based compositions. However, the incorporated mentor texts varied by type and implementation usage, and included published literature, student-authored texts, wordless picture books [28], and teacher-modeled texts [33]. For example, the focus teacher in Hong's [34] study used both children's literature texts and a previous student's authored text to guide multilingual students to craft their own poetry. In DeNicolo et al.'s [41] study on testimonios, undergraduate students wrote model compositional texts to influence third-grade

narrative writing. These exemplary texts gave students insights into the power of testimonial narrative writing and encouraged the children to make connections with the mentor pieces as they crafted their own compositions.

Specifically, students experienced the mentor texts through the lens of a writer. The texts were engaged with to study the author's craft, familiarize students with particular genres [43], or help students visualize the structural components of the texts [36]. Several studies deconstructed the mentor texts, guiding students to investigate how advanced writers structured their poetry and prose. For instance, in Machado and Hartman's [35,42] studies, the mentor texts provided by the structured curriculum were replaced with bilingual poetry. When students encountered these poems during instruction, it reframed translingual writing as an intentional craft move and showed the children avenues for incorporating bilingual writing in their own compositions.

Equally important, while mentor texts can be a route to assist multilingual compositional writers, O'Hallaron [37] highlights an additional salient note for educators. The thoughtful selection of mentor texts used during writing instruction is vital. These texts must be evaluated to ensure they align with writing instructional goals and are accessible to students. In particular, mentor texts may limit a child's ability to guide their writing if the text is too difficult to comprehend. Because of this, teachers should consider a broad range of texts and text types to support young writers in both content areas and during literacy instruction. Additionally, teachers should be open to crafting their own exemplary texts for MLs to emulate. Texts composed by teachers can serve as effective writing models and demonstrate the importance of writing when one becomes an adult.

6.4. Creation of Multimodal Texts

In thirteen of the research studies, the multilingual participants crafted multimodal genre-based compositions. According to Alvarez [44], multimodality "represents all the resources and tools that contribute to children's sense making processes and forms of expression; these can be language domains, visuals, movement, artefacts, digital technology, etc." (p. 98). While the five-paragraph essay has been the dominant structure for genre writing [71], creating multimodal texts allows students to utilize all their linguistic resources to compose narrative, informational, and opinion writing pieces. When teachers encourage multimodal compositional writing, multilingual students can demonstrate their learning through a combination of sensory and communicative modes. Because the creation of written text can be cognitively straining for young writers [13], visual literacies and multimodal compositions can provide teachers additional insight into MLs' storytelling and composing abilities beyond just the written words [34,44]. In other words, encouraging different representational modes can contribute to MLs accurately expressing their thoughts and conveying meaning [49].

While hand-drawn images depicting compositional text were the most common form of multimodal work, some studies had students create informational projects, narrative presentations, and persuasive advertisements. Two studies incorporated photography into the writing instruction [46,47]. Handing students a camera before crafting personal narratives presented a unique classroom writing opportunity. As seen in Haines's [47] work, photography can guide students' writing and be a source of motivation. Furthermore, the photographic images were an avenue for incorporating culturally sustaining pedagogies as students brought their outside worlds, including their families and communities, into literacy spaces.

Rowe [50] showcases an additional strategy for teachers seeking to incorporate multimodal texts into elementary writing classrooms. Second graders in her qualitative study composed eBooks by adding visual images and audio recordings to their stories and became "enthusiastic composers" [50] (p. 339). Overall, these studies illuminate the possibilities of transforming classroom spaces through multimodal composition, pointing to how these literacy practices can support emerging multilingual students. Educators should seek to shift what constitutes legitimate composing in traditional English literacy classrooms and welcome storytelling in diverse modes, including visual, linguistic, and audio representations.

6.5. Writing Scaffolds

A significant percentage of these studies (n = 14) emphasized the usage of scaffolds to expand multilingual students' writing development. These articles provided insight into potential instructional practices that can be used with multilingual writers in three subcategories: oral language as a scaffold, technology scaffolds, and targeted scaffolds.

6.5.1. Oral Language as a Scaffold

Oral language proficiency has long been known to impact multilingual developing writers [53], and the results from this corpus further reveal how particularly ongoing and collaborative oral dialogues can assist multilingual writers as they compose. Eleven studies used oral language as a writing scaffold for MLs. Throughout the writing process, students utilized oral language to aid in planning, drafting, and editing their compositions. Peer-writing partnerships, also referred to as buddy pairs, were present in a subset of the studies [28,32,38,39]. For instance, Gort [52] investigated students' pair-writing-related talk when first-grade students composed narratives. She found that, most often, MLs used their partner pairs and combined language repertories to reflect on, evaluate, or regulate their own writing or peer's

compositions. This oral code-switching allowed students to solve problems and address questions they encountered while completing the writing task. Hong [34] echoed the importance of oral language as a scaffold of the writing process. She argues that incorporating oral discussion opportunities motivated students "to observe, talk and think like poets" and work through the idea-generation process (p. 176).

An underlying premise of these studies is that promoting oral language usage in writing-classroom spaces can allow linguistically diverse students to boost both their writing and verbal language repertories. As Durán [30] states, "What children can do collaboratively today; they can do on their own in the future" (p. 88). This evidence should motivate teachers to shift away from silent independent writing times and alternatively create collaborative spaces where students can orally communicate using their full linguistic repertoire to support their writing development.

6.5.2. Technology Scaffolds

A small group of studies (n = 6) gave insight into technology scaffolds that could be incorporated into instruction to support ML writers. For instance, Arcon et al. [54] tested the impacts of dictation (DT) and speech-to-text (STT) software on the quality of MLs' written composition. They found that, relative to handwriting, STT produced significantly higher holistic quality writing and a lower error rate in students' compositions. STT also potentially lowered the cognitive effort students needed to apply to create persuasive writing texts.

Technology also allowed students to enhance their writing and served as a means of communication between individual students in classroom spaces. For example, in Squire and Clark's [38] research, fourth-grade opinion writers used Google Translate as an assistive technology when their heritage language was divergent from their classroom writing partners.

Translation support allowed young writers to collaborate verbally, move through the writing process, and further enhance their written texts. Google Translate was also the focus of Rowe's [56] research, and students utilized the software to write informational writing compositions. Specifically, the translation service encouraged the exploration of new languages, including those beyond a student's native language. Students used the resource to communicate with classroom peers and to incorporate bilingual elements into their animal informational texts.

Digital literacy practices combined with technology scaffolds were also noted as promising routes for supporting MLs as they created genre-based texts. In another study by Rowe [50], second graders created multimodal eBooks as an approach for composing narratives. Likewise, Shin's [57] qualitative case study investigated how blogging in diverse genres developed a multilingual student's academic confidence. Because of the technology scaffold, the child began to visualize himself as a "capable peer" and confident writer (p. 76). The focus child of the study used writing and blogging to increase his social recognition among his peers, especially his social standing among boys, which allowed him to provide feedback to others and grow individually as a writer.

Across these studies, translation technologies were one promising pathway for teachers to develop writers' bilingual skills and increase communication between multilinguals when they have different first languages (L1). However, researchers also noted the limitations of technology scaffolds. For example, Kim et al. [55] observed that technology inhibited younger students from showcasing their full linguistic abilities. When asked to write in a digital format, the students stated they enjoyed the typing element, yet students "generally performed best on the paper task compared to the online tasks" (p. 494). Thus, this study implicates paper–pencil composing as still developmentally appropriate for young first- and second-grade MLs. In another limitation

example, Rowe [56] acknowledged that Google Translate was an imperfect tool because it failed to fully capture the complexity of named languages. Instead, the students saw the tool as knowledgeable, even when their understanding of their language was more accurate.

6.5.3. Targeted Scaffolds

One strategy apparent in this literature is to implement targeted scaffolds to support multilingual writers, such as graphic organizers (e.g., [28,60]). Specifically, Squire and Clark's [38] usage of graphic organizers for fourth-grade opinion writing helped students focus, organize their thoughts, and capture their ideas before writing. "Thinking Maps" were used as a targeted scaffold during the prewriting stage in Cooks and Sunseri's [58] work. These writing scaffolds positively impacted students' expository rubric scores, increasing growth in the organization and idea-elaboration categories.

Like the previously discussed writing supports, educators should thoughtfully select targeted scaffolds. Wiley and McKernan's [61] research shows that some scaffolds, such as sentence frames, that exceedingly focus on a sole writing concept can restrict students' creativity, impact their language usage, and lead to formulaic writing compositions. In addition, teachers should acknowledge that, when students can complete writing tasks without the scaffold, then gradual removal of the implemented support is necessary. Gradual withdrawal of the scaffold transfers the learning responsibility back to the multilingual student [13].

6.6. Authenticity

A portion of the studies (n = 13) indicated the importance of authentic writing instruction for MLs. Writing for authentic purposes and audiences and incorporating the students' outside worlds were encouraged in these classroom spaces.

6.6.1. Authentic Writing Purposes

Several publications presented evidence of how writing for authentic purposes, such as positioning writing as a form of communication or writing for an intentional goal, influenced students. Authentic writing experiences engaged and motivated multilingual students, further encouraging them to envision writing as a necessary and influential aspect of their own lives. Additionally, giving students the choice to self-select topics was a subtheme. Personal topic choices also expanded the students' perspectives of writing, making the writing experiences more authentic for the learners. For instance, in Fisher-Ari and Flint's [32] study, when educators shifted their pedagogical practices, it opened the door for students to explore their own lives and backgrounds through genre-based writing. This instructional shift created a sense of authorial ownership, and teachers "came to appreciate and acknowledge the rich diversity of student's lives and experiences" (p. 369). Similarly, Machado and Hartman [35] posit that authentic topics, such as transnational experiences, can demonstrate students' awareness of audience and linguistic flexibility. The findings in Zisselsberger's [40] case study are also particularly compelling. Because of humanizing literacy practices, "students began expanding their definition of writing, from the idea of 'expressing oneself' to '[taking] action' and 'getting what you need'" (p. 132). The fifth grade MLs realized persuasive writing could serve the vital purpose of writing for social justice. Another implication highlighted in Zisselsberger's [40] study was how writing for an authentic purpose allowed students to experience writing in a real-world context, motivating the learners to use rhetoric to portray their opinions and ideas effectively.

6.6.2. Outside Worlds: Communities, Families, and Authentic Audiences

In these studies, the practitioners and researchers encouraged students to bring their outside worlds, communities, and families into their writing experiences. Haines [47] noted that, when her MLs were encouraged to incorporate their outside lives into their writing through photography, the student's motivation and enjoyment of writing increased. The students "wrote prolifically and willingly shared their writing with the classroom community" (p. 26). Likewise, DeNicolo et al.'s [41] analysis found that, during authentic narrative writing experiences, "students found their linguistic capital meaningful because of its connection with other forms of community cultural wealth" (p. 235). Sunseri and Sunseri [39] also highlight the importance of mindfully choosing writing activities that build upon background knowledge and students' funds of knowledge to help learners see the value of writing experiences.

Also aligning with this theme, three studies encouraged the students to write for authentic audiences in ways other educators can emulate in their own educational context. Two of Durán's included studies [29,30] have pertinent examples. In her 2018 study, students had opportunities in the classroom to re-write and translate Spanish-language texts after parents were invited to send in poems and songs that families were willing to share. In doing so, families were positioned as literacy and linguistic experts, which validated home literacy practices. Durán [29] also developed an audience-focused writing unit, and students used message journals to build literacy skills through written communication with their families. Comparably, in two studies, multilingual pen pals served as an authentic audience [29,46]. Written conversations between multilingual peers encouraged students to internalize and adapt to their audience's perspectives and gave the children a compelling reason to write. Overall, when the students' outside worlds are connected to classroom writing compositions, children can conceive the value of proficient

writing skills, and families are positioned as biliteracy experts with valuable knowledge to contribute to classroom instruction [30].

6.7. Specific Teacher Instruction

Nearly a quarter of the studies (n = 9) exclusively measured the effects of individual writing approaches or instructional topics. For example, three studies [64,66,67] analyzed vocabulary breadth and its effect on the quality of compositions. While it is unlikely that simply increasing vocabulary instruction would solve all ML writing challenges, the results from these studies implicate a connection between multilingual students' vocabulary and their writing quality. Direct vocabulary instruction improved ML's compositional texts in multiple areas, including word choice and holistic writing quality. Thus, teachers should consider incorporating explicit vocabulary instruction into both their literacy and content-area contexts to strengthen the emerging multilingual student's writing.

Wood [65] also examined a potential instructional focus when investigating transitions or transitional words and their predictive relationship with writing quality scores, finding that increased usage of transition words predicted higher scores in quality on the scoring rubric. Since connective word usage significantly predicted the quality of ML's writing, explicit instruction in transitions could improve an ML's writing compositions.

The need for specific instruction was also addressed in Kim and colleagues' [63] study. The researchers pointed to the influence of higher-order cognitive skills and their relationship with advanced writing. Students with progressed cognitive abilities correspondingly had more advanced biliteracy skills when their writing was evaluated.

6.8. Multilingual Language Approaches

Biliteracy instruction has been associated with increased literacy achievement and greater cognitive flexibility. Many studies (n = 20) demonstrated how multilingual language practices empowered students, encouraging them to utilize their full multilingual repertories for composing writing pieces and, thereby, advancing their writing abilities. Code switching, code meshing, and translanguaging in both the oral and written forms progressed the students' biliteracy development, and students strategically employed their first and second languages to navigate the writing process. Velasco and García [51] found that students used translanguaging approaches to adapt to their audience and writing purpose. Translanguaging served as a writing scaffold, and its usage motivated the students to advance their own learning with self-regulation tactics during the writing process. Axelrod and Cole [46] also found that encouraging translanguaging during writing opportunities allowed elementary authors to incorporate their own voices into the compositions and build knowledge together as a classroom writing community.

Another effective strategy for supporting students' writing development within this literature was their placement in dual language or biliteracy programs [69], such as *Literacy Squared*. For instance, in a study by Montanari and colleagues [70], the researchers investigated the relationship between first and second languages and the influence that both languages had on students' writing quality. Their findings show that students in biliteracy classrooms parallelly develop their heritage language and English. Moreover, the colleagues postulate that "advanced writing ability in one language was associated with advanced writing ability in the other and limited writing ability in one language was also associated with limited writing ability in the other" [70] (p. 54), further supporting the theory of cross-linguistic transfer [15]. Escamilla et al.

[68] assessed students' writing using a holistic bilingual rubric in another study completed in a biliteracy context. They found that, by evaluating students' writing production in both Spanish and English, educators could better understand the student's full literacy proficiency. Overall, these studies imply that, by encouraging translanguaging and dual language genre-based writing, teachers can better evaluate both students' writing abilities and knowledge of the content material.

However, although the advantages of multilingual composing were apparent, three studies [29,31,42] addressed that elementary students were initially reluctant to compose in both languages. Machado and Hartman [42] posit that this hesitation could be due to the "dominant language ideologies present in children's lives" (p. 499). Moreover, some students may not see writing classrooms as places where bilingual language use is "allowed" [31] (p. 419). Therefore, educators should not be discouraged if students are not naturally deploying their biliteracy skills for learning and writing purposes. Modeling— possibly with mentor texts—and direct instruction may be needed to encourage students to use their full linguistic knowledge [41].

According to this body of research, literacy skills acquired in one language are closely linked to literacy abilities developed in another [45,63,68]. Therefore, teachers should not fear students using multiple languages in their writing and content-area classrooms; instead, motivating students to read and write in multiple languages is a powerful tactic to support learning and development rather than being a hindrance to English acquisition.

7. Discussion

Given the increasing need to support multilinguals as they develop their writing skills in elementary settings, this review is a valuable resource that synthesizes the strategies and tools from recent research studies. These research based methods are specifically designed to assist

elementary practitioners in supporting their linguistically and culturally diverse students as they compose texts that meet the expectations of the Common Core genre writing standards. The following insights from the review are particularly noteworthy for elementary educators.

First, this study reinforces that teachers play a vital role in supporting multilingual students in elementary classrooms. Though teachers might not have all the instructional answers, as Wiley and McKernan [61] state, “Our role is not providing “perfect” tools or answers but instead . . . to test new ideas in the classroom” (p. 167). Teaching MLs to write is a complex process, but explicit and thoughtful experimentation can help educators identify instructional methods that assist their multilingual writers. Educators must consciously select evidence-based pedagogical practices to use with multilingual students in their classrooms if MLs are going to reach their full writing potential.

Second, these findings reiterate the necessity of providing multilingual students with unique instruction and intentional supports to help them become proficient writers. Cultivating learning environments that offer authentic writing experiences and encourage the use of multiple languages is essential. Educators should strive to promote and nurture biliteracy skills in classrooms as students engage with texts and process content-area information. Specifically, the incorporation of bilingual mentor texts, writing scaffolds, and the use of technology can facilitate this process, enabling students to leverage their full language repertories to write genre-based texts.

Third, reconceptualizing restrictive definitions of what writing is or is not is crucial for multilingual success. Intentionally moving away from monolingual and monomodal writing compositions is essential for disrupting restrictive views of genre writing. Instead, classrooms and assignments should be reconfigured to welcome translanguaging and multimodality. The

written texts of our world are diverse, so classroom practices must reflect genuine writing experiences beyond those of traditional school assignments.

Fourth, providing opportunities for students to build upon their cultures, languages, and experiences to process content-area information and develop advanced writing skills is vital. When writing activities and prompts are tied to students' outside worlds, these experiences become assets and resources for learning and creating texts. Students can see the connection between their classroom experiences, visualizing how writing authentically fits into their lives.

Combined, these four key takeaways highlight an additional need for practitioners, namely professional development. While reframing writing spaces to support multilingual students is necessary, it is not an easy undertaking. Teachers need access to robust, empirically based professional development that provides insight into multilingual supportive literacy pedagogies. Specifically, the research has emphasized that teacher coaching could provide necessary opportunities for feedback as new instructional strategies are implemented into classroom spaces [72].

8. Future Research

Although informative, more than just the findings of this systematic review are required to ensure that multilingual students reach their full literacy potential. The current state of education presents a complex landscape for teachers who are under immense pressure to boost literacy scores while navigating district and state-level oversight. Research must delve into methods that cater to the needs and identities of multilingual students while also acknowledging the realities of the CCSS and the current assessment era. This way, educators can envision how these practices can realistically be integrated into their literacy and content-area instruction to support their students' achievement.

One opportunity for future research this review highlights is a deeper investigation into self-regulated strategy development (SRSD). While this strategy has previously been considered beneficial for struggling writers [73,74], including exceptional learners [75], only one study in this corpus [59] investigated the strategy with elementary MLs when composing genre writing. If implemented in elementary writing classrooms, SRSD could potentially support ML's writing development to meet the genre-writing expectations outlined by the CCSS.

Furthermore, most studies investigated during this review process used qualitative research methods. There is significant room for quantitative studies, specifically longitudinal studies, in the field of ML elementary writing. Research that quantitatively measures the impact of writing modifications on students' performance using standardized writing measures could provide a more robust understanding of how these strategies can improve students' writing abilities.

9. Conclusions

This systematic review has the potential to inform the development of more effective instructional practices while also providing practitioners with avenues for fostering the development of ML's genre-writing abilities. Specifically, this research body showcases that linguistically inclusive practices can encourage students to visualize themselves as writers, motivating students to compose texts. Engaging multilingual students in writing opportunities in both content areas and literacy spaces can help learners process pertinent information and improve their writing abilities; however, when these opportunities are combined with thoughtful pedagogical supports, authentic experiences, and intentional instruction, students can grow as writers and see writing as necessary for their future lives. It is essential to authorize students to

negotiate their linguistic writing abilities to ensure students meet rigorous academic writing standards, such as those outlined by the Common Core.

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Figure 1

PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Search and Screening Process.

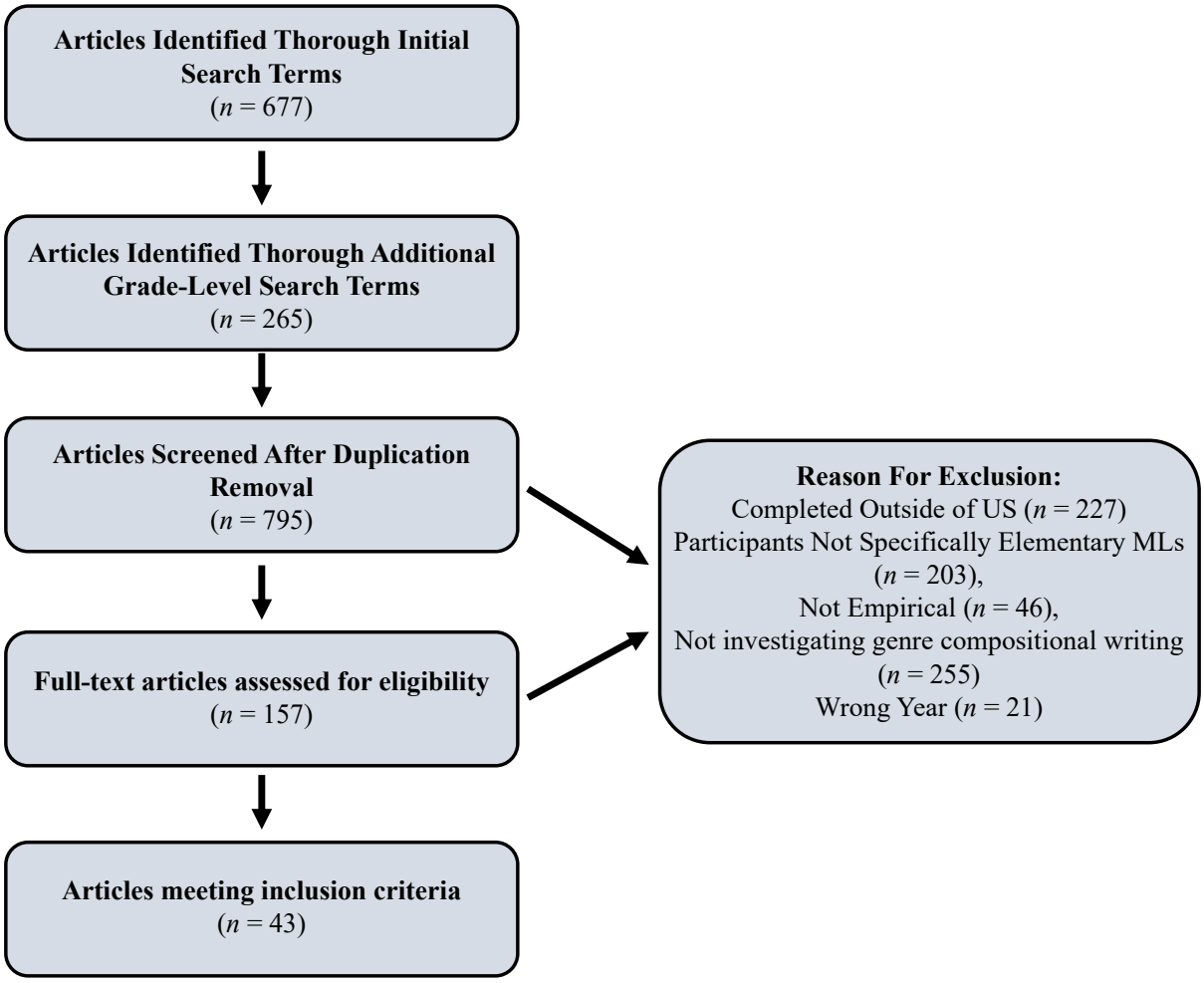

Table 1

Themes, Descriptions, Example Subcodes, and the Corresponding Relevant Research Studies.

Themes	Description	Example Subcodes	Relevant Studies
Role of the Teacher	Instances within the studies where the teacher played an impactful role on the multilingual learners' writing development.	*teacher's understanding, responsive to students, facilitate student learning, asset-based perspective, co-construct curriculum with children, encourage bilingual practice, repositioning language beyond English, praise, teacher transformation, resistant, bilingual educator, shared values, modified curriculum*	[28-40]
Writing Mentor Texts	Instances within the studies where mentor texts were used to impact the multilingual learners' writing development.	*songs, example texts, family poems, bilingual books, children's literature, previous students' writing, mentor texts, picture books, "author studies," explore genre*	[28,33-37,40-43]
Creation of Multimodal Texts	Instances within the studies where students used diverse semiotic modes to create texts.	*multi-media presentation, pictures, drawings, PowerPoint, photography, color choice, visual composing, design, research posters, text features, advertisements, eBooks, audio recordings*	[29,31,33-35,40,42,44-51]

Table 1 (Continued)

Writing Scaffolds			
Oral Language as a Scaffold	Instances within the studies where oral language skills were used or encouraged to support the multilingual learners' writing development.	*collaboration, oral language skills, "buddy pairs," talk, requesting help from peer, relying on others, translingual talk, partner talk, oral code switching, discuss vocabulary, brainstorming, sharing of work, feedback discussion*	[28,30,32,34,37-40,46,48,52,53]
Technology Scaffolds	Instances within the studies where technology was used to support the multilingual learners' writing development.	*dictation, Google Translate, speech to text, typing, digital writing assessment, blogging, imperfect technology*	[38,49,50,54-57]
Targeted Scaffolds	Instances within the studies where a specific scaffold was used to support the multilingual learners' writing development.	*graphic organizer, "Thinking Maps," writing outline, idea collection, five-part essay structure, sentence frames, writing posters, joint text construction, goal setting*	[28,30,33,37-39,43,48,50,58-61]
Authenticity			
Authentic Writing Purposes	Instances within the studies where students wrote for authentic and real-world purposes to support their writing development.	*pen-pals. letters, topic choice, showcase personal experience, explore emotion, communication, exploration of self, narratives of disruption, address issues, authentic argument*	[32,35,37,40,46-48,57]

Table 1 (Continued)

Outside Worlds: Communities, Families, and Authentic Audiences	Instances within the studies where students were encouraged to build upon their experiences outside of school settings to support their writing development.	*funds of knowledge, older siblings, family literacy contributions, outside writing context, authentic audiences, "real readers," audience awareness, community cultural wealth, responsiveness, parents, write to family, pets*	[29,30,39,41,44,46, 56,62]
Specific Teacher Instruction	Instances within the studies where specific instruction on a topic or strategy was taught to support the multilinguals' writing development.	*Self-Regulated Strategy Development, Integrated Reading and Writing Instruction (IRWI), vocabulary, lexical diversity, writing productivity, small group instruction, phonological awareness, higher order cognitive skills, dual language instruction*	[36,53,59,60,63-67]
Multilingual Language Approaches	Instances within the studies where students deployed their full linguistic repertoire to support their writing development.	*translanguaging, reluctancy beyond English, deliberate language choice, negotiation of language, bilingual text, translation, need for formal second language instruction, inventive second language spelling, dual language programs, biliteracy assessment, cross language transfer, bilingual modeling, biliteracy rubrics*	[28-31,39-42,44-46,49-51,53,62,63,69-70]

Table 2

Overview of Studies Included in the Review.

	Frequency (*n*)	Percentage (%)
Methodology		
Quantitative	11	25.58
Qualitative	28	65.11
Mixed	4	9.30
Grade Level		
Kindergarten	3	6.98
First	6	13.95
Second	6	13.95
Third	5	11.63
Fourth	2	4.65
Fifth	6	13.95
Mixed	15	34.88
Writing Genre		
Narrative	14	32.56
Opinion/Persuasion	9	20.93
Informational	8	18.60
Poetry	3	6.98
Multiple	9	20.93

CHAPTER 3

Understanding Novice Teachers' Experiences when Implementing a Literacy Curriculum for Multilingual Learners: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Abstract

Despite the increasingly widespread adoption of scripted curriculums for literacy instruction, little is known about how novice teachers navigate the incorporation of these materials into classroom spaces, specifically for students who are linguistically diverse. Scripted curricula have been widely criticized for their one-size-fits-all instructional approaches and lack of culturally sustaining pedagogies. However, culturally and linguistically diverse students are the most likely to be taught by novice teachers who rely on scripted curriculum resources for literacy instruction. This interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study investigated novice teachers' perceptions and experiences when they were tasked with implementing a scripted curriculum to support the literacy development of students who are multilingual learners (MLs). In general, the teachers articulated feeling overwhelmed by the expansive curriculum materials and addressed significant barriers to implementation when seeking to meet MLs' literacy needs. Despite their best intentions, the teachers struggled with instructional uncertainty, the curriculum's design, and visualizing MLs as primary members of the learning community deserving of instruction reflective of their cultures and linguistic needs. The findings provide insight for curriculum developers regarding the curriculum design and the professional development needed for successful classroom implementation. Additionally, these findings are pertinent for teacher educators as they prepare preservice educators who may be increasingly required to use scripted curricula to guide their future literacy instruction. Finally, crucial future research avenues are indicated regarding the usage of scripted curriculums for the literacy development of MLs.

Introduction

While literacy is crucial for future academic and career success, there have been decades of growing concern regarding students' literacy achievement across the United States. For reading specifically, only 33% of United States fourth-graders are considered proficient (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022). However, these numbers are even bleaker for the rapidly growing population of multilingual learners (MLs) or students learning English simultaneously with another language. Meanwhile, for MLs, only 10% are considered proficient in the area of reading (NCES, 2022). While there are some concerns that standardized test scores obscure the achievement of English Learners (Kieffer & Thompson, 2018), there is still the need to ensure that these students receive high-quality educations to reach future academic success. At the core, when MLs build a strong literacy foundation and practice using language effectively, these are indispensable lifelong skills. Being biliterate profoundly and positively affects students' cognitive abilities (Bialystok et al., 2007, 2012; Fox et al., 2019), and in nearly every profession, MLs will need proficient literacy skills to be successful. Furthermore, biliteracy has been shown to increase employability (Fox et al., 2019) and future earning potential (Agirdag, 2014), highlighting the need for robustly developing the literacy skills of this population of learners.

While numerous instructional practices may be impacting the successful development of ML's literacy proficiencies (e.g., monolingual instruction), one barrier that has remained largely underexplored is how teachers use scripted curriculums to instruct multilingual students in the disciplines of reading and writing. Instructional curriculum materials play a central role in classroom instruction (Cervetti et al., 2015; Davis et al., 2017), influencing both the literacy content and the pedagogies teachers engage with; however, consistent pushes for accountability

performance have dramatically increased the prevalence of more detailed scripted curriculums in classroom spaces (Au, 2011; Barrett et al., 2018; Fitz & Nikolaidias, 2020). In fact, in a recent study completed by the RAND research organization (Doan et al., 2023), 96% of elementary teachers reported using published literacy curriculum materials, and an estimated $18.9 billion of federal Elementary and Secondary School Relief (ESSER) funds in 2021-2022 school year was used to purchase instructional materials in an effort to leverage student learning post COVID-19 (EdReports, 2023).

Just as it sounds, a scripted curriculum provides a teacher with a scripted lesson plan and adjacent resources for each instructional lesson (Au, 2011). Scripted programs standardize the curriculum regarding the knowledge purveyed and the teacher's pedagogical practices by providing individual instructional steps that should be abided by during each lesson and implementation phase (Fitz & Nikolaidias, 2020; Meidl & Meidl, 2011). Furthermore, many of these curricula articulate the exact words instructors are to repeat by including specific speaking and questioning cues for teachers. However, labeling a curriculum as "scripted" is a nuanced task; in reality, literacy curriculums fall across a spectrum regarding their level of scriptedness. Some curriculums may include the *what* (e.g., activities and topics) teachers are to teach, while other curricular materials may more precisely dictate the *how* (e.g., terminology, small group instruction, usage of specific worksheets or literary texts) teachers are to instruct topics and standards. Moreover, the usage of all literacy curriculums in classroom spaces, including those with more detailed scripts, is context-dependent. District and school expectations of alignment can impact teachers' adherence to curriculums and their incorporated materials (McCarthey & Woodard, 2018). For example, within one district, teachers might be provided with a more extensively scripted literacy curriculum yet be free to deviate from the materials,

such as supplementing or replacing literacy texts. In contrast, within another district using the same curriculum, teachers may face district or school expectations to state scripts verbatim with less ability to deter from the curricular materials. Thus, the usage of any curriculum additionally falls across a spectrum, which is influenced by additional contextual factors. Additionally, while mandated and scripted are not mutually exclusive terms, curriculums purchased by school districts and states commonly fall under both categories, mandating that teachers utilize specific curriculum scripts when instructing reading and writing.

Advocates of scripted curriculums view these teaching materials as avenues for improving instructional quality and increasing student achievement. In theory, scripted curriculums provide students with an *equal* education and less guesswork for teachers. Teachers spend less time planning because lessons and resources are supplied, and every student hypothetically receives the same high-quality instruction. Conversations about scripted curriculums typically coincide with an emphasis on accountability and increasing students' reading performances (Fitz & Nikolaidias, 2020; Olivant, 2015). When the curriculum is standardized, classroom instruction is assumed to be more strongly aligned with standards, subsequently impacting student outcomes on end-of-grade assessments and thus increasing literacy scores (Timberlake et al., 2017). In fact, extensive research evidence has shown that when curriculums are high-quality and evidence-based, there can be transformative impacts on students' learning and development (Cervetti et al., 2015; Davis et al., 2017; Steiner, 2017).

Others argue that scripted curriculums align with simplified notions of equity, encouraging teachers to "teach to the test." By necessity, scripted curriculum lessons are focused on teacher-centered instructional practices (Meidl & Meidl, 2011), which can limit teacher autonomy and force students into passive learning roles (Lenski et al., 2016; Narayanan et al.,

2023). Scripted curriculums can lead teachers to focus more on measurable academic skills that align with test-centric literacy pedagogies. For example, instead of teachers engaging students in rich comprehension opportunities as readers and writers, they may devote additional time to practicing multiple-choice questions or focusing on individual item analysis, which are tactics less likely to support literacy growth (Davis & Vehabovic, 2017).

Building on these issues, researchers have expressed concerns that scripted curriculums are detrimental to teacher autonomy and professionalism by limiting practitioners' abilities to make instructional adaptations and decisions driven by their students' needs (McCarthey & Woodard, 2018; Narayanan et al., 2023). When asked, educators can describe these curricula as stifling or suffocating (Lenski et al., 2016; Olivant, 2015). Thus, not only do scripted curriculums ignore teachers' professional knowledge, but they also leave little room for incorporating students' backgrounds, interests, and personal learning choices, all of which are considered aspects foundational for strong literacy instruction (Linan-Thompson et al., 2018). Consequently, the combination of teacher-centered pedagogy, lowered learning expectations, and the narrowing of curriculum topics due to scripted curriculums can further perpetuate educational inequalities (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020; Olivant, 2015).

Additional issues add to the complexity of the stark and contrasting debates surrounding scripted curriculums. Primarily, the media has recently become increasingly cognizant of national reading achievement, specifically regarding the term "Science of Reading" (e.g., Hanford, 2018). The Science of Reading (SoR) refers to the rich and growing body of evidence-based knowledge identifying pedagogies that align with effective literacy instruction for developing readers. After broad objections that teacher literacy practices were not fully aligned with this body of research and, thus, impacting students' ability to become proficient readers, 43

states passed laws and policies seeking to shift literacy instruction by increasing teacher training and changing the usage of classroom instructional materials such as curriculums (Schwartz, 2022). In some ways, the SoR has been oversimplified specifically regarding MLs' literacy development (e.g., Goldenberg, 2020; Kittle et al., 2024); however, one additional cause of this advanced scrutiny was the identification of a misalignment between broadly used curricula (e.g., Adams et al., 2020) and the body of SoR research on effective literacy instructional practices. As one example, widely used curriculum materials were criticized for under-addressing and omitting explicit teaching of phonics, a necessary component of instruction for reading growth (e.g., Hanford, 2018). In other words, despite publisher claims of curricula being "evidence-based," it appears these materials have an ambiguous research backing. Furthermore, not all teachers implement and engage with curriculums to the same degree (Doan et al., 2023). Even if a curriculum could positively impact student literacy acquisition, this success could be dissipated due to a lack of fidelity in implementation (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Thus, despite best intentions, curriculums, even when accessible and responsive to student needs, may not be executed to their full potential.

Teachers and Their Usage of Curriculums

Because of the burgeoning of scripted curriculums (Doan et al., 2023; Vaughn et al., 2021), questions about which teachers use these materials and how curriculums are engaged within classroom spaces deserves a greater focus by researchers. Teachers play an active role as negotiators of the scripted curriculum. Thus, how teachers engage with curriculums is nuanced, varying based on educators' teaching philosophies, experience levels (Cobanoglu & Capa-Aydin, 2015), experience with curricular professional development (McCarthey & Woodard, 2018), and classroom contexts (Narayanan et al., 2023). These factors shape how educators make sense of

curriculums and supplemental materials, consequently impacting how they are leveraged for students' literacy learning. As one example, some data suggests that novice teachers are most likely to parallel their teaching with the scripted curriculum, possibly despite their individual students' needs (Cobanoglu & Capa-Aydin, 2015; McCarthey & Woodard, 2018). As such, explicit curriculum resources can systematically guide novice educators' teaching, ensuring organization and coherence while providing a sense of security that students' learning is aligned with state literacy standards (McCarthey & Woodard, 2018). Furthermore, pre-packaged curriculums can save educators valuable planning time by providing an instructional planning starting point. Thus, particularly for teachers new to the profession, curriculums play a complex role in their experiences, both supporting and potentially restricting their instructional teaching methods (Cobanoglu & Capa-Aydin, 2015; McCarthey & Woodard, 2018). Furthermore, because novice teachers are early in their careers and still developing their professional knowledge, the success of their teaching methods can be influenced by their teacher education preparation experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2023). Thus, novice teachers may struggle with navigating curricular materials and effectively implementing these resources into classroom spaces, regardless of whether these curriculums are well-developed and evidence-based.

Additionally, more attention is being given to teachers' differentiation practices when implementing scripted curricula. Research shows that when teachers modify curriculum materials and make changes, these are strategic instructional moves to intentionally support learners (Chapman & Elbaum, 2021; Lenski et al., 2016; Maniates, 2017). For example, studies have shown that teachers adapt curricula to make instruction more relatable for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Aukerman & Schuldt, 2017; Maniates, 2017). Specifically, teachers supplement or replace curriculum texts with multicultural literature to increase student

engagement. Thus, curriculums may serve some students effectively, but informed adaption of such programs could support a broader range of learners (Maniates, 2017). Overall, when teachers are critical consumers of curriculum and armed with the power of adaption, curriculums have a greater potential to effectively meet students' literacy instructional needs.

Concerns About Scripted Curriculum for Multilingual Learners

One of the most prominent critiques of scripted curriculums is concerns regarding the disadvantages of such resources for instructing specific demographics of the student population (Aukerman & Schuldt, 2017; Rigell et al., 2022; Thomas & Dyches, 2019), including the growing number of culturally linguistically diverse learners (Maniates, 2017; Meidl & Meidl, 2011). Many researchers see these materials as highly problematic due to their inability to validate and affirm students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds; thus, scripted curriculums can fail to acknowledge that students' experiences are foundational elements to build upon for literacy success. In fact, research investigating curriculums has shown that some widely used curriculums promote whiteness, lack diverse literature, and even perpetuate racial stereotypes (Thomas & Dyches, 2019). For example, in a recent qualitative analysis of a K-8 literacy curriculum, Rigell and colleagues (2022) found that the included literary texts excluded stories by and of people of color and, thus, actively taught students history from a dangerous whitewashed perspective. Similar research has also explicitly highlighted issues with literary texts incorporated into curriculum instruction due to a lack of representation for students of color (e.g., Thomas & Dyches, 2019; Whittingham & Hoffman, 2024).

For MLs, these scripted resources can also lack consideration for individual students' linguistic needs regarding their dual language acquisition (Meidl & Meidl, 2011). Because of the nature of providing an equal education, scripted curriculums inherently reinforce monolingual

learning tactics. Such instruction further perpetuates monoglossic language ideologies, therefore ignoring the large body of research pointing to the need for students to have access to their first language to develop advanced English proficiency skills (e.g., Relyea & Amendum, 2020; Relyea & Hwang, 2024). Within equity-based language education frameworks, including translanguaging (García and Wei, 2014), flexibility in teaching praxis is centered, allowing educators to differentiate and *shift* (García et al., 2017) from curriculum expectations for individual learners' language needs. Furthermore, MLs' language repertories are entwined and unable to be separated during the language and literacy learning process (García et al., 2017; Otheguy et al., 2019). The individual speaker should be central to literacy instruction, and teachers must develop an asset *stance* on linguistic diversity and bilingualism (García et al., 2017; García & Kleifgen, 2020). Adopted curriculums must assist teachers in guiding classroom instruction away from language restriction, instead building literacy instruction around what students individually need, thus legitimizing the usage of all language skills to enhance learning and literacy development. Therefore, if curriculums fail to build upon students' full linguistic repertories, it can constrain children's learning choices, potentially alienating them from their education and negatively impacting their literacy acquisition.

Linguistically restrictive pedological methods, commonly used by scripted curriculums, narrowly define what language is and who uses it, further marginalizing bilingual language usage and failing to acknowledge the benefits of multilingualism. Furthermore, scripted curricula and simplifications of the “Science of Reading” can fall short of providing teachers with the necessary resources to enhance MLs' dual language acquisition, leaving teachers unsure of how to support these students' needs (Goldenberg, 2020; Kittle et al., 2024). When curriculums are standardized, multilingual children can lose the ability to investigate, create, and collaborate to

support their literacy development, which stands in direct contradiction to evidence-based pedagogical practices for students developing multiple linguistic repertoires (August & Shanahan, 2006; Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020; García & Kleifgen, 2020). Despite the knowledge of these shortcomings, data reveals that low-income schools with higher percentages of both MLs and novice teachers are the most likely to incorporate scripted curricula, disproportionately affecting vulnerable MLs who then may receive low-quality instructional methods due to curriculum mandates (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020; Milner, 2013).

It is probable that a comprehensive curriculum aligned with both evidence-based research and rich academic standards could support MLs' literacy needs, especially if teachers use assessment to modify and adapt curriculums for their specific students. However, coupled with being the least experienced educators and yet the most likely to teach in low-income schools, there is little insight into how novice teachers perceive the experience of learning to implement a scripted literacy curriculum for all students, including those who are MLs. Therefore, this phenomenological qualitative study explored the experiences of novice teachers as they navigated, learned, and implemented a literacy curriculum in their elementary classrooms for their MLs. Through qualitative interviews, this study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences of scripted curriculums by asking how teachers implement these resources to support ML elementary readers and writers.

Methods

Due to the widespread use of published literacy curriculums (Au, 2011; Timberlake et al., 2017) and the identified shortcomings of these programs, researchers and curriculum developers need to gain a deeper understanding of how educators implement literacy curriculums in classroom settings. Thus, exploring the viewpoints of teachers who are actually executing these

curriculums with elementary MLs is essential. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was chosen for this research study because it is a particularly beneficial methodology for carefully examining teachers' experiences and thus privileging their voices. As a methodology, IPA focuses less on previous theories, frameworks, or hypotheses (Larsen & Adu, 2021); instead, IPA is an interpretive endeavor concerned with conducting a detailed and inductive analysis of the participant statements to make sense of his or her experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith et al., 2009).

By inquiring and documenting novice teachers' experiences, motivations, and perceptions, schools and districts can become more knowledgeable about the usage of these resources. A study of this nature can illuminate supports that may be necessary to equip new teachers better and, thus, potentially increase the usability of such curriculums for all students, including the growing population of MLs in schools across the United States. To this end, this study used the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach outlined by Smith et al. (2009) to address the following research questions:

1. What influences do novice teacher describe as impactful on their experiences with scripted curriculums?
2. How do novice teachers describe their experiences as they navigate implementing a scripted curriculum for the literacy development of multilingual learners?

Setting and Participants

A total of 14 teachers participated in this study, aligning with previous recommendations of at least 10 participants for robust phenomenological studies (Spiers & Smith, 2019). All teachers taught in the same school district (Jackson County, a pseudonym) that serves more than 75,000 students in grades K-12, located in a large urban area in the southeast United States.

Participants were considered novice elementary teachers by the district due to being currently in their second year of teaching. These teachers were also all required to teach literacy using a district-wide scripted curriculum mandated by the county. The participants were primarily White and female, reflecting the current teaching force across the U.S. (de Brey et al., 2019). All but one of the participants (e.g., Lauren) had completed their student teaching practicum in the same district in which they were now employed. See Table 1 for additional demographic information. This information is provided in the aggregate to further protect the teachers' identities.

Each participant taught students identified as multilingual learners (MLs), interchangeably called English Learners (ELs) by the participants, in their general education elementary classrooms. Within Jackson County, students are identified as MLs first through the usage of a home language survey completed by their guardian(s). Then, students are assessed using the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 (2020), a computer-adaptive screener mandated by the state to determine their ML language status. Students who scored below the proficiency thresholds in one of the four assessed domains (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening) received additional language support through the school-based English as a Second Language (ESL) program. As a crucial note, previous research has highlighted that this type of English proficiency identification downplays the number of multilingual students who deserve literacy support throughout their educational journeys. If students are to become fluent across all four language domains, additional language instruction will be needed for their entire linguistic repertoire, even after they achieve proficiency on the WIDA assessment. These teachers had additional multilingual students who spoke languages beyond English at home, and these students are equally deserving of language support beyond those necessary to learn English, even though the district no longer labels them as MLs.

The Curriculum

This study aimed to amplify the participants' experiences with literacy scripted curriculums rather than investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the particular curriculum. As such, a pseudonym (Building Readers and Writers [BRW]) is used when referencing the curriculum. This choice protects the participant's identities; however, some background insight is provided about the curriculum below to provide additional context for the participants' experiences.

The BRW curriculum is an open-source curriculum that provides teachers with lengthy lesson plans of ten or more pages for daily literacy instruction that includes a detailed instructional script for teachers to use. Expansive, multifaceted resources are supplied, including student workbooks, small group activities, assessments, and read-aloud texts. Regarding reading, the curriculum is knowledge- and language-based, and each of the four instructional units typically centers around a singular literary text and overarching knowledge topic (e.g., frogs, the Revolutionary War). While students write across the unit in their workbooks as responses after engaging with the selected text, explicit writing lessons are clustered at the end of units. During these end-of-unit lessons, students compose genre-based texts, including informational books, poetry, and argumentative compositions. However, these prompts are tied to the same topic (e.g., frogs, the Revolutionary War) and the same selected literary texts focused on during prior reading instruction. For example, after reading about the Revolutionary War during previous instructional weeks, students may be tasked with writing an informational text comparing the goals of the Loyalists or Patriots. Furthermore, each day's primary literacy instruction is followed by an hour of small group time called Time to Excel [TtE] (also a pseudonym), where students receive additional instruction to reinforce their learning from the whole group session.

As seen in the interview excerpts below, even though teachers were all working in the same school district and supplied the same materials, *how* the novice teachers implemented the curriculum in their classrooms varied greatly depending on their individual contexts. Based on the interview conversations, the teachers' usage and adherence to the curriculum and its accompanying materials were influenced by school administrators and grade-level teams. Some teachers stated they directly read from the curriculums' script while teaching, while other novice teachers clarified that they viewed the materials as a more flexible guide for their literacy instruction. As one example, many participants brought presentation slides to the interviews. These resources were created based on the curriculum's lesson plans but served as guidance during teaching instead of teachers reading the exact instructional script to students as they taught. Other teachers differentiated more significantly by adding individual activities or even whole literacy units. Therefore, these participants' experiences with the curriculum are important but context-based, as their usage of the curriculum was impacted by their perceived school and the district's expectations for adherence.

Researcher Positionality

In IPA, the researcher plays an active role in the analysis of the data (Smith et al., 2009); however, an important step of the methodology is considering how previous experiences may impact my understanding of the participants' experiences. Regarding this reflexivity, I was once an elementary teacher required to use a mandated literacy curriculum to instruct my general education students, including those identified as MLs. My experiences with such curriculums were complex and conflicting. As a novice teacher, I felt unprepared to design comprehensive, evidence-based literacy units from scratch; however, I felt many of the lessons provided were not tailored to my student's abilities, interests, or cultures, thus making student engagement

challenging. These conflicting experiences guided my interest in how other educators perceived and navigated these materials when implementing literacy curriculums with their students. Furthermore, as a scholar of multilingualism and literacy, not only am I knowledgeable of literacy instructional practices that are supportive of dual language development, but I also have an asset lens of multilingualism and believe students deserve spaces and instructional practices that acknowledge, build upon, and support their full linguistic repertoire.

As an additional note on positionality, most of the participants in this study were my prior students during their undergraduate preservice training, and all were part of the same graduating class at the university level. While it was necessary to be mindful of potential biases due to these pre-existing relationships, prior familiarity with the participants increased the natural rapport and built a trustworthy environment, allowing for deeper conversations about these teachers' experiences. In fact, prior research has shown that when mentors are outside parties, compared to school district members, educators are more forthcoming and candid in their responses about successes and struggles due to less fear of negative repercussions (Grifenhagen & Jones, 2022).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were analyzed utilizing Smith et al.'s (2009) approach for IPA research. The methodology of IPA was selected to understand the shared experience of novice teachers as they navigated and employed a literacy curriculum to support the literacy development of MLs. Aligning with Smith and colleagues' (2009) expectations of IPA, semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source. To begin this process, an interview protocol was developed. After the initial protocol was drafted, two additional outside colleagues peer-reviewed the questions to aid in credibility (Tracy, 2020). This process resulted in multiple questions being added, deleted, or reworded for clarity prior to the completion of the participant interviews.

The teachers were selected using purposeful convenience sampling, and all were in their second year of teaching within the selected school district of Jackson County. Teachers were first contacted through email. Interested participants responded and agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Smith et al., 2009) conducted through Zoom video conferencing that lasted approximately one hour. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then uploaded into ATLAS.ti (2023), a qualitative coding software, for further analysis. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, which was used throughout the analysis and this article.

As an additional data source, teachers were requested to bring a lesson plan to the interview that they had taught to their students in the last year. During the interview, the teachers "walked" the researcher through the lesson plan, engaging with questions that inquired about their experiences with teaching this particular lesson to their elementary students.

The data analysis was a systematic process beginning with a complete immersion into the individual details of data. The IPA steps taken during the process are outlined below.

1. Each transcript was read and re-read while simultaneously listening to the participant's voice through the usage of the audio recording (Smith et al., 2009). During this reflection step, descriptive memos were recorded of emerging ideas, increasing familiarity with the data.
2. Afterward, the data was returned to using inductive strategies. At this stage, the transcripts were line-by-line analyzed using descriptive and conceptual comments to code the participant's statements (Smith et al., 2009).
3. Next, these codes were scrutinized and clustered by emergent themes best representing the experiences of the individual novice teacher (Smith et al., 2009).

4. The first three steps of this process were then repeated on each of the 14 participants' transcripts until all the data was reviewed, coded, and clustered into themes.
5. Once completed, the themes were analyzed across the entire data set of interviews through a comparison process, which focused on the present interrelationships between participants' descriptions of their experiences.
6. Finally, themes could be collapsed into the six overarching findings discussed below.

Findings

In line with prior research, the novice teachers had varying first-year teaching experiences (Bettini & Park, 2021); however, nine of the fourteen novice teachers described their inaugural year of teaching as a particularly demanding experience. While the teachers articulated and even anticipated their first year in the profession would be difficult, the actual challenges they faced surpassed their original expectations, a phenomenon Bettini and Park (2021) call "practice shock" (p. 8). The novice teachers described their experiences using verbiage including "rough," "a doozy," "struggles," and "challenging." They expressed sentiments of survival and gratitude that the previous year was over. While these perceptions align with previous research on novice teachers' experiences (Bettini & Park, 2021), they also serve as additional insight into the surmounting problem of teacher attrition (Taie & Lewis, 2023). Outlined below are six findings that emerged during the data analysis phase, which answer the two research questions guiding this study. These findings provide insight into how novice teachers describe their experiences as they navigate implementing a scripted curriculum for their elementary literacy instruction with MLs.

Research Question 1: What influences do novice teacher describe as impactful for their experiences with scripted curriculums?

Finding 1: Being Influenced by Colleagues

Interactions with grade-level teaching teams played a key role in constituting how novice teachers navigated learning and implementing the curriculum for their students' literacy development. Most of the time, grade-level mentors and team meetings were positive experiences, providing opportunities for novice teachers to gain support, share resources, and ask questions to grow their knowledge about the curriculum. Novices viewed other teachers as "experienced" and confident in navigating the curriculum materials. Veteran teachers usually took the lead for the majority of the lesson planning, while novice teachers followed along. For example, Nina described her team leader's roles by stating,

> "She (my team leader) was the one that kind of took on the most weight of (the curriculum), and I feel like that was helpful. Just to be able to learn from her, how she did it, and getting those resources from her just to sort of have. It wasn't me digging through it all by myself. It was somebody that was almost kind of like an expert at this. Who's been doing it for a while to be able to provide resources and talk it through."

Similarly, when describing how his team planned together and collaborated, Thomas shared that it increased his feelings of stability and the sense that everyone was "sharing the load."

However, these teaching teams also influenced the adherence to which the novice teachers aligned to the curriculum regarding fidelity. Their decision-making was informed by interactions with their teaching teams, which sometimes promoted pressure for novice teachers to "go with the flow" even when they questioned the methods and choices of their colleagues or

felt the curriculum was not aligned to their students' learning needs. For example, when discussing her team straying from the curriculum, Elena stated,

> "I would be more like devoted to (the curriculum) if that's what the team was about but being one... of 7 (people), if the team is not totally like loving the curriculum... Then, like, I'm just gonna be a team player, and that's just me being honest about it."

Comparably, when discussing her team's impact on her own commitment to the curriculum, Zoey stated, "I know my team is pretty strong against (the curriculum). They don't feel like it's giving the biggest bang for the buck like for the kids."

While employed at a different school, Kate felt a similar tension to align to her team's planning and differentiation tactics. However, she expressed worry that her lack of adherence to the curriculum might have resulted in "missing something" and, thus, impacted her students' end-of-grade test scores the previous year. After getting up to close her classroom door during the interview for privacy, she stated,

> "Last year, like my EOG (end-of-grade) scores were not great, but it's okay. It was my first year of teaching. But it did make me wonder like if I should be doing the curriculum like more strictly... But then two, like I do have these veteran teachers on my team who are like, well, I *have* done it... So, it's like they're all telling me that they've tried it, and it didn't work. So, I'm like, I don't have that experience either."

Kate's statement highlights the tension she and other novice teachers perceived between the required district initiative and her understanding that many of her grade-level teammates did not support the curriculum mandates due to a perceived mismatch between students' needs and instruction provided by the curriculum.

Aligning with previous research, teaching teams also had broader impacts on novice practitioners, keeping them in the profession even when teaching was difficult, and the novice teacher had considered leaving the school or profession during their first year (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Sutcher et al., 2016). In one such example of reflection Anna said, “My team actually is probably one of the only reasons I stayed here last year.” After a similarly difficult year, Ben questioned his teaching experiences sharing,

> “Do I want to go somewhere else? I want to find someplace that I think is better? But I realized, like I love the staff there. I got along with so many people that I didn't want to leave what I had, and I had a lot of really good support there, and I didn't want to leave that.”

Unfortunately, for some of the teachers, the grade-level team situations were far less supportive, lacking collaboration and leaving the novice teachers feeling isolated as they planned and navigated the curriculum. Four participants, Lauren, Madison, Amelia, and Julieta, grappled with these feelings of separation or isolation. Madison expressed her frustrations when planning for literacy instruction by commenting,

> “I am probably the only second-grade teacher that follows pretty rigorously to the curriculum... I don't plan with anybody. That's actually the real answer. I don't really plan with anybody. I plan by myself, which was another really hard thing with last year. We truly did not plan together, which was really challenging.”

Likewise, when describing how her grade-level team planned, Lauren stated,

> “My team lead was very like wanting to teach exactly to the curriculum, and how like it was outlined in the curriculum. So, we would like look at what lesson we're on, and we kind of look through it quickly at the stuff. But other than that, like, we're on our own.

So, like I know what lesson I'm teaching. But then to go through it and kind of dive into it is on my own."

Similarly, after describing the previous year as a "very unfortunate team dynamic," Julieta saw her new isolated role due to a change in the departmentalization structure of her team through a lens of vast relief. For her, this new isolation was an escape from tension brought on by the competitive nature of her colleagues, and she could "just do my own thing" with the curriculum and was happy "to not share children with anybody."

While professional learning communities (PLCs) to support instructional improvements is an increasingly popular approach to professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), the relationships between these teachers and their teams were complex. Some novices found their teams supportive when navigating the curriculum, while other teams they were placed on needed extensive direction to function effectively and support students' literacy development.

Finding 2: Having Valuable Insight into Curricular Training Types and Quality

Relying on Student Teaching Experiences. While some have argued that early teaching experiences involving scripted reading programs may be limiting for preservice teachers (e.g., Holt, 2021), virtually all participants viewed these experiences as positive. In fact, they shared a consensus that student teaching practicums were integral to their ability to effectively implement the curriculum materials in their own future classrooms. For example, when asked to expand on her student teaching experiences with the same curriculum, Avery reflected by stating:

"I think that I was kind of exposed to that through student teaching. Like this is how you take this curriculum, and you make it best for your class, like not everyone is gonna learn

> in whole group, and you need to differentiate as much as you can, like even your independent work."

Because student teaching experiences utilized the same scripted curriculum that they were now using as novices, the teachers felt they had an increased familiarity with the materials. Through fieldwork, they had positive opportunities to observe their mentor teachers, ask questions, and receive additional resources that they later utilized during their novice teaching years. Only one teacher, Lauren, taught in a neighboring county that employed a different curriculum. Lauren compared the two divergent curriculums, proceeding to discuss the challenges of what she deemed were less compatible student teaching experiences:

> "A lot more wiggle room in that (the previous curriculum). So I went from like having the freedom and a very a lot looser of a curriculum, and seeing my teacher supplement a lot and just finding a lot of her own resources to then going to a curriculum that is so packed, and I wish I was able to see how someone sifted through the (Jackson) County curriculums because I feel like that's what I struggled with last year, just knowing how to scaffold and differentiate a huge curriculum like that."

Experiencing Curriculum-Based Professional Development. Although it was evident that student teaching experiences were more compatible, the teachers expressed different perspectives on the official BRW curriculum professional development (PD) attended during their first year teaching. Interestingly, even though all the participants taught in the same county, the expectations to attend PD sessions were far from uniform. Instead, some participants attended multiple events, while others mentioned PD sessions that they wished they had had the opportunity to attend. Regardless, the consensus among the participants was that these PD opportunities were not particularly rememberable or helpful, leaving the teachers feeling

overwhelmed and still ill-equipped to meet the implementation expectations at their schools. For example, Olivia addressed this insufficient guidance regarding curriculum resources, saying, “Like they give you a lot of stuff (at the PD). It's just they don't tell you how to use it.” Similarly, Madison described her PD experience due to the extensiveness of the curriculum instruction as going “over our heads.”

Furthermore, some teachers addressed concerns about misalignment between the PD, curriculum goals, and their current teaching context. For example, when addressing her school’s scheduled literacy block Amelia stated,

> “And they (professional development leaders) were like ‘without a doubt you should be able to be taught in 60 min or less’... I was like, ‘That is the biggest lie I've ever heard in my life.’”

Julieta expressed similar sentiments by saying,

> “So, they show us the video of like what we're supposed to be doing and how we're supposed to be doing it. And it's literally the teacher with a small group. And then the teacher assistant with the other two groups. And I'm like, well, yeah, duh, that's so easy. Like If I had a teacher assistant in my room, that would be so easy.”

These misalignments made it hard for novice teachers to see how these resources could be implemented in their own contexts and left them questioning the materials' effectiveness when instructing their own students.

Finally, regarding PD, the teachers were reflective, identifying specific ways they felt the PD could be improved in the future. The PD's brevity, timing during the school year, and the need to streamline resources provided were all noted by the participants. For example, Lauren remarked,

> "Some feedback I gave my administration was that going before I had even been exposed to the curriculum was not the most helpful because I didn't know what I was really looking for, and I didn't know. They were just saying a bunch of stuff, and I didn't know what it meant in practice because I hadn't been teaching it."

Through the interviews, it was clear that the teachers had vital feedback that was potentially going unsolicited by the county and curriculum developers regarding the PD approaches to curriculum training. If heard, these critiques would be invaluable for improving future novice teachers' PD experiences and potentially positively impact their curriculum implementation within their classrooms.

Research Question 2: How do novice teachers describe their experiences as they navigate implementing a scripted curriculum for the literacy development of multilingual learners?

Finding 3: Struggling With Time and MLs as Secondary Within Instruction

Time, rather lack thereof, was reported as one critical barrier to implementing the curriculum with fidelity. Primarily, the participants stated that time hindered their ability to fully engage with the curriculum and its subsequent materials during the planning stage. A common perspective was that due to the length and the descriptiveness of the curriculum's lesson plans, there was an overabundance of material to navigate efficiently. Action verbs such as "sift," "grapple," "squish," and "unpack" were used to describe the teacher's interactions with the resources. For example, Ava explained her experiences by stating,

> "It's not like there's not a spark-noted version of the (curriculum) lessons. And so, realistically, I'm not gonna have time to sit down and read like a 10-15 page lesson plan every day for (the curriculum) when I'm teaching three other subjects."

Likewise, Avery called it an "overload of content," while Lauren used the term "jam-packed."

The dichotomy between the expectations of the curriculum and the provided time to implement the materials was also a concern regarding feasibility. Teachers considered it "unrealistic" to fit all the lesson plan expectations into a typical class period, resulting in nearly every teacher reporting the deletion of curriculum components before teaching the lessons. Other times, the lessons would run over numerous days as students tried to complete the amount of work expected by the curriculum.

The lack of time negatively impacted the teachers' instruction, including not finishing or even starting whole literacy units, using personal hours to compensate, and not reading parts of the curriculum or not reading literary texts before incorporating materials with students. Olivia expressed a few of these sentiments by noting,

> "So, like last year, we didn't get through our entire Unit 4. So, we started it. But we did not get to finish it because we ran out of time, and that was because we were trying... having to break up lessons over days and days and days."

The way novice teachers prepared and differentiated their instruction for their MLs was also negatively mediated by elements of time. Statements like "I can support them (MLs) on the fly" or a sense of being "not there yet" for adding additional linguistic support were common. In many ways, teachers were still developing an asset lens on multilingualism, not yet realizing that adaptations for MLs were a necessary rather than a secondary step to instruction. For example, when reflecting on whether he used the provided curriculum resources for his MLs, Ben articulated,

> "They (the curriculum) provided it, like in the lessons or the section that says for multilingual learners. So, they give you stuff. It's just one of those things that you just you gotta find the time for it and actually sit down and read into. It's just an easy thing to

> forget about... It's just, it's more time-consuming that way, and it's just, you don't have the time... It's so much easier just to go with the lesson, and they (MLs) might just be sitting there listening and not really doing anything, but it's hard to find a way to get them involved in the lesson."

Similarly, when asked why he was not implementing the MLs resources provided by the curriculum due to timing constraints, Thomas noted,

> "I guess I could just like stay up all night one night, and like take coke or something and just do it (laughing at his joke). But I'm not. But I'm not gonna."

Thomas further explained that after facing nightmares while first-year teaching, he realized the need for rigid work hours that respected his personal time and allowed him to be a "happy, rested, fulfilled, (and) caring" educator for his students.

The misalignment of instructional time also resulted in a deployment of weaker teaching pedagogies, such as students copying or teachers skipping whole lessons. Because they were clustered at the end of literacy units, writing lessons were often "put on the back burner" (Zoey). Lauren described how time influenced her writing classroom instruction by commenting,

> "But then sometimes the actual writing piece has to go because of the time, or they end up just copying off of like what I put on the board. So, I try to include it as much as I can, but sometimes I feel like it (writing) tends to be the first go depending on the skill."

Across the interviews, there was an apparent need to streamline the curricular content and materials being provided to the teachers for effective implementation. Additionally, the novice teachers needed support that allowed for structured preparation time to explore the lessons before facing implementation expectations and supporting their MLs literacy development.

Finding 4: Facing Uncertainty About Teaching

As novices, the teachers were navigating feelings of uncertainty regarding the curriculum's implementation and teaching in general. This uncertainty manifested in two ways and considerably impacted the educators' instructional practices.

Facing Uncertainty about How to Use Aspects of the Curriculum. Due to the robustness of the curriculum, teachers felt inundated with supplemental materials to meet students' varying instructional needs, including various supports for MLs. However, in addition to struggling to find the time to navigate these resources, there was a clear consensus among the teachers that the number of resources was overwhelming and under-explained, resulting in a broad sense of uncertainty about how the materials should be implemented into classroom spaces. One consequence of this insufficient guidance was teachers' disregard for essential aspects of the curriculum. Interestingly, the most commonly skipped aspect of the curriculum was the TtE section, the second half of the curriculum where small group instruction was to be engaged with. This omission meant that nearly all teachers admitted not implementing half the curriculum with fidelity. Furthermore, because small group interventions are a particularly vital opportunity to support MLs' literacy development (Baker et al., 2014; Kittle et al., 2024; Proctor et al., 2020), this finding was especially concerning. As admitted by Addison,

> "I don't know if I'm supposed to like admit this (laughing), but I'm being honest. We don't follow the (small group TtE) that (the curriculum) tells us to. We do the (main) curriculum, but we don't do the (small group) one."

Teachers described this whole portion of the curriculum as "confusing" or "didn't make sense." One area from which this confusion stemmed was the workbooks provided for the

students. When asked to expand on her reasons for omitting this section of the curriculum, Amelia clarified by stating,

> "I think, for me, it's just a lack of understanding of how the book works. I'm not against the stuff in the book. It's just confusing to me."

While the teachers described varying degrees of adherence to the curriculum's lessons based on their teaching context and administrations' expectations, the consensus was that building leaders were supportive of extensive differentiation from the TtE portion of the materials due to extensive school-wide uncertainty. Other minor aspects of the curriculum also erected feelings of uncertainty and confusion, additionally impacting the literacy instruction MLs received within the classrooms. For example, when discussing one support intentionally provided by the curriculum to build MLs vocabulary abilities, Julieta said,

> "I haven't done a single one. I'm not gonna lie. I still don't know what they are. Nobody has explained them to me. And honestly, I don't feel like there's a time built in for them. I think it's just extra."

Other interview discussions highlighted additional impacts of the sense of uncertainty regarding MLs and the resources provided by the curriculum for this population of students. For example, Nina addressed a need for additional guidance and tangibility of resources to aid in their usage with students by staying,

> "But (the curriculum) will have this section for supporting English Learners. But it's… not like a filled-in note catcher, or a sentence frames that they can use, or something where it's tangible that I can take this resource and go and implement or give it to the students that need it without needing to make it."

Stating similar concerns about the ML resources provided, Lauren stated

“They (the curriculum developers) have a folder for us, with adaptations for each module. But I think sometimes something that we lack is then how to implement those resources into an actual (curriculum) lesson because we have the folder, and we have the different resources. But how?... (that) is not always there.”

Facing Uncertainty about Teaching Abilities When Supporting MLs. Unsurprisingly, these novice teachers faced general uncertainty about their teaching abilities; however, this specifically manifested in understanding the MLs in their classrooms and how to best support their instructional needs. First, teachers were uncertain about their multilingual students in general. For example, they were not always sure about the student's linguistic classification identified by the district or the student's WIDA English proficiency scores. Second, while some teachers could create their own evidence-based literacy supports and effectively implement scaffolds (e.g., sentence stems, oral language opportunities) for their MLs students, others were uncertain about their teaching skills when it came to supporting this demographic of students in their classrooms. For example, when discussing modifying lessons for MLs, Lauren said,

> “I asked my ESL... teachers for support. And they said the sentence stems. And so, beyond that, I didn't (support the MLs). I don't feel like I knew what to do, and I feel like I didn't necessarily support them in the best way, but I don't know how else to support them.”

Because of her uncertainty, Avery expressed a desire to have had prior experiences at the undergraduate level that reflected the current diverse linguistic needs in her first-grade classroom. Describing some of the adjacent challenges, she stated,

> “I didn't realize that a fourth of my class would be learning English and not even have their first language be Spanish. Like it's very difficult to teach a student whose first

> language is Arabic just because it's so different than English. And I think that like the behaviors get so much worse when they don't understand 95% of their day because then they're not listening. So... I don't know if it's the specific school that I'm at or if we are just having more English Language Learners in general in the public schools, but I think some more like resources and support and just maybe like exposure. Like I feel like I should have gotten a minor in ESL. I wish that that was maybe encouraged more (at the undergraduate level) because I definitely don't feel qualified to have so many language learners."

Madison conveyed a similar unfamiliarity about the potential of and current diversity of the ML population within her second-grade classroom setting,

> "And so that has been something that I obviously should have known... I guess I didn't think about until I was facing it… that I was like, oh, it isn't just Spanish that these kids are coming with. It's like other languages and that they're still learning English with."

As an important note, one resource generally perceived as helpful to this uncertainty was the ESL teachers located in the novice teachers' school buildings. Novice teachers noted these professionals modeled lessons, provided modified resources, and gave teaching support tailored to the MLs in the classrooms of novice teachers. Nina described the sharing of resources from her ESL teacher by stating,

> "These were resources that were very helpful, that were given from our ESL teacher, and I'm even thinking that if I hadn't had these from her that we'd be trying to think of and brainstorm and think of other ways to best support them (MLs)."

These participant excerpts highlight that these novice teachers may need additional and continued PD to successfully implement the scripted curriculum and advance their pedagogical knowledge of effective literacy instruction for MLs.

Finding 5: Reconsidering Design of the Curriculum for MLs

Through the interviews, it was also evident that there was a need to reconsider how the curriculum was designed for MLs if these students were going to reach their full potential for literacy development. Lauren generalized this concern about the curriculum's misalignment for MLs by articulating, "I don't know if ELs, like EL Learners, were really kept in mind fully when the curriculum was made. Because it just feels like a lot for them."

Additionally, teachers described MLs' engagement with learning through the curriculum in other concerning ways, including statements such as, "So, he was getting *something* done," or as Julieta said regarding her ML students' engagement, "They (MLs) have no idea. I mean, they just sit there and listen. They don't really do much." Similarly, Ben described this design tension by stating, "(It's) so much easier just to go with the lesson, and they might just be sitting there listening and not really doing anything."

Even more concerning, some teachers still had an additional need to further develop their asset-based *stance* (García et al., 2017) that the curriculum should be intentionally designed to meet MLs' daily literacy needs. For instance, when asked about how he saw the curriculum impacting MLs' learning, Thomas stated,

> "One of them being the refugee who only speaks Swahili, but she's an outlier so, but they can barely follow along. It's (the curriculum) not meeting their needs, and I don't really... I've not really been given the resources to help them otherwise."

This assumption of MLs as "other" was troubling, considering participants had recently left an undergraduate program focusing on the necessity of culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies for literacy development.

Sometimes, the curriculum design led the teachers to rely on weaker pedagogical methods, including traditional monolingual instructional practices. As an example, Julieta admitted a hesitancy to use students' first-language skills to teach the curriculum even though she was a Spanish-English bilingual herself:

> “So, I'm not gonna lie. I do talk to them a lot in Spanish (laughing awkwardly).”

However, after I, as the interviewer, confirmed translanguaging during instruction is an evidence-based teaching practice, Julieta admitted that due to contextual barriers (e.g., time, resource overload), she clarified, “I mean, I just teach (the curriculum) in English.” Hence, unfortunately, even students with the rare support of a bilingual teacher could not utilize her linguistic support to the fullest extent possible to engage with the curriculum.

Furthermore, while some teachers (Addison and Avery) expressed enthusiasm that the curriculum included a bilingual text (e.g., *Esperanza Rising* [Ryan, 2000]) in the literacy units, Amelia identified valid gaps in the design of the curriculum when it came to incorporating such a text with her own students. While she agreed the text was meaningful and reflective of her MLs’ experiences, she noted that the lack of resources made it difficult to teach the book within her classroom. Amelia poignantly said,

> “For a while, we had approximately two Spanish copies of *Esperanza Rising* for the entire school. I think that if you are going to implement a curriculum in a big county like Jackson County or anywhere in the U.S. because Spanish is a quickly growing population

> of students, you need to make sure that you're offering that text in the languages that students are gonna need it in."

She continued by addressing common misconceptions about how her students used these Spanish materials to enhance their literacy skills, stating,

> "I think people want to get into this, 'Oh, well, we shouldn't be giving them the crutch of reading it in Spanish.' But what my ML kids do is they grab an English (copy), and they grab a Spanish copy, and then they're listening it me read it in English, and they're translanguaging it while they're listening to me read... If there is an unknown word, then they try to be like, okay, well, what would it be in Spanish?"

Aligning to previous research (Fox & Short, 2003; Tschida et al., 2014), Amelia further expanded that one bilingual text was a superficial gesture of diversity, and she considered many of the other texts not to be accessible for her class of MLs. Amelia had a robustly developed asset lens for how she viewed and instructed her class of MLs. Nevertheless, she clarified, "All that stuff (differentiated supports) ... that I give them have been helping. But again, those are things that I do. Those are not given to me by the curriculum."

Finding 6: Emerging as Critical Consumers of Curriculum

Aligning with previous research, a consensus was present that having "something" as a curriculum was beneficial as a novice teacher as compared to being expected to create literacy lessons from scratch (McCarthey & Woodard, 2018). For example, Ava stated,

> "I think it's very helpful to have guidance (from the curriculum) of what to do. I think if I were just given free rein, I'd be like, 'What am I supposed to do with these kids?' (laughing). It's just nice to have that guidance."

However, ambivalence was also common, especially when teachers felt the curriculum was misaligned to their classroom needs. This irresolution was evident in the statement by Lauren below,

> "In one sense, it's nice that I have my like lessons and the materials there for me. I don't have to go through it all and find and start from scratch. But on the other side, if it's not where my kids are at. It makes it really hard to do because then I feel like I'm just teaching this curriculum, and it's just not clicking in their head. So, it's not beneficial. So, pros and cons. I mean, it was helpful for my first year at least, having something to base off of, but I feel like even this year, I'm wanting to change a lot more of it."

When asked to further elaborate on their engagements with the curriculum, the teachers expanded on some positives about the curriculum (e.g., the curricular pacing, question cues, provided texts, and consistency); however, they were far more likely to critique the curriculum by listing either specific elements they felt were barriers to implementation or identifying components of the lessons that hindered student success. Critiques ranged in complexity; some were easy changes (e.g., suggestions for modifying workbook pages for MLs), and others were far more complicated (e.g., adding whole literacy units or changing focus texts). As an example of a more simplistic yet highly reasonable critique, both fourth-grade teachers pointed out a misalignment between the literacy curriculum and their state-wide social studies units. This misalignment resulted in students simultaneously learning about the Civil War and Revolutionary War, preceding in students inquiring about Loyalists' role in the North and South.

While a complete in-depth analysis of all curriculum challenges indicated by novice teachers is outside the scope of this research article, the important takeaway is that, even as novices, these teachers had valuable feedback about the curricular components that impacted

how they engaged with the curriculum. Because these are the educators implementing the curriculum, they deserve to be asked about insight for improvement. However, to provide some insight into these challenges, outlined below is one fundamental curriculum component most frequently reported as problematic by the teachers when it came to instructing literacy.

Noticing Need for Increased Learner Engagement. The teachers were keenly aware of their student's level of engagement and how this level of interest waned for certain literacy units. Teachers had this inherent sense that students disliked specific literary texts, lessons, and content-based topics featured within the curriculum. Ben expressed this sentiment by saying,

> "I feel like it needs to be more engaging because some of the lessons just can be real boring. And the kids don't get too into it, and you need to make them more engaging."

Throughout the interviews, the term "boring" or "boredom" was used by seven participants when discussing the students in their classroom engagement levels. Other unfavorable phrases like "ugh," "stresses them out," or "not exactly like invigorating" were all stated too. Madison even said, "You can just see it in their (the students') faces. They are done. They don't wanna be there." Lauren, specifically addressing teaching her MLs, agreed by stating, "Last year, I felt like it was a lot of just speaking to a brick wall like they (MLs) weren't super engaged." Interestingly, even the two teachers, Thomas and Addison, who used the adjective "fun" when describing the curriculum topics, later countered their statements by saying, "Well, not fun for the kids" and "They probably think it's lame and stupid."

The lack of student engagement stemmed from two key components. First, teachers critiqued the specific texts incorporated into the curriculum. When asked about an example of challenges of student engagement, Kate recollected one pertinent classroom scenario. During one literacy unit, when the focus text was *Love that Dog* by Sharron Creech, her students decided to

rename the book, referring to it as "Hate that Dog" for the remainder of the unit. There was a sense that Kate felt obligated to align with the curriculum, finishing the literacy unit and the text despite the students' clear disinterest. Unsurprisingly, other teachers expressed appreciation for this exact text and its usage in their own contexts. These stark text experiences highlight an important note about curriculums addressed by previous research. A single curriculum or literary text will not connect to every classroom or student (Tschida et al., 2014), and texts should represent students' languages and cultures (Fox & Short, 2003). Nevertheless, forcing specific texts has the potential to alienate students from classroom reading experiences, severely decreasing engagement with literacy (Hattan et al., 2024).

The curriculum material also impacted student engagement regarding writing instruction. Ava explained the writing experiences in her classrooms as, "Writing takes forever. It's like pulling teeth to get writing out of these kids sometimes." Lauren likewise said, "It's (writing) such a sore spot for every student, like them all. They didn't want to do it."

Teachers mainly credited this disengagement from students to both the types of writing required by the curriculum and the prompts provided. As Amelia described, most of the writing prompts included in this curriculum are text-based, "formulaic.... with no freedom." As an example, for the narrative writing genre, students are given tasks such as rewriting scenes from books or retelling a story's plot from a different character's perspective. Lauren discussed the challenges to engagement for one poetry writing exercise, explaining,

> "But then some of the poets that we were studying and that they had to write the essays on were not poets that were relevant to them or that they were necessarily interested in, so that was difficult on the engagement side because they had to write this whole essay

about an expert poet that they just didn't really care about at all, and didn't see themselves in a whole lot."

Olivia expressed similar sentiments about the rigid nature of the writing portions of the curriculum, acknowledging,

"They (students) get flexibility with choosing what animal, but they (curriculum publishers) only give them four options to choose from. So, if you don't like one of those animals, sorry, still going to have to write about it.

Extensive research has shown the importance of choice within writing instruction for all students (Graham et al., 2018; Graham, 2019); however, incorporating chances to build upon multiple languages, funds of knowledge, and see how writing can reflect authentic communication and connect to community is specifically important for MLs (Lewis, 2024; Salmerón, 2022).

Discussion and Implications

This study lends insight into the complexity of novice teachers' experiences of scripted literacy curricula and their subsequent implementation for MLs. The findings showed that factors such as school context, grade-level teams, quality of professional development, and pedagogical knowledge influenced teachers' experiences with the curriculum when explicitly seeking to support MLs' literacy development.

Although the curriculum provided extensive resources and materials, even numerous materials focused on ML literacy development, teachers struggled to implement these resources with fidelity due to several, including lack of time, feelings of uncertainty, and perceived misalignment of curricula resources. Similar to previous research, the novice teachers felt the

need to have "something" to support their instruction (McCarthey & Woodard, 2018), yet implementation challenges and critiques of the literacy curriculum were expansive.

As such, the mere presence of a curriculum is not enough to impact student learning, particularly for those students who need additional language support due to learning two languages simultaneously. Instead, if to be implemented with fidelity, teachers will need coherent, systematized, and long-term PD training to navigate curriculum material successfully. In fact, research has shown that PD is particularly an influential way to address the literacy needs of MLs by ensuring teachers are effectively implementing evidence-based instruction and language interventions (Shelton et al., 2023). However, this assemblage of interviews made it abundantly clear that these novices had less than adequate support, which resulted in the teachers feeling overwhelmed and under-supported. A lack of certainty was apparent regarding navigating the curriculum, implementing the supplemental materials for ML literacy development, and fitting instruction into the available class time. Concerns were identified with how the material impacted MLs' learning, leading to disparaging levels of differentiation from the curriculum by the teachers.

Particularly concerning, though, is that teachers perceived a lack of student engagement with the reading instruction provided by the curriculum. Teachers deduced this lack of engagement from a sense of mismatch between students' needs and curriculum instruction. Expansive research has shown that literacy practices are socially and culturally constructed (Street, 2003), and thus, when we separate students from their languages, cultures, and communities, we are effectively disengaging their strongest assets for literacy acquisition. To foster literacy skills, curriculums must reflect students, building upon their cultural and linguistic resources. For MLs, this means educators must select literary texts and writing prompts

representative of students' backgrounds (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020; Lewis, 2024). Furthermore, these interviews suggested the existence of an apparent misalignment, particularly between EL's literacy needs and the design of the instruction they were receiving due to the curriculum. There was a need to revise the books and writing topics to better engage students by reflecting on their interests and experiences.

Regarding differentiation, when schools provide space for educators to adapt curriculum instruction for students' linguistic needs and individual interests, MLs will be better served; however, these teachers had insufficient guidance for being equipped to do so effectively (Parsons et al., 2018). Most of these novice teachers were uncertain how to productively adapt their instruction for their students' dual linguistic needs. While some teachers leaned on various resources (e.g., ESL teachers, the internet, team-created resources) to differentiate, others were unsure of how to do so, which resulted in low levels of support and a lack of instructional engagement, particularly for MLs. However, MLs deserve supports and high-quality instruction that includes intentional linguistically responsive pedagogies woven into every lesson. Similarly, it was apparent that additional work was needed for teachers to develop a translanguaging *stance* or their asset lens on linguistic diversity. It is crucial to further expand teachers' beliefs on privileging students' rights to access educational pedagogies that support their linguistic needs (García et al., 2017). Crucially, teachers must visualize ML support as a primary step of the planning process, compared to treating evidence-based modifications as an afterthought if time and resources permit.

Furthermore, these qualitative interviews showed the importance of trust, support, and collaboration between mentor teachers, grade-level teams, and novice teachers. These teachers were all acutely aware that they were novices to the profession. However, when strong mentors

were present, new teachers felt stabilization and guidance, providing a space for asking questions, borrowing resources, and planning collaboratively. However, less collaborative environments felt isolating, forcing novice teachers to navigate both teaching and the curriculum alone. Aligning with prior research (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; James et al., 2021), these teachers' accounts underscored the need for intentional and careful selection of mentors at both the preservice level and for novice teachers. District and school administrators are responsible for ensuring mentors are well-trained, ready to collaborate, and prepared to build a supportive community of teachers that help guide novice educators to successfully teach both multilingual and monolingual students.

Two factors emerged from this research suggesting the importance of authentic preservice field work that is reflective of potential future teaching experiences. First, previous research has illustrated that teachers are typically underprepared to support the needs of MLs (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Rahman et al., 2017) or even view MLs as someone else's instructional responsibility (Feiman-Nemser, 2018), and unfortunately, this was also true for these novice practitioners. This study provides evidence that considerable opportunities are needed to practice instructing and differentiating for MLs before teachers enter their own classrooms (Heineke & Giatsou, 2020). The continuation of these supports will likely be needed as educators enter the profession and proceed through their novice teaching years. Because the population of MLs in U.S. classrooms is quickly growing (Irwin et al., 2024), it is vital that all general education teachers have a developed asset-based lens of multilingualism, as well as the pedagogical skills needed to support MLs' language needs in literacy spaces.

Furthermore, while existing studies have suggested concerns with preservice teaching being experiences entwined with scripted curriculums (e.g., Holt, 2021), this research

demonstrates the opposite. For these teachers, because their student teaching experiences aligned with future teaching expectations, including using the same scripted curriculum, teachers found these to be supportive training experiences. However, numerous questions still exist about longer-term impacts regarding transferability. Will teachers still be able to navigate curriculums if they move into a different teaching context with less compatibility? Will these experiences be compatible when teaching different demographics of the student populations regarding cultural and linguistic diversity?

Collectively, these findings are essential for future curriculum development. Even as novices, these teachers had valuable implementation feedback about the curriculum that seemed to go unsolicited by their schools or the district. They identified concerns with the PD opportunities, the curriculum materials, and the feasibility of implementing the resources into their teaching contexts and supporting their MLs. By leveraging teachers' voices, curriculums can be improved, ensuring more substantial alignment with the needs of teachers and MLs. However, simply asking teachers for their perspectives once will not be enough support. Curriculum development must be an ongoing, iterative process involving researchers, curriculum publishers, and practitioners. Continual adaption will allow for addressing tensions regarding implementation barriers, feasibility, and altering curriculum materials to reflect MLs and their diverse linguistic needs (Gadke et al., 2021; Zucker et al., 2021).

Finally, while this study provides a foundation for future research and extends the existing literature on literacy curriculums, its limitations highlight potential new avenues of study that are important for future investigations. The first new area of research regards this study's methodological design due to the nature of phenomenology. Primarily, because the interest of this study was solely the participants' experiences, it does not include observations of

the teachers' instruction as they engage with the curriculum in their literacy classrooms. Additional observational data would allow for pertinent insight into the physical context. As such, it is probable that additional curricular engagement and differentiation may be taking place within these spaces that went unmentioned by the educators. Furthermore, future studies explicitly investigating students' perceptions and engagement levels with scripted curriculums would be helpful. There is also a need for more studies on what Tran & O'Conner (2024) deem "teacher curriculum competence," or the investigation of how and why teachers interact with curriculums in particular ways (p. 1). Specifically, teachers' active transition between the official and teacher-intended curricula remains largely underexplored.

As an additional future area of research, the teachers in this study were a relatively homogeneous group of educators, as most identified as white, female, and as monolingual English speakers. While these gender and racial demographics mirror the current demographics of the teaching profession in elementary schools (de Brey et al., 2019), there is absolutely a need to understand a wider variety of teachers' experiences with literacy curriculums. Specifically, investigating multilingual teachers' experiences, such as Julieta's in this study, would be pertinent to better understanding how these educators use their linguistic assets to engage with curriculums and instruct students.

Finally, limitations exist due to timing as these teachers were novice educators. As previous phenomenological scholars have addressed (e.g., Moustakas, 1994), their current opinions and feelings about the investigated phenomenon are essential but are only a minute snapshot of their full teaching career. Their opinions may change as they move from novice to veteran teachers, and future studies are warranted to further understand these teachers' experiences beyond the typical stress of the first year of teaching when it comes to teaching

MLs. Thus, one further avenue of exploration is to examine how teachers' interactions and perceptions of curriculums longitudinally change as they progress through their teaching careers and potentially grow their pedagogical knowledge regarding literacy instruction for MLs.

Conclusion

Implementing literacy curriculums to support students' reading and writing achievement is a complicated endeavor. However, this is especially true for novice teachers who need adequate support to successfully navigate and implement these robust resources for diverse populations of learners. Because of the broad implementation of scripted literacy curriculums in schools, both curriculum impacts and teacher experiences are important topics to continue to explore in tandem. Amplifying the voices of teachers is necessary for understanding curricular impacts on educators and students, specifically for those identified as MLs.

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Table 1

Demographics and Descriptive Data of Teacher Participants and Their Teaching Context.

	Total (N = 14)
Teacher Demographics	n
Gender	
Male	2
Female	12
Race/ethnicity	
Asian	0
Black	0
Hispanic	1
White	13
Teaching Context	
Title-1 School	8
Grade-Level	
First	2
Second	2
Third	4
Fourth	3
Fifth	3

Note. Title-1 School = Federal definition of a school identified as having at least 40% of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch status.

CHAPTER 4

Exploring the Role of Early-Grade English Learners' Language and Reading Proficiency in Writing Abilities

Abstract

The primary goal of this study was to examine the relationship between oral language proficiency, early reading abilities, domain-specific vocabulary skills, and writing quality for developing elementary multilingual students classified as English Learners (ML-ELs). During a prior larger study, three assessments were used to measure ML-EL's writing proficiencies, including the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) ACCESS assessment of English writing skills, a social studies argumentative prompt, and a science argumentative prompt. The data from first- and second-graders' ($N = 633$) writing samples were analyzed using hierarchical linear modeling as a secondary analysis of existing data. Correlational results provide tentative support for the conclusion that specific foundational literacy skills may be related to ML-EL's writing abilities. Practical applications of this research involved emphasizing early reading abilities, oral language skills, and domain-specific vocabulary, which are associated with ML-EL's writing outcomes in content areas and literacy spaces.

Introduction

Writing is a skill that must be taught for several reasons, including the importance of advanced writing abilities for success in schools, careers, and higher education. Writing is a powerful tool for learning, communicating, and critical thinking as learners organize and process their ideas through orthographic means. Despite its value, learning to write is a linguistically and cognitively complex task for all learners (Graham, 2019; Sato & Thompson, 2020). Because writing is an expressive skill, it is cognitively laborious as learners determine *what* to write and *how* to write it (Berninger & Winn, 2006). For example, consider the heightened cognitive demands students face while sculpting an argumentative writing piece. Foremost, students must generate a cohesive opinion supported by thoroughly developed reasons and examples that align with a prompt. Then, by applying numerous foundational writing skills (e.g., handwriting, spelling, punctuation), students must physically transcribe their ideas onto paper. From a linguistic perspective, writing also requires students to navigate discrete language skills as learners intentionally select pertinent vocabulary, address syntax, and build upon grammar understandings. Successful writing of a cohesive text requires students to simultaneously process information, develop ideas, and orthographically represent thoughts to others, which makes proficient writing a difficult task for any student to master (Berninger & Winn, 2006; Gough & Tunmer, 1986).

However, acquiring the necessary English writing skills is particularly challenging for the growing population of multilingual students classified as English Learners (ML-ELs) present within U.S. schools. Writing is a unique process for these students, requiring additional cognitive effort because of the complexities of learning two languages simultaneously (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020). ML-ELs must navigate their full linguistic resources to be successful writers, translating

words and ideas across languages. As an example, consider an argumentative writing task again, but from the ML-EL student perspective. In addition to coordinating idea generation, organization, and transcription skills to develop an opinion, ML-ELs must grapple with English morphology, semantics, and culturally specific pragmatics to effectively communicate their arguments, further increasing the difficulty of the writing task. Language abilities are integrally related to writing outcomes. Thus, ML-ELs require consideration for their full linguistic repertoires during writing instruction.

With that said, ML-ELs additionally face other contextual barriers impacting the successful development of their writing abilities. Primarily, ML-ELs traditionally receive solely monolingual literacy instruction rather than the native-language support needed to become proficient readers and writers (Ardila et al., 2017; Relyea & Hwang, 2024). Furthermore, regardless of the broad awareness that learning to compose text is a complex yet necessary task for developing writers (Graham, 2019), advancing students' writing skills has historically been considered secondary to learning to read (Graham et al., 2018). Prior evidence from both teacher surveys (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Richards et al., 2012) and classroom observations (Coker et al., 2016; Puranik et al., 2014; Spencer & Petersen, 2018) have shown that students typically receive inadequate writing instruction in terms of both quantity and quality in literacy classrooms. In other words, the small amount of writing instruction ML-ELs receive is likely to be pedagogically inferior compared to that obtained for the domain of reading (Coker et al., 2018). Finally, teachers often express feeling unprepared to support students' linguistic diversity, resulting in ML-ELs not receiving the instructional resources needed to reach success (Coady et al., 2011). Ultimately, the gaps between evidence-based research and actual instruction, combined with the challenges of writing in English - a language that ML-ELs are still acquiring -

dramatically impact the development of ML-ELs' writing abilities. In fact, students identified as ML-ELs score lower on national writing assessments than their monolingual peers, indicating a noteworthy disparity in their writing skills (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). This mismatch of literacy achievement underscores the urgent need for targeted writing support, ensuring ML-EL students can succeed in their future academic and professional lives.

Despite these outlined challenges, even at early ages, ML-ELs face ambitious expectations to compose advanced written texts, including in the genres of argumentative, opinion, and narrative writing, which are each commonly found on state-wide testing (Behizadeh & Pang, 2016; Tortorelli et al., 2021). Beginning in Kindergarten, students are expected to express their opinions and tell stories through written texts. However, writing standards grow in complexity across the grade levels. By fifth grade, writers are expected to sculpt cohesive and logically ordered texts supported by facts, details, and advanced craft moves intended to engage a reader (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO], 2010). Furthermore, each of the three main genres typically addressed by elementary standards is unique, requiring different demands of learners (Collins et al., 2021). Each genre necessitates various understandings of its specific elements, and subsequently, the application of distinctive skills to compose each genre is required (Graham et al., 2018; J. Kim et al., 2015). For example, the organizational structure of a narrative (e.g., beginning, middle, and end) differs from that of an argumentative text, which requires logical reasoning and evidence. Additional work is needed to inform classroom instruction, fully understand the relationships among language skills and potential differences across genres, and how these skills may differ for ML-ELs compared to monolingual English speakers.

Consequently, genre-based writing is a foundational skill that needs to be adequately developed starting in the earliest grade levels of elementary schools rather than waiting until students are fluent readers or proficient English speakers. However, these outlined intricacies of learning to write spotlight that children who are both ML-ELs and early in their literacy development could conceivably struggle with composing genre-based texts regardless of the expectations for their grade level. In order to better understand ML-ELs' writing development and subsequently advance classroom writing instruction, it is crucial to examine and identify which specific literacy precursor skills constitute increased writing outcomes for learners. Thus, this study focuses on the extent to which ML-ELs' early literacy skills, English oral language proficiency, and domain-specific vocabulary knowledge are associated with first- and second-graders' writing outcomes for the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA; 2020) writing assessment and content-based argumentative writing.

Influential Factors of Writing Ability

Reading and Writing Relationships

Considerable research has suggested that reading and writing abilities are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000; Shanahan, 2016; Y.-S. Kim et al., 2018, 2024). Thus, it is believed that advancing a learner's writing abilities can positively impact elementary learners' growth in reading as well as vice versa (Graham & Harris, 2017). Specifically, phonological and orthographic knowledge have been identified as being closely linked, and readers and writers must master many of the same literacy subcomponents (e.g., spelling and letter-sound correspondence) to both comprehend and produce texts (Berninger & Abbott, 2010; Shanahan, 2016). Because reading and writing are both forms of communication, they are interactive, drawing from a shared body of early literacy knowledge and similar

cognitive skills (Ahmed et al., 2014; Juel et al., 1986; Y.-S. Kim et al., 2015). However, less is known about the nuanced intricacies that may exist within the reciprocities of reading and writing skills (Kent & Wanzek, 2016), specifically for ML-ELs. As one example, successful reading requires the usage of both code-based reading skills (e.g., phonics, decoding) and meaning-focused skills for language comprehension (e.g., background knowledge and verbal reasoning) (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). For writing, the usage of code-based and meaning-based literacy skills for written outcomes is an area that requires more investigation.

Vocabulary is one central component illustrating the interwoven relationship between reading and writing, as more extensive vocabulary networks are associated with improved literacy abilities (Lesaux et al., 2014; Truckenmiller & Petscher, 2019; Y.-S. Kim et al., 2024). Explicit vocabulary instruction advances word knowledge, influencing students' ability to read and write high-level texts (Graham et al., 2015; Wright & Cervetti, 2016). When students expand their vocabulary networks, they can utilize these terms to bolster their reading comprehension while integrating the same vocabulary into their writing for enhanced compositions (Baker et al., 2014; Dobbs & Kearns, 2016). Over time, vocabulary knowledge accumulates, laying the groundwork for future word expertise and literacy growth (Beck et al., 2013). Vocabulary's association with writing quality is specifically true for genre-based writing and content-area writing, which require specialized academic vocabulary (Nagy & Townsend, 2012). Access to word knowledge and understanding of linguistic relationships is essential for effective writing; however, vocabulary usage can vary across writing genres (Olinghouse & Wilson, 2013) and disciplinary subjects (Schleppegrell, 2004; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). For instance, Tier 2 vocabulary, also deemed general academic terms, such as the words "opinion" or "reason," are standard within the genre of argumentative texts (Beck et al., 2013; Nagy & Townsend, 2012).

Likewise, knowledge of Tier 3 domain-specific words such as "habitats," "adaptations," or "migrate" will impact students' ability to comprehend and sculpt writing about distinctive science or social studies topics. In this regard, vocabulary knowledge is essential to background knowledge, enabling writers to pull from prior language experiences to respond to writing responses.

Explicitly teaching vocabulary tailored for types of writing has been shown to be impactful for developing ML-EL writers (Baker et al., 2014; Silverman et al., 2015; Silverman et al., 2021), including in the form of intervention research (Silverman et al., 2021). Unfortunately, this body of vocabulary research is less robust as compared to that for monolingual learners. In one recent randomized control trial, Relyea and colleagues (2024) found a statistical significance for domain-specific vocabulary for ML-EL's social studies writing outcomes but not for the domain of science. Similarly, Shen and Coker (2022) demonstrated reading and writing relationships using regression models to better understand the predictive role of vocabulary knowledge in ML-ELs' writing performances. Their results underscored vocabulary knowledge's multidimensional yet present predictive role for ML-ELs' writing outcomes in the genres of narrative and descriptive writing. Taken together, enriching vocabulary instruction and explicitly teaching domain-specific words may enhance elementary ML-EL's writing outcomes concerning genre-based writing.

Oral Language and Writing Development

Similar to vocabulary, budding research has pointed to the importance of explicit instruction of oral language skills to support writing development for all elementary writers (Kent & Wanzek, 2016) and specifically for multilingual speakers (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020; Escamilla et al., 2022). Oral language is both a receptive (listening) and expressive (speaking)

skill. Specifically for content-based writing prompts, students need robust receptive oral language repertories to process background texts before writing and responding to prompts. Then, expressive oral language skills will be required to generate new ideas and produce texts with intentional word choice, style, and writing traits. Thus, students with poorly developed oral language skills may struggle to express their thoughts and ideas in the form of writing (Baker et al., 2014; Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020). For example, Peng et al.'s (2022) inquiry into cognitive skills explored the predictive relationship between oral language abilities and writing achievement. Their results showed that English oral language skills strongly predicted writing abilities for narrative writing in the upper elementary grades. Similarly, Silverman et al.'s (2015) elementary skills study investigated elementary ML-ELs and English-only writers, finding a positive relationship between vocabulary breadth and the quality of student-composed narratives. This research implicates the importance of integrated classroom opportunities to assist students' advancement of their oral language skills for increased writing outcomes. Both of these studies were completed with upper-grade ML-ELs, but less is known about vocabulary's relationship for younger students early in their writing development. Furthermore, despite the outlined knowledge that oral language skills are influential for writing development, it is essential to note that research has also highlighted that no minimal level of oral language proficiency is required before writing skills can be developed for learners (Shanahan, 2016). Reading, oral language, and writing skills develop in tandem, and students must be offered ample and early structured opportunities to develop each of these literacy aptitudes regardless of their current proficiency in the other domains (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020; Escamilla et al., 2022).

In addition to oral language proficiency playing a vital role in writing outcomes, oral language opportunities support students while they navigate the writing process. Orally

discussing and planning writing can enrich ML-ELs' writing compositions and build a supportive classroom community of writers (Graham et al., 2018; Traga-Philippakos et al., 2018). The dynamic interplay between oracy and written language is apparent when students interact, collaborate, and develop their writing skills communicatively with others. For example, in Bernstein's (2017) ethnography focused on pre-k ML-ELs, oral language helped to expand students' zone of proximal development (see Vygotsky, 1978). Orally planning and composing enriched the students' vocabulary when they collaborated to create jointly written texts. Hong (2018) echoed the importance of oral language as a scaffold for the writing process. She argues that incorporating oral discussion opportunities encourages students to work through the idea-generation process while motivating writers "to observe, talk, and think like poets" (p. 176). In this study, flexible oral communication allowed students to solve problems and address questions they encountered while completing the writing task. Oral language directly maps onto written language abilities, allowing students to build vocabulary knowledge and communicate with peers while working through the writing process to successfully compose written texts. Promoting oral language usage in writing classrooms can allow multilingual students to expand their written and verbal language competencies and, thus, impact their writing outcomes.

Theoretical Models of Writing

Theoretical models of writing development emphasize the process of written text creation as complex and involving the simultaneous usage of numerous cognitive functions (Kim & Park, 2019). Primarily, the simple view of writing (SVW; Berninger et al., 2002) outlined two skill strands influencing the extent to which learners can engage with a writing task. The first strand is ideation, encompassing the skills of idea generation, word choice, and understanding of the distinctive genre. The second strand, transcription, comprises of handwriting, spelling, and

mechanics. The SVW theory argues that as the skills of ideation and transcription are interwoven, and as each becomes increasingly automatic, skilled writing becomes the outcome.

Over time, the simple view of writing theory has been expanded, and a third component addressing critical executive functioning skills has been hypothesized. Deemed the not-so-simple view of writing (NSSVW), this adapted theory emphasizes the role of self-regulatory skills (e.g., goal setting, planning, and revising) needed for writers to successfully navigate through the writing process and produce written texts (Berninger & Winn, 2006).

More recently, Kim and Park (2019) expanded upon these original models, proposing a more nuanced theory of writing development called the Direct and Indirect Effects Model of Writing (DIEW). This model hypothesizes that the component skills of discourse and oral language proficiency, including vocabulary and grammar knowledge, are additionally impactful for developing young learners' writing abilities. Within the DIEW model, cognitive and executive functioning skills (e.g., working memory) foundationally support transcription abilities and discourse oral language skills. Higher-order oral language skills (e.g., inference, perspective taking, monitoring) build upon these foundational literacy skills, combining dynamically with students' affective writing needs and background knowledges to produce written compositions. As these underlying skills extend, children can construct more advanced written texts in terms of quality and complexity.

In research, DIEW has been used to examine the relationship between foundational language, literacy skills, and writing abilities for English-speaking children (Kim & Graham, 2022; Kim & Schatschneider, 2017); however, less is known about how this model might apply to children who are identified as ML-ELs. To fully understand the extent of the model's generalizability, it is necessary to test its relevance for ML-ELs whose writing development is

increasingly complicated because of the nature of learning two languages simultaneously. In addition to possible variations by language status, there is limited knowledge about how this model might need to be modified for individual genres and for writing embedded into content area instruction. For example, argumentative writing demands distinct cognitive and linguistic skills compared to other genres, as it requires the usage of logical reasoning, supporting evidence, and persuasive language to convey one's argument effectively. This study sought to broaden the understanding of the DIEW model by exploring how – and to what extent- measures of English oral language proficiency, early reading proficiency, and domain-specific vocabulary knowledge may be associated with young ML-EL's writing quality.

Genre-Based Writing: Argumentative Texts

While considered a necessary aptitude, genre-based writing tasks are exceptionally difficult for beginning writers to master. However, among the three distinct genres (e.g., narrative, argumentative, informative/explanatory) typically outlined by state standards (e.g., NGA & CCSSO, 2010), argumentative writing can be particularly challenging. Argumentative writing requires learners to navigate the writing process, consolidating ideas and producing a cohesive, well-developed text that presents a clear opinion. While clearly a complex task, empirical research supports the need for students to engage with argumentative writing texts even at early ages (Graham et al., 2018). In fact, the What Works Clearinghouse (Baker et al., 2014) reports strong evidence for and recommends that educators "teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes," including the genre of argumentative writing (Graham et al., 2018, p. 12). The successful development of an argument through written discourse is a key feature of effective academic writing and a lifelong skill necessary for school and career success.

Extensive research has substantiated writing as a tool for facilitating the learning of content area material in subjects such as science and social studies (Graham et al., 2020). Critically responding to reading sources through the semiotic mode of writing allows students to increase their comprehension of texts, process information more effectively, and enhance learning (Graham et al., 2020). Content-based structured writing opportunities, such as those used in this research, allow teachers to assess students' writing skills while simultaneously addressing misconceptions about content-area topics (Fisher & Frey, 2013). When argumentative writing and content area topics are fused, learners have opportunities to grapple with ideas and deeply process disciplinary knowledge. However, content-based argumentative writing tasks may be increasingly sophisticated for students to accomplish. These prompts typically require learners to process background informational texts and select specific supporting evidence before incorporating these attributions into a composition to further develop their opinions.

Overall, the type of writing practice matters for students, and children benefit from generative writing tasks (Coker et al., 2018), such as content-area argumentative writing tasks (Graham et al., 2018). However, relatively little research has explored the precursory skills that may be associated with young students' abilities, specifically those children considered ML-ELs, when writing these challenging texts. Unanswered questions also persist about how the relationship between foundational literacy skills may differ for social studies and science disciplines when students write argumentative texts within these content-area subjects. As a result, researchers are still determining exactly how literacy skills relate to students' abilities to create grade-level performances within the genre of argumentative writing.

The Present Study

Overall, foundational writing research highlights that proficient writing correlates with sophisticated early reading skills (e.g., Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000; Shanahan, 2016; Y.-S. Kim et al., 2018). This body of research suggests that the more writers advance early literacy skills specifically tied to successful reading, the stronger their subsequent writing compositions will likely be (Graham & Harris, 2017).

However, our understanding of the nature of developmental writing, specifically for elementary ML-ELs, is more limited for three reasons. First, the majority of current research focused on argumentative writing has been completed with students in the upper-grade levels and higher education (e.g., Zhang, 2021). Instead, it is essential to identify specific literacy skills that enhance students' abilities to become proficient writers from an early age, thereby increasing educators' abilities to establish a solid foundation for ML-ELs' lifelong writing capabilities. Second, several studies have shown that ML-ELs struggle to write at proficiency levels comparable to their monolingual peers (NCES, 2017; Silverman et al., 2015). This disparity is exacerbated by the complexities of simultaneously learning two languages, and thus, ML-ELs are more likely to encounter natural challenges while learning to write and compose (Proctor et al., 2020). Third, distinctions may exist in the relationships between foundational literacy skills and writing success for different genres (Olinghouse & Wilson, 2013) and potentially for varying content area subjects. However, despite the need to investigate these discrepancies for ML-ELs, given their still-developing English language skills, there is sparse empirical research exploring these potential nuances.

Therefore, the primary goal of this study was to address this gap in knowledge by investigating the nature of the relationships between various early literacy skills and writing

outcomes for young ML-EL writers. Specifically, I examined English oral language proficiency, early reading abilities, and domain-specific vocabulary knowledge to learn more about potential relationships between these variables and ML-ELs' WIDA (2020) writing and argumentative writing outcomes. Specifically, we asked the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent are first- and second-grade ML-ELs' English oral language proficiency, early reading proficiency, and domain-specific vocabulary knowledge associated with their science and social studies argumentative writing?

RQ2: To what extent are first- and second-grade ML-ELs' English oral language proficiency, reading proficiency, and domain-specific vocabulary knowledge associated with their WIDA writing ability?

To address this question, data was collected from first- and second-grade children who were administered three writing tasks, including two content area (science and social studies) argumentative writing prompts and the WIDA (2020) writing assessment. These student writing samples were collected during a prior cluster randomized control trial called the Model of Reading Engagement (MORE), which investigated a tier-1 elementary content-area literacy intervention (J. Kim et al., 2021). For the purpose of this study, only the writing samples from the control group participants who received business as usual (BAU) instruction and, thus, did not participate in the intervention treatment were used for analysis.

Method

Study Design and Participants

This study is a secondary analysis using data from the control group of a previously conducted cluster randomized controlled trial (RCT) with a randomized block design (J. Kim et al., 2021). The original RCT occurred across 30 elementary schools (307 classrooms) in a large

urban school district in the southeastern United States, where schools were stratified into seven blocks based on demographic characteristics and academic performance. For the present study, I focus solely on the control group, which did not receive the intervention, to examine the associations of early literacy skills, domain-specific vocabulary, and oral language proficiency with writing outcomes.

Students in the present study comprised 633 children in Grades 1 (n = 284) and Grades 2 (n = 349). The school district identified all children included in this study as ML-ELs. To be identified, parents filled out a home language survey when enrolling their child into the school system, indicating that the family primarily used a language other than English in the home. These children were then assessed using the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) ACCESS for ML-ELs 2.0 assessment (2020), which assesses English language proficiency in four domains: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. If students scored below the proficiency score of 5.0 in one of the domains, they were classified with the status of EL. This classification allowed the children to qualify for additional language support while attending school.

Additional details about the participants' demographics are presented in Table 1. The student sample was 56% female, and 57% were considered as having a low socioeconomic status (SES) defined by their eligibility for free or reduced lunch. As for race, approximately 75% of the participants identified as Hispanic/Latinx, 15% as Asian, 5% as White, and 5% as Black.

Student Measures

The first- and second-grade participants were assessed on the following constructs: argumentative writing, English writing proficiency, English oral language proficiency, early literacy skills, and domain-specific vocabulary knowledge.

Writing Outcomes

Argumentative Writing. Students were assessed on their argumentative writing abilities by engaging with a provided writing prompt for both a science and social studies topic. During the data collection phase of the MORE study (J. Kim et al., 2021), first- and second-graders were read aloud a short social studies or science-themed informational passage, which provided background information about the topic. Then, students were read an open-ended argumentative writing prompt relevant to the text. Finally, students were reminded of the components of a solid argumentative text and were directed to compose a thoughtful response to express their opinions regarding the prompt. The four writing prompts utilized with the first- and second-grade participants are listed in Table 2.

After the writing responses were collected, the researchers of the MORE study (J. Kim et al., 2021) applied a stepwise procedure to assess the students' compositions. First, trained researchers digitally transcribed each composition, and spelling and punctuation errors were corrected. Editing the children's writing reduced potential bias due to presentation effects, lessening the influence of the quality of students' handwriting on the final rubric scores (Graham et al., 2011). Second, argumentative writing quality was operationalized as the extent and clarity of idea development and organization as measured by a genre-specific rubric. Specifically, students' written responses were evaluated with scores of 0-7 of holistic text quality by receiving scores in three domains: claim (2 points), evidence (4 points), and conclusion (1 point). This rubric was created based on past research identifying best practices when assessing students' argumentative writing samples (e.g., Graham et al., 2011). An interrater reliability test was conducted on 20% of randomly selected writing samples for assessment validation purposes.

Cohen's κ values ranged from .92-.99, indicating high rates of coordinate agreement between the raters when using the writing rubric.

English Writing Proficiency. The WIDA (2020) writing assessment was administered to assess students' English writing abilities. WIDA is a collective English language proficiency assessment for ML-ELs taken annually by kindergarten through twelfth-grade students. As a consideration of age-appropriateness, first- and second-graders were administered the writing assessment using a computer interface. Students are given constructed response items during the writing tasks at the word, sentence, and composition levels, and the testing can take up to 90 minutes. The students' responses are submitted to WIDA and scored by trained raters using a detailed rubric. Afterward, students receive a scaled score between 100 and 600, reflecting their English proficiency abilities in the domain of writing.

As a comparison, the researcher-developed argumentative writing prompts evaluated genre-based argumentative writing expectations, assessing students' abilities to create claims, evidence, and conclusions to support their argument. However, the WIDA (2020) writing assessment instead considers the comprehensiveness and appropriateness of the students' produced text. The rubric captures a more holistic and unique picture of students' English linguistic abilities by assessing across the three domains of linguistic complexity, language forms, and vocabulary usage.

English Oral Language Proficiency

The WIDA (2020) assessment was also used to measure student's English oral language proficiency. Because oral language abilities are multifarious, both the productive (speaking) and receptive (listening) scores were used in the analysis for this specific study. Similar to the writing assessment portion, students receive a scaled score between 100 and 600, reflecting their English

oral language proficiency levels. Both the speaking and listening assessments were administered using a computer. For the speaking assessment, students are first given dialogue-based speaking prompts accompanied by images. Then, the assessment platform guides the student to record a coherent verbal response using the computer's microphone. After test submission, WIDA assessment administrators score the speaking domain using a rubric that analyzes the same three language domains employed in the writing portion (e.g., linguistic complexity, language forms, and vocabulary usage). For the listening assessment, students attend to pre-recorded passages through the computer interface. The assessment coaches students to select answers and images aligning with the listening comprehension questions. The online testing platform operates an adaptive design that automatically scores the students' responses during administration.

Early Reading Proficiency

Reading Comprehension. The Measure of Academic Progress (MAP; Northwest Evaluation Association [NWEA], 2019) assessment measured students' reading comprehension. The MAP is a computer-adaptive literacy assessment that captures student reading comprehension growth and proficiencies using a scaled score. The measure assesses reading skills, including students' foundational literacy skills (e.g., phonics, decoding), fiction and nonfiction comprehension, understanding of language conventions, and domain-specific vocabulary knowledge. Performance on MAP yields an overall interval Rasch unit (RIT) score, which is used as a mediating variable in this study. The test-retest reliabilities for the state were reported to be between .90 and .91 (NWEA, 2019).

Early Literacy Skills. The commonly used mCLASS Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS; University of Oregon, 2012) measured students' early literacy skills, including code-based skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. The K-3

DIBELS assessment includes numerous subtests; however, the composite score was utilized for this study. A composite score is achieved by combining the subtest scores for nonsense word reading fluency, oral reading fluency, and phonemic awareness, which provides insight into students' early reading proficiencies. The interrater and test-retest reliabilities of the composite scores ranged from 0.88 to 0.98 for the two grade levels.

Domain-Specific Vocabulary Knowledge

A semantic association task (Read, 1998, 2004) was used to measure students' domain-specific vocabulary knowledge for the disciplines of science and social studies. This assessment evaluates a learner's ability to identify connections between semantically related words. For this task, students were guided to select two semantically connected words to the target word (e.g., big and large). The reported internal consistency (Cronbach's α) for this assessment is .91.

Control Variables

The analytic models accounted for several student-level control variables, (i.e., students' demographic information of gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), Individualized Education Plan (IEP) status, and grade level). Additionally, the models account for the randomization of school blocks, where schools were stratified into seven blocks on demographic characteristics and academic performance before random assignment.

Data Analysis

The primary analytical strategies were Hierarchical Linear Models (HLM; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) that were used to account for the nested nature of the data (Level 1: students; Level 2: schools). The outcome variables for each model were the three student writing outcomes (e.g., WIDA writing, social studies argumentative writing, and science argumentative writing). The composite equation is written as follows:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{10}(WIDA\_Speaking)_j + \beta_{20}(WIDA\_Listening)_{ij} + \beta_{30}(MAP)_{ij} +$$

$$\beta_{40}(DIBELS)_{ij} + \sum_{p=5}^{10} \beta_{p0}(COV)_{ij} + \sum_{q=1}^{6} \beta_{0q}(BLOCK)_j + \varepsilon_{ij} + \zeta_{0j},$$

where Y_{ij} denotes the writing outcomes (WIDA writing and science and social studies argumentative writing) for student *i* in school *j*; *COV* indicates student-level demographic covariates (grade, gender, Hispanic, IESP statis, and SES); and *BLOCK* refers to dummy-coded school blocks. The model included random effects at student (ε_{ij}) and school (ζ_{0j}) level, assumed to be normally distributed. The hierarchical linear model analysis was conducted using Stata 18.0 (StataCorp, 2023).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analysis

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics for the entire sample, including means, standard deviations, minimums, and maximums. On average, the ML-EL participants in this study had similar English listening (*M* = 322.25, *SD* = 58.34) as compared to WIDA's overall reported results (*M* = 323) for early elementary students in the first and second grades during the same school year of 2020 (Poole & Sahakyan, 2024). However, the participants in this study scored lower in the domain of speaking (*M* = 253.87, *SD* = 52.96) than WIDA's reported aggregated data for the full population of students assessed in the early grades (*M* = 261).

Per writing outcomes, students scored higher on average on the social studies argumentative (*M* = 2.81, *SD* = 1.89) writing than the science argumentative writing (*M* = 2.56, *SD* = 1.78). However, the average scores on both writing outcomes could be considered low overall because the maximum score was 7, and the mean student performance was well below this score. Regarding writing scores as measured by WIDA, students scored (*M* = 282.78, *SD* = 42.73), slightly higher than WIDA's total population reported results (*M* = 275) (Poole &

Sahakyan, 2024). As an additional note, because WIDA's (2020) scores are scaled, they cannot be compared across the domains of speaking, listening, and writing.

Table 3 also displays a bivariate correlational matrix between all the variables in columns 6-13. Preliminary analysis showed that the patterns of relations were highly similar for first- and second-grade students, so the results from the combined data are presented. As shown, the writing outcome measures are moderately and statistically significantly correlated among themselves (*r*s between .36 and .41), indicating shared variance between these factors. This outcome is to be expected as strong writers are likely to be still more successful than struggling writers, regardless of the given writing task. Similarly, WIDA speaking, listening, and writing scores were moderately correlated (*r*s between .45 and .53). This is also anticipated to some degree given that these three measures of English Language proficiency are from the same assessment and consequently share measurement variance. Furthermore, prior research has shown these language skills work in tandem for ML-ELs (Relyea et al., 2024). Thus, if a student struggles in one domain of the English language (e.g., listening comprehension), there is likely an association with proficiency in the other two areas of language learning (e.g., speaking or reading comprehension). Regarding oral language proficiency, correlation magnitudes for listening and writing outcomes (*r*s = .33-.53) were greater than that of speaking and writing (*r*s = .18-.45). The analyses indicated that both MAP and DIBELS reading measures were positively and weakly or moderately correlated with all writing outcomes. Interestingly, though, correlations were consistently stronger for MAP (*r*s = .46-56), an assessment measure of meaning-based reading comprehension. Meanwhile, DIBELS, a code-based reading measure, had smaller correlational measures (*r*s = .37-47) regarding ML-ELs' writing outcomes. Vocabulary and writing correlations with the same academic domains, such as pairing science

vocabulary and science writing, were stronger than cross-domain correlations (e.g., social studies writing and science vocabulary). However, vocabulary and writing relationships were more substantial for the academic discipline of social studies (*r*s = .38) than for science (*r*s = .28).

RQ1: **To what extent are first- and second-grade ML-ELs' English oral language proficiency, early reading proficiency, and domain-specific vocabulary knowledge associated with their science and social studies argumentative writing?**

Three HLM models were conducted to explore the predictive relationship between early literacy skills and students' writing outcomes while controlling for demographic factors and grade level. As shown in Table 4, science argumentative writing was significantly predicted by MAP reading proficiency (β = .31, SE = .10, $p < .001$). WIDA listening and speaking did not significantly predict science argumentative writing ($p > .05$). Social studies argumentative writing was significantly predicted by MAP (β = .19, SE = .09, $p < .05$), DIBELS (β = .21, SE = .07, $p < .01$), and social studies vocabulary (β = .20, SE = .06, $p < .01$).

RQ2: **To what extent are first- and second-grade ML-ELs' English oral language proficiency, reading proficiency, and domain-specific vocabulary knowledge associated with their WIDA writing ability?**

Table 4 displays results of the HLM model for ML-EL's WIDA writing outcome. WIDA writing was significantly predicted by WIDA oral language domains: WIDA speaking (β = .10, SE = .03, $p < .01$) and WIDA listening (β = .19, SE = .03, $p < .001$). In addition, WIDA writing was significantly predicted by MAP (β = .20, SE = .05, $p < .001$) and DIBELS (β = .26, SE = .04, $p < .001$) reading proficiency. However, neither social studies nor science domain-specific vocabulary knowledge significantly predicted WIDA writing scores (*ps* > .05).

Discussion

Despite increasing literacy expectations, it has been widely acknowledged that students across the United States are not writing at proficient levels (NCES, 2017). Given the importance of strong writing skills for future learning and academic success, it is crucial to identify specific foundational skills that may be predictive of ML-ELs' abilities to become proficient writers. While existing research has explored the role of foundational literacy skills in writing development (e.g., Kent & Wanzek, 2016; Kittle et al., 2024), less is known about the nuances of these relationships across various language statuses and writing genres. This study extends current research, indicating four key findings regarding the early writing development of ML-ELs.

First, early reading proficiency demonstrated a significant relationship for both argumentative genre-based writing and WIDA writing outcomes consistent with extensive previous research suggesting that reading and writing skills are reciprocal (Y.S. Kim et al., 2018, 2024; Shanahan, 2016). However, this study also adds new information about how the strength of these relationships may vary for ML-ELs depending on the nature of the reading construct. As ML-ELs' reading abilities become heightened by strong instructional practices, students' writing abilities will grow accordingly (Graham & Harris, 2017; Shanahan, 2016). Interestingly, in this study, the meaning-based reading outcome of MAP was more closely related to all three writing outcome measures. Meanwhile, DIBELS, a code-based reading variable, was less correlated with students' writing outcomes. This finding might suggest that the contribution of reading proficiencies to writing outcomes is largely shared with reading comprehension development for at least this point in early writing development. Writing is not merely about putting words to paper; it involves constructing a coherent argument based on text-based evidence comprehended

through reading. Through this process, children lean on both word recognition (e.g., decoding, phonics) and language comprehension skills for writing development (Berninger et al., 2002). However, the findings in this study suggest that comprehension-based instructional practices could have a more significant association with learners' writing development if educators are seeking to specifically advance these literacy skills.

Furthermore, the reading and writing relationships found within this study reinforce that ML-ELs need rich opportunities to create texts, particularly with the support of reading passages that supply background knowledge about domain-specific topics. From this perspective, directly utilizing reading and writing connections to support students' orthographic outcomes is a powerful literacy opportunity for ML-ELs. In this study, science and social studies source texts provided background information to students before composing their argumentative texts. However, prior research has also shown that written texts are valuable to writers in other ways (Moses et al., 2016; Salmerón, 2022). As mentor texts, the presence of disciplinary passages allows for the enhancement of students' writing because they contain domain-specific vocabulary, conceptual ideas, and correct word spellings for students to emulate. As with all literacy skills, using reference texts as mentor texts requires intentionality and scaffolding (Graham et al., 2018). Educators must explicitly model and provide ample opportunities to guide students to actively engage with source texts. Directly learning how to build upon one's reading comprehension skills to respond to a genre-based writing prompt may subsequently be related ML-EL's writing outcomes.

The second finding supports that oral language proficiency plays a vital role in writing development for ML-ELs, acting as a bridge between home languages and the academic discourse required for success in school settings. Numerous previous research studies (e.g.,

Kieffer, 2012) and meta-analyses (e.g., Graham & Eslami, 2020; Kent & Wanzek, 2016) have suggested oral language as foundational for enhancing ML-ELs' literacy development. However, in this study, oral language proficiency for both speaking and listening did not have a significant relationship with argumentative writing, as might have been expected based on both previous writing research (Graham & Eslami, 2020; Kent & Wanzek, 2016) and content area research (e.g., Pollard-Durodola et al., 2017). This finding is similar to Relyea et al. (2024) study, which also found no significant relationship between oral language proficiency and content area writing outcomes for ML-ELs. Given the hierarchical structure suggested by Kim & Park's (2019) DIEW model, one potential explanation of this observation is that as students attempt more complex writing compositions, they may need to cognitively employ different foundational skills beyond simply oral language skills to successfully write. The deployment of unique skills for writing success may be particularly apparent for different genres, including those more advanced in terms of complexity, such as source-based argumentative writing tasks. While the results of this study offer little evidence that students might draw from oral language skills to write argumentative genre-based writing tasks, this remains an important area for future research as additional questions regarding this finding remain, particularly about differences across individual writing genres.

However, and possibly unique to this study, differences were identified in the extent to which oral language proficiency is portrayed in writing regarding the multifarious nature of the oral language construct. While both the domains of speaking and listening were significant predictors of WIDA writing outcomes, listening had more substantial correlational magnitudes across all three writing outcomes. This finding indicates that the predictive power of oral language may vary between the two language constructs of speaking and listening. This

distinction is particularly salient given the assumed compatibility between speaking and writing, as both are expressive literacy skills, whereas listening is a receptive language skill. Since the students in this study are early in their language learning journeys, it is possible to speculate that their English-listening skills are developing more quickly while their English-speaking skills are progressing more gradually. Thus, English listening oral language abilities might be compensating for ML-ELs' still-developing speaking language proficiency. This finding highlights the complex dynamics of oral language, wherein ML-ELs need additional classroom opportunities to speak and listen to develop their writing abilities optimally. Regardless, it still may be the case that some forms of oral language (e.g., listening) practice are more beneficial than others for writing development, and thus, additional English listening comprehension embedded into classroom practices may be influential for early developing ML-EL writers. More research will be needed to understand how these variables of oral language are related to the quality of writing compositions, especially across different grade levels and statuses of English proficiency.

The third finding indicated a positive correlation between ML-ELs' domain-specific vocabulary knowledge and writing outcomes, further testifying to Kim & Park's (2019) DIEW model of writing development. These findings also align with prior research concerning the predictive strength of vocabulary on literacy development for ML-ELs, as students with more advanced vocabularies are anticipated to have higher reading and writing outcomes (Hwang & Duke, 2020; Hwang et al., 2022; Shen & Coker, 2022). In fact, intensive vocabulary instruction is one of four recommendations outlined in the practice guide by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) for effectively teaching academic content material to ML-ELs (Baker et al., 2014).

However, vocabulary usage can vary across writing genres (Olinghouse & Wilson, 2013) and academic content areas (Schleppegrell, 2004; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012), as highlighted in this study. When accounting for the nested nature of the data, domain-specific vocabulary's predictive relationship was only significant for writing outcomes in the domain of social studies and not for science. This result is in alignment with prior intervention research (e.g., Relyea et al., 2024) that showed more pronounced effect sizes for social studies vocabulary than science on writing outcomes for ML-ELs. Given this significant relationship, ML-ELs will likely need robust opportunities for social studies vocabulary knowledge building to subsequently facilitate argumentative writing growth for this academic discipline. Interestingly, though, this result contrasts with previous literacy studies into ML-ELs' reading relationships, including the studies by Relyea and Hwang (2024) and Hwang and Duke (2020), where science knowledge played a significant role in differences in reading outcomes for ML-ELs. The nuances found in this study highlight vocabulary's complex role in reading and writing development for ML-ELs.

One potential explanation for this distinction may regard the type of vocabulary included in science texts. While Tier 3 domain-specific words do not make up the bulk of the words students encounter in written text, science texts are more likely to be characterized by these technical and specialized terms compared to the domain of social studies (Schleppegrell, 2004; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). As such, science passages challenge students to understand abstract topics that may not reflect their everyday experiences or prior background knowledge (Baker et al., 2014). Because social studies texts are more likely to have Tier 2 vocabulary than Tier 3 terminology, it may be that in classrooms where word selection for instruction is based on word frequency, these students would be more prepared to engage with these texts. Thus, comprehension of science text might require ML-ELs to make more word inferences based on

their prior knowledge, potentially obscuring the role of domain-specific vocabulary in their science writing outcomes. However, more research will be needed to confirm this hypothesis.

Additionally, it is possible that the students in this study likely lacked the necessary broad understanding of the specialized Tier 3 science vocabulary words present in the source text, which could have additionally obscured the full relationship between domain-specific vocabulary and science writing outcomes. However, the reciprocity that is present in this study between domain-specific vocabulary and writing outcomes highlights the importance of high-quality vocabulary knowledge for developmental writing growth. Aligning with extensive prior research (e.g., Dobbs & Kearns, 2016; Lesaux et al., 2014), strengthening vocabulary instruction through the inclusion of more profound word learning opportunities is an effective way to further develop ML-ELs' writing competencies, which consequently increases their content area knowledge (Baker et al., 2014). Thus, one concern raised by this study regards the standard school practice of withdrawing ML-ELs during science and social studies content area instruction and instead using the allotted time to provide supplemental English supports through ESOL programs (Hopkins et al., 2016). Exclusion during content area instruction means ML-ELs are missing vital opportunities to further expand their domain-specific vocabulary repertories that are necessary for writing growth.

Fourth and finally, the students in this study were early in their English learning journeys due to only being in the first and second grades. However, these findings indicate that when given writing opportunities to compose complex genre-based written texts, young ML-ELs are capable of success. Based on the writing outcomes (social studies: $M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.89$; Science $M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.78$), these young ML-ELs successfully engaged with content area prompts, crafting arguments and supplying reasons to support their nuanced opinions. In alignment with

prior research, this study indicates the importance of incorporating authentic and meaningful language learning experiences for ML-ELs to promote writing development and academic content area learning, even for the youngest elementary learners (Lewis, 2024; Salmerón, 2022). Rather than waiting for students to become proficient readers or proficient English speakers, ML-ELs need ample opportunities to write across the school day, including generative writing tasks that are embedded in science and social studies instruction to develop their writing abilities (Graham et al., 2020). Furthermore, these findings exemplified the need to dismantle perpetuating deficit classroom views of ML-ELs having "little" or "few" English abilities (e.g., Lew & Siffrinn, 2019; Rizzuto, 2017). Contrastingly, these findings highlight not only these students' bilingual development but also their capacity to navigate and engage with difficult argumentative writing tasks. This study substantiates that teachers must actively engage all ML-ELs with high-quality writing opportunities, visualizing students through a lens of capability and, thus, acknowledging what these children *can* do rather than leaning on simplistic concerns about what they *cannot* do in literacy spaces (August, 2018).

Taken together, these findings indicate that ML-ELs writing development can benefit from explicit literacy instruction characterized by robust and targeted opportunities for oral language growth and domain-specific vocabulary development. Furthermore, this study underscores the reciprocal nature of reading and writing for ML-ELs; thus, as multilingual children develop into better readers, their writing argumentative writing outcomes will be potentially associated.

Limitations

Despite its contributions to understanding argumentative writing outcomes in early grades, this study still has limitations that should be addressed by future research. First, as

outlined by Kim and Park's (2019) DIEW model, writing is a complex multicomponent skill. However, only the variables of domain-specific vocabulary, oral language proficiency, and early reading proficiency were investigated in this study. Therefore, the extent to which the present findings may be associated with the other elements (e.g., motivation, background knowledge) suggested in Kim and Park's (2019) model is a continuous question requiring future work. Such an investigation would provide insight into other literacy and executive functioning skills that educators can incorporate into their teaching to support the writing development of ML-ELs. For example, measuring students' transcription abilities regarding handwriting fluency and spelling would have been insightful, for lack of transcription skills has been shown to negatively impact writer outcomes, specifically in the early grades (e.g., Kim, 2020; Kim & Graham, 2020; Wanzek et al., 2017). Additional measures considering ML-ELs' transcription abilities or other writing skills highlighted by the DIEW model could be used to capture elements specifically related to students' writing success during passage-based writing assessments, such as the tasks used in this research.

Second, supplemental insight into environmental factors would be helpful in future studies. While I controlled for valuable demographic information and accounted for the nesting of the data within the schools, additional measurements would still be worthwhile for a more robust understanding of the predictive nature of these factors for ML-EL's early writing outcomes. For example, prior writing research has investigated an individual's gender, socioeconomic status (Y.-S. Kim et al., 2015), and, of course, quality of writing instruction (J. Kim et al., 2021) to understand the relationship between these variables and students' writing proficiencies. Additional similar studies scrutinizing these factors specifically for ML-ELs and content area writing would be insightful.

Third, this study only analyzed data from students who were identified as scoring below the established threshold on the WIDA (2020) English language proficiency assessment by the district. However, multilingual learners are a diverse population. Prior research has highlighted that solely analyzing subsets of the multilingual population, such as those identified as ELs, can obscure the progress of the larger population of multilingual students – students who are considered to have already achieved basic English proficiency and yet are still learning multiple languages as they continue through their academic journeys (Kieffer & Thompson, 2018). Additional research, including longitudinal studies, is needed to investigate relationships for the larger population of multilingual students, even after learners exit English support programs (e.g., ESOL programs). By evaluating broader trends in achievement, our understanding of multilingual writing development widens, likely indicating other specific precursory skills for multilinguals, including learners at advanced stages of literacy development.

Implications and Conclusions

Because of the importance of proficient writing skills for future academic and career success, it is vital to pinpoint specific foundational skills that are associated with students' abilities to become proficient writers. Overall, the findings in the present study extend research on developing young ML-ELs' writing proficiencies and have implications for educational practice.

First, this research demonstrates that ML-ELs can successfully compose argumentative writing compositions even in the early developmental years of the first and second grades. Teachers must not be afraid to offer young ML-ELs more complex genre writing tasks, especially when these opportunities are effectively scaffolded for literary development. Instead, teachers must purposefully incorporate advanced writing opportunities across academic

disciplines to assist ML-ELs in the retention of content knowledge, deepen students' level of engagement, and successfully develop foundational writing skills.

In this study, domain-specific vocabulary knowledge played a more significant role in social studies writing development than in the discipline of science for ML-ELs. Regardless, these results support the recommendations of other researchers for the explicit usage of content-enriched vocabulary practices for language learners (Baker et al., 2014; Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020). It seems clear that a broader network of word knowledge would be associated with advancing ML-ELs' reading and writing development. Thus, intentionally incorporating multiple opportunities for students to practice vocabulary can decrease the cognitive load on students during writing. Additionally, this study complicates current findings of the relationship between oral language proficiency and writing outcomes, particularly deepening understanding of the multifarious nature of oral language. It may be that higher writing outcomes are possible in classrooms where attention to listening comprehension is more commonly integrated into pedagogical practices.

Additionally, while this study concludes with important findings regarding the relationships between early literacy skills and writing outcomes, it is important to note that the argumentative writing outcomes are not a measure of total writing ability. While the WIDA (2020) writing assessment outcome more robustly captures students' total English writing proficiency, the argumentative writing outcome was computed with a rubric that assessed holistic writing quality specific to the argumentative genre. The rubric scoring evaluated the writers' usage of textual elements that are considered essential components of genre-based argumentative writing (e.g., including reasons and a conclusion). While different, these are both important measures for understanding MLs' writing abilities. Because this research addresses

these unique elements of idea development specific to argumentative writing, another rich avenue of research would be investigating similar early literacy variables and their predictive relationship with writing outcomes for other genres students are expected to compose in early grade levels, such as narrative or informational writing. These genres have different important elements regarding idea development (e.g., narrative writing being structured by the inclusion of a beginning, middle, and end); thus, specific literacy skills may have different relationships with writing outcomes within these particular genres.

Finally, given the strength of the relationship between reading and writing outcomes found in this study, making these connections explicit for ML-ELs could be related to their writing development. Direct instruction of these reciprocal relationships could enhance written compositions for ML-ELs. Supporting students in understanding *when* and *how* to use their reading abilities for compositions could bolster students' reading and writing development. Specifically, teaching students to interact with source text through a mentor text lens and, thus, emulate the linguistic structures of text, including vocabulary, syntax, spelling, and genre elements, could support ML-EL's writing development.

Given the importance of writing development and the growing population of ML-ELs, teachers should consider expanding opportunities for early writers to compose argumentative texts within science and social studies content areas while tangentially developing students' early literacy foundational skills. Early reading proficiency, domain-specific vocabulary, and oral language skills are essential resources for ML-ELs to become advanced argumentative writers.

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Table 1

Demographics and Descriptive Data of Student Participants.

	Total (N = 633)	
Student Descriptives	*N*	*%*
Gender		
Male	278	43.92
Female	355	56.08
Race/ethnicity		
Asian	98	15.48
Black	24	4.79
Hispanic	477	75.36
White	32	5.06
Other	2	0.31
IEP Status	58	9.16
Low SES	367	57.98
Grade		
First	284	44.87
Second	349	55.13

Note. IEP = Individualized Education Program; SES = Socioeconomic Status.

Table 2

Overview of Argumentative Writing Prompts Used During Data Collection.

Grade Level	Topic: Social Studies or Science	Writing Prompt
First Grade	Science	Should people be allowed to cut down trees in the rainforest?
First Grade	Social Studies	Both Amelia Earhart and Sally Ride deserve to be celebrated. But, if you had to pick just one of these women explorers to celebrate, which one would you choose - Amelia Earhart or Sally Ride? Why?
Second Grade	Science	Some scientists think the dinosaurs died out after an asteroid struck Earth. But, not everyone agrees. Do you think that an asteroid killed the dinosaurs? Why or why not?
Second Grade	Social Studies	Both young Leonardo da Vinci and Henry Ford deserve to be celebrated. But, if you had to pick just one of these young inventors to celebrate, which one would you choose - Leonardo da Vinci or Henry Ford? Why?

Table 3

Pairwise Correlation Matrix and Descriptive Statistics for Study's Variables.

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Early Literacy Proficiency													
1. MAP	597	173.56	17.00	115	218	-							
2. DIBELS	606	177.51	117.20	0	456	.79***	-						
Oral Language Proficiency													
3. WIDA Speaking	620	253.87	52.96	100	374	.40***	.34***	-					
4. WIDA Listening	620	322.25	58.34	129	436	.64***	.49***	.48***	-				
Domain-Specific Vocabulary													
5. Science	557	31.29	6.74	14	46	.55***	.53***	.22***	.36***	-			
6. Social Studies	540	30.16	6.59	14	48	.55***	.50***	.23***	.41***	.55***	-		
Writing Outcomes													
7. WIDA Writing	618	282.78	42.73	111	396	.56***	.47***	.45***	.53***	.25***	.33***	-	
8. Science Argumentative	309	2.56	1.78	0	7	.48***	.37***	.26***	.35***	.28***	.25***	.36***	-
9. Social Studies Argumentative	291	2.81	1.89	0	7	.46***	.42***	.18***	.33***	.30***	.38***	.41***	.38***

Note. MAP = Measure of Academic Progress; DIBELS = Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills. ***$p < .001$

Table 4

Results of Hierarchical Linear Modeling for Writing Outcomes.

	Coefficient (SE)		
Source	Science Argumentative Writing	Social Studies Argumentative Writing	WIDA Writing
Fixed Effect			
Intercept	-1.24 (.00)	-.46 (.30)	221.33 (9.58)***
WIDA Speaking	.00 (.14)	-.00 (.13)	.08 (.02)***
WIDA Listening	.00 (.10)	.00 (.23)	.14 (.02)***
MAP	.31 (.00)***	.19 (.03)*	8.35 (2.02)***
DIBELS	.11 (.19)	.21 (.01)*	11.12 (1.65)***
Science Domain-Specific Vocabulary	.02 (.70)		-1.37 (1.35)
Social Studies Domain- Specific Vocabulary		.20 (.00)**	.87 (1.44)
Random Effect			
Level 1 (child)	.69 (.06)	.58 (.05)	525.34 (34.15)
Level 2 (school)	.04 (.04)	.01 (.02)	45.63 (26.49)

Note. Student-level demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, grade) and school randomization blocks were included in HLM analyses as covariates but suppressed in Table 4. MAP = Measure of Academic Progress; DIBELS = Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Multilingualism benefits both individuals and society; however, students in American classrooms still regularly experience literacy instruction that encourages monolingual literacy acquisition. Literacy instruction must be adapted to align with this growing population of learners' needs. MLs deserve targeted interventions, culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012), and ample high-quality instruction employing the usage of their entire linguistic repertories for literacy acquisition (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020; García & Kleifgen, 2020). When we separate students from their languages, cultures, and experiences, we effectively disengage their most vital asset to literacy acquisition.

Furthermore, teachers play a significant role in making the instructional changes necessary to enhance ML's literary abilities. However, educators must be adequately prepared to pedagogically support MLs and intentionally sustain linguistic and cultural diversity within literacy classrooms (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020; Paris, 2012). Aligning with the translanguaging perspective, teachers must seek to legitimize all forms of languages, affirming literacy practices outside of the dominant English norm. When truly prepared, teachers have the power to transform literacy education, capture the diversity of MLs' language abilities, and enhance literacy development through an asset lens on multilingualism (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020). As such, teachers are a vital connection between MLs and effective literacy practices. Teachers directly engage with literacy materials and curriculums, implementing resources with students to teach reading and writing. Thus, it is important to understand and identify both effective literacy practices and how teachers implement these resources in classroom spaces.

Significance of the Three Studies on MLs and Literacy Development

This three-article dissertation explored gaps in research regarding MLs and their literacy development. The main objective of these studies was to examine current literacy instructional practices utilized in research and by classroom teachers. The first systematic review article synthesized current research, providing practitioners insight into effective practices that support MLs' writing development. When incorporated into literacy instruction, linguistically inclusive practices can encourage students to visualize themselves as writers, motivating students to compose texts. This first research study showcases that teachers must create literacy spaces that support students in building upon and developing their full linguistic repertoires while also providing opportunities to participate in authentic writing experiences that align with rigorous academic writing standards and genres, such as those outlined by the Common Core.

Building upon the findings outlined in the systemic review article, the second study investigated novice teachers' experiences regarding a specific literacy curriculum and the usage of its materials for instruction. While the intended focus of this research was on ML's literacy development, participants' interviews made it apparent that the novice teachers needed more support if they were going to successfully implement the district-selected curriculum. This study illuminates that novice teachers are critical consumers of curriculum, but it also showcases that they need robust and ongoing professional development, collaborative work environments, and authentic preservice fieldwork to support their implementation and learning of literacy curriculums. Additionally, this research highlights that in the future, teachers, including novices, must be a part of the curriculum development cycle, co-creating lessons and providing feedback on the material's usability for all learners, specifically MLs.

Finally, the third article pinpoints individual foundational skills that have a predictive relationship with ML's writing outcomes. These findings first suggest that teachers should consider expanding opportunities for early writers to compose argumentative texts within science and social studies content areas. Furthermore, this research suggests that these early literacy skills should be robustly addressed with explicit instruction, including within literacy curriculums such as those materials used by the novice teachers in the second article of this dissertation. When combined with the highlighted pedagogies noted in the findings of the systematic review, the inclusion of these literacy skills into instruction can aid practitioners as they help MLs establish a strong literacy foundation for lifelong writing success.

Therefore, the intention of completing this three-article dissertation has been a strategic choice. This dissertation allowed for a broader examination of multilingual writing development within the elementary grades by exploring the current research body, examining teachers with experiences and then investigating the predictive relationships between specific literacy skills and writing outcomes that can later be incorporated into literacy instruction and curricular materials. These three studies add to the growing corpus of research at the intersection of writing and the literacy development of MLs. The findings provide educators with tangible ways to support elementary MLs as they develop the crucial writing skills required for lifelong success. These articles also shed light on additional avenues of examination that are significant opportunities for future research within the writing field.

Limitations of Studies

Despite its contributions to MLs' literacy development, specifically writing, this dissertation has limitations that are important to acknowledge for the benefit of future research. Organized by individual articles, these limitations are discussed below.

For the first article, the scoping procedures used for systematic review could have excluded specific studies that may also have implications for MLs' literacy development. Because this review was focused on the broadly used Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO] 2010), it only investigated writing research within the context of the United States. Unquestionably, there are additional research studies completed in countries outside of the U.S. that would have beneficial insights into instructional pedagogies that may positively impact MLs' literacy development.

The second article has two important limitations that are common to studies employing phenomenological methods. First, this research only investigated these teachers' experiences with a singular literacy curriculum, and as such, the findings could lack generalizability to other literacy curriculums. Teachers implementing other distinctive literacy materials could have wildly divergent experiences from the participants interviewed in this research. This may also be specifically true for this study because the teachers were novices and potentially still developing their professional knowledge. However, this study does highlight the important role teachers play in curriculum implementation. Teachers are the instructional link between curricular materials and student learning, and thus, listening to their voices and investigating their experiences are crucial steps in providing necessary curriculum professional development and supporting implementation efforts. As a second limitation, this study was not intended to highlight strengths and areas of improvement within this specific literacy curriculum. Even though the novice teachers highlighted barriers when it came to the successful implementation of the curriculum materials, this study does not provide any insight into whether the curriculum was effectively

advancing students' literacy abilities. More research will be needed to address this avenue of questioning and determine the extent of the curriculum's impact on learning.

As for the third study included in this dissertation, this quantitative work was correlational; a pertinent limitation is the inability to establish causality or directionality between the investigated variables. Potentially, unobserved variables could be influencing the relationships observed between early literacy skills and writing outcomes within this study. Additionally, the data used in this research study was collected during a prior randomized control trial, the Model of Reading Engagement (MORE, Kim et al., 2021) study. Inherent to secondary analyses of existing data, I was not directly involved in the data collection process as a researcher. As such, there are likely additional variables that may be associated with ML's writing outcomes that were not available for this analysis. Additionally, there may have been nuances of the study and the collected data discussed during the planning and implementation stages of the original MORE research study. While I was not privy to this additional information, steps were taken throughout the analysis process (e.g., consulting with a researcher who was part of the original data collection) to mitigate the influence of these limitations.

Areas of Future Research

Through the completion of these three articles, this dissertation highlights numerous future research avenues essential for advancing the body of knowledge focused on MLs and their writing development. First, MLs' advancement in the writing domain depends on continually investigating the question: What instruction is taking place in classrooms regarding the literacy instruction of MLs? To address this question, one opportunity is for researchers to employ case study methods that combine teacher interviews with additional data collection methods. For example, completing classroom observations and investigating students' written compositions are

important for building a more robust understanding of ML's writing development. The intersection of multiple data points would allow for identifying gaps in classroom instruction and observing how teachers are physically implementing curriculum materials into their literary classrooms with MLs. The potential findings would be helpful for curriculum developers and researchers when considering the usability of specific literacy instructional materials.

Meanwhile, literacy curriculums must be rigorously investigated to ensure they are evidence-based and successfully support *all* students' literacy development. As previously discussed in the second article of this dissertation, the alignment of curriculums to the robust body of literacy research has been a point of recent contention (e.g., Tierney & Pearson, 2024). The completion of both qualitative and quantitative content analysis work would be a strong starting point of investigation to ensure that individual curriculums include necessary foundational literacy components, such as those suggested by the DIEW model (Kim & Park, 2019) and the third research article included in this dissertation. Additionally, completing RCTs to evaluate the impacts of the curriculum on reading and writing growth is a necessary next step. It is crucial to confirm literacy curriculums' effectiveness and alignment with evidence-based practices before providing the materials to teachers and implementing them with students.

Finally, additional investigations into teachers' knowledge of MLs' literacy development are paramount, and research into effective professional development practices is necessary. First, teachers must have access to comprehensive syntheses of research evidence, such as the published open-access first article in this dissertation, to help inform their instructional decision-making in classroom spaces. Furthermore, the empirical body of research about literacy and multilingualism is ever-evolving, so teachers will also need access to professional development and higher education throughout their teaching careers if they are going to continue to support

the growing population of culturally and linguistically diverse students. This professional development must include rich discussions of the literacy skills noted in the third article dissertation (e.g., vocabulary, oral language, and reading-writing relationships) and how these variables, and additional variables highlighted in the DIEW model (Kim & Park, 2019), may relate to early writing outcomes for MLs. Additionally, this professional development must originate from an asset lens on multilingualism and support teachers in the implementation of translanguaging practices and pedagogies, such as the creation of a translanguaging *space* (Wei, 2017). Finally, teachers cannot just be handed systematic reviews and evidence-based curriculums that include instruction on foundational literacy skills. Teachers, specifically novices or teachers newly learning curriculum materials, will need adequate professional development to ensure the materials are effectively implemented into classroom spaces for ample reading and writing development.

Final Notes

To effectively build the literacy foundation that MLs will need for lifelong career and academic success, it is essential to explore various research avenues and theories, as demonstrated in this dissertation. As researchers, it is crucial to build upon the current research body investigating MLs' writing development and seek to pinpoint additional specific foundational skills that are associated with students' abilities to become proficient writers. Then, these skills can be intentionally incorporated into literacy instruction and curricular materials. However, identifying evidence-based skills in isolation will not be enough to impact literacy learning; there must also be an understanding of the social context and human experience in which these skills are taught and implemented in classroom spaces.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX

Phenomenology Interview Protocol

IRB# 27404

Title: Understanding Novice Teachers' Experiences when Implementing a Scripted Literacy Curriculum for Multilingual Learners: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Memo to Participant

The purpose of this study is to understand your experiences with literacy curriculum as an elementary school teacher. I am interested in your experiences with curriculums, writing and supporting multilingual learners.

Throughout this interview, I will be asking you questions about your current and past experiences as a teacher and your experiences with your school's literacy curriculum. During this interview, I will be writing a few notes to remember key aspects of our conversation. This interview will also be audio-recorded for future data analysis. Recordings will not be used for anything outside of this research. Your personal identity, as well as other specific identity markers, will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms when this data is presented as a publication.

Please note that this interview is completely voluntary and if at any moment you wish to pause the recording or end the interview, please let me know. Do I have your consent to conduct this interview and have it audio recorded for the purposes of this research?

Introduction Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself and your teaching experiences.
2. Tell me about your current school and teaching placement and student demographics.

Curriculum:

3. Tell me about the current literacy curriculum you are using in your classroom.
   . - Can you describe your reading language arts block? When do you teach it? How is it structured?
   - How does the curriculum guide this instruction?
   - What about writing instruction? Are these experiences part of the curriculum? What does writing specifically look like within this curriculum?
   - What kind of products do students produce in writing through the curriculum?
4. As a novice teacher, what have your experiences been or how do you feel about this curriculum?
5. This curriculum is fairly new to you as a novice teacher, what support have you experienced when using this curriculum?
   - Did other teachers help you? Was there professional development?
6. I want to talk more about your experience with this curriculum as a teacher.
   - How do you see kids impacted by this curriculum? Do you find you can meet their needs? Expand on your answer and experience.
   - What's helpful about this curriculum? What challenges have you faced/what has been challenging or hard?
   - What do you wish you could implement that is not in the curriculum?

7. What has your experience been when using this curriculum to support linguistically diverse (ML-EL) students?
    - What about for your culturally diverse students (e.g., students of color)?
8. What is your experience with being able to sway or differentiate from the curriculum?
    - Can you provide an example of when you have been able to do so (or not do so?)

University Experiences

9. Thinking back to your university course work, how does this specific curriculum align with your undergraduate experiences in literacy methods courses?
    - What do you wish instructors would have taught you? Can you give me an example?

Document Review

1. Can you walk me through the lesson plan you brought today?
2. What is your experience with the curriculum and this lesson? (Why did you choose this one?)
3. What is your experience with this lesson when considering your linguistically diverse students (ML-ELs)?
    - Can you provide me with an example?
4. What is your experience with this lesson when considering your linguistically diverse students (ML-ELs)?
    - Can you provide me with an example?
5. How does this specific lesson align to your university experiences with teaching reading and writing?