

CREATING MORE EQUITABLE AND SOCIALLY-JUST QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS THROUGH ESOL AND BILINGUAL TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICES: THE CASE OF RESCS IN TEXAS

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Abstract

This paper calls for quality professional development and support for teachers of English learners (ELs) when only 1 out of 10 of this student population is prepared to go to college and are not provided with quality education that they deserve. This study explores and describes the various professional development (PD) services that Texas Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) offer teachers of ELs and identifies important areas of need. The focus was on the extent to which the need of ELs is met and crucial areas of in-service teacher PD that remain challenging based on input from the RESCs. Data revealed that RESCs provide many PD services that meet the need of ELs and identified other important areas that need attention and collaboration between RESCs and institutions of higher education. The reviewed literature corroborated these findings and showed that while the population of ELs continues to grow, the number of ESOL-certified and highly-qualified teachers who can provide effective instruction to these students has not kept pace with their growing numbers. Based on results from this study and the reviewed literature, research-based recommendations are shared to create more equitable and socially-just quality education for ELs.

Keywords: ESL and Bilingual Teacher Education, English Learners, Equitable Education, College Readiness, Professional Development

Introduction

Texas Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) are key factors in impacting school improvement and educational change. These centers are described as being systems of support that “provide general and special education support to the schools and districts in their service areas” (Peters & Svedkauskaite, 2008, p. 15). Meeting the needs of English learners and supporting school districts in this area is one of the challenges that RESCs face in Texas and the nation as this student population continues to grow. The purpose of this descriptive case study was to address and explore the extent to which 1) there is need for more collaboration between RESCs and Institutions of Higher Education; 2) the types of professional development services that RESCs offer teachers of ELs; and 3) the areas of professional development services that are most needed in the state based on input from the state’s RESCs.

Review of Literature

A Rapid Growth of ELs Student Population

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022) the number of English learners (ELs) is steadily increasing in all areas of the United States. Samson and Collins (2012) remarked that most teachers can expect to have ELs in their classrooms. These researchers explain that based on the Center for American Progress's estimate, one in four (25%) of children in the US come from immigrant families and speak a language other than English at home. According to Mitchell (2020) in a report written for Education Week, ELs are the fastest-growing student population in the country. Other researchers and professional organizations concluded that ELs grew 60% in the last decade, as compared with 7% growth of the general student population (Batalova & McHugh, 2010a; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021). The state of Texas is always among the states that witness a rapid growth in the population of ELs. According to NCES (2021) "California reported the highest percentage of ELs among its public school students, at 19.2 %, followed by Texas (18 %) and Nevada (17.1 %)" (p. 2). This trend of growth is expected to continue and EL student population comprises a diverse and heterogeneous body of students. Some have no exposure to English in the home, and some have limited exposure, while others are exposed to multiple languages in addition to English. According to Menken and Kleyn (2009), a significant number of ELs who fall within the category of Long-Term English Learners (LTELs) attend middle and high school nation-wide. Among the sub-categories of ELs, the LTELs' academic performance lags behind their peers according to reports by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES, 2016). LTELs constitute another challenge for educators in the nation and in the state of Texas. More than 72,500 EL students who started first grade in 2014-15 in Texas became LTELs which is more than 67% of this student population, according to Cashiola and Potter (2021).

There is also a wide range of socioeconomic status (SES) and family literacy levels among all ELs, not to mention their linguistic and cultural differences and experiences. Almost 60% of ELs nationally are from economically-disadvantaged families in which parents have limited levels of education (Peregoy et al., 2023), nearly twice as high as the share of English-proficient students (Batalova & McHugh, 2010a). According to Texas Tribune (2019), in 2018 academic year, 60.6% of students were identified as economically disadvantaged, meaning they qualified for free or reduced-price meals. According to Creamer (2020), Black and Hispanics are more than twice as likely to live below the poverty line as White and Asian.

The demographics of Texas schools have changed drastically over the past decade requiring highly qualified teachers and new approaches to better meet the needs of the increasing numbers of ELs. These numbers continue to grow as more families immigrate to the area to work in agribusiness and other industries. According to Texas Education Agency (2021), the number of students identified as ELs increased by 239,940, or 30.9 %, between 2007-2008 and 2017-2018. In the 2017-2018 school year, 19 % of students were identified as ELs, compared to 17 % in 2007-2008 (TEA, 2021). The Latino population is the largest and fastest growing minority group in schools in the state of Texas as well as nationally. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), Hispanics represent 38.4% of the population in Texas with Spanish representing 90% of the languages spoken by ELs. These changing demographics and increasing numbers of ELs create a challenge for our educational system.

To meet the challenge of educating this student population, states across the nation developed policies and resources. According to Texas Education Agency (TEA)'s (2021) policies, "...every student in the state who has a home language other than English and who is identified as an English language learner shall be provided a full opportunity to participate in a bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) program, as required in the Texas Education Code (TEC)" (Chapter 29, Subchapter B). As stated above, the growth in this student population poses a challenge in the area of teacher preparation both nationally and at the state level. The seriousness and urgency of this challenge become evident when we look at the academic performance of these students.

EL Student Population Academic Performance

What is concerning about these rapidly changing demographics is the fact that EL students typically lag behind in meeting the state and national academic standards, compared to their peers who are native speakers of English. For example, NCTE (2017) reported that ELs aged 14-18 were 21% less likely to complete high school than their native English speaking counterparts. Samson and Collins (2012) found significant achievement gaps on the fourth-grade level in states with the largest EL populations: California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Massachusetts. These percentage gaps in reading only worsened when measured using eighth grade scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). While the causes of these gaps may vary, data confirm that in the states with the largest populations of ELs, the achievement gap in reading tends to increase over time. This academic achievement is concerning because it perpetuates the status quo of widening the gap of opportunity between the haves and have-nots. Research has documented a critical need that exists for teachers in general and teachers of English learners in particular to contribute as members of a culturally relevant and sustaining school-wide culture to assist their students in navigating the processes related to preparing for, applying to, and enrolling in university (e.g. Carey, 2018; Gibbs Grey, 2018). Robledo Montecel (2018) described this critical opportunity gap in Texas as follows:

English language learners, who are almost one out of five students in the state of Texas, are not being well served by schools in Texas. They continue to be placed in underfunded, poorly monitored, segregated programs that do not produce results, particularly in middle school and high school... [and] only one out of 10 English language learners is prepared to go to college. (p.1)

In some Texan school districts, the percent of at risk students, mainly ELs, is 71% and the percent of economically disadvantaged students is 91%. Unfortunately, these ELs have not met the target performance measure in language arts (reading and writing) in the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test, which is set at 29%. Their STAAR score is at 22%. Their Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment Standards (TELPAS) test progress rate is at 32% in many districts and does not meet the target of 36% either (TEA, 2021).

It should be noted here that, according to research, states with highly restrictive and one-size-fits-all English-only policies tend to have higher achievement gaps in reading and math on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) than in states with less restrictive or bilingual educational policies (Garcia, 2011). When these policies are added to teacher unpreparedness, the potential to increase the already expansive achievement gap gets even wider, according to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017).

Teacher quality strongly relates to student academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2021). A lack of attention to specific pedagogy for ELs has curtailed their academic growth (Waxman & Padrón, 2002). The challenge of meeting this student population's academic needs is still growing nation-wide. Rumberger and Gándara et al. (2005) stated that ELs are exposed to a greater number of uncertified and beginning teachers, who lack essential pedagogical knowledge and skills, than are students who are native English speakers. Educators and parents who promote dual language bilingual education programs for creating equitable and socially-just quality education for English Learners also face many obstacles.

Challenges Faced by Dual Language Bilingual Education Program Implementation

According to research (e.g. Christian, et al. 1997; Palmer et al., 2016; Pérez 2004 among others), Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE) programs started through what can be described as a localized bottom-up process that is supported by parents and educators based on the languages used in their local communities, demographics, and the shared vision in their socio-economic contexts. Multiple challenges have been identified with the implementation of DLBE programs. These include 1) securing quality, equitable academic materials in the target program languages, 2) providing effective and appropriate professional development that is informed by the needs assessment of both teachers and students, and 3) administrative support for the DLBE program in the community at large (Lindholm-Leary 2001; Pérez 2004). Other researchers emphasize the following components as essential ingredients for DLBE programs to succeed. These are: 1) long-term planning and investment, 2) a research-based and context-appropriate effective model for language and content-based instruction, and 3) effective and culturally-responsive leadership that uses a shared vision with all decision makers and stakeholders (Howard & Sugarman 2007; Lindholm-Leary 2001, 2005; Pérez 2004). DLBE programs face similar challenges in the state of Texas. Palmer et al (2016) describe the challenge in Texas as an "... inherent mixed message: while the language policy promotes bilingualism, the accountability policy encourages monolingualism" (p. 394). Texas state education code mandates transitional bilingual education (TBE) to allow DLBE as a replacement for TBE in elementary grades when school districts have a minimum number of 20 ELs at a grade level who speak a common language with state standards and exams being available in either Spanish or English until 6th grade (TEC Chapter 89). On the other hand, ELs in Texas are required to meet the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) and demonstrate their knowledge of English in the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment Standards (TELPAS). ELs also have to meet the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and demonstrate their performance in reading in the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). According to research, these high stake tests that start assessing students beginning in 3rd grade have been shown to constrain teachers, leaving little space for curricular or instructional agency (Au 2007; Bach, 2020; McNeil & Valenzuela 2001; Sloan 2005).

Additionally, the academic challenges of ELs are also due to the need for teachers to receive professional development in second language acquisition processes and research-based strategies to teach biliteracy, content, and provide families with evidence-based strategies for promoting biliteracy (Sehlaoui, 2018). These challenges are amplified when ELs are not offered adequate support to develop their biliteracies and succeed in academic content necessary to prepare them for college and career. DLBE program teachers must address academic content and second language development needs of their students (Palmer 2011; Valenzuela 2005).

While the population of ELs continues to grow, the number of ESOL-certified and trained teachers who can provide effective instruction to these students has not kept pace with their growing numbers (Peregoy et al., 2023). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2021) indicates that only 20 percent of P/K-12 educators think they are well prepared to teach students with limited English proficiency, even though 54 percent of public school teachers have these students, and this number is increasing. The NCES's report also shows that only 17% of all teachers who work with ELs meet the requirements of highly qualified teachers. Research has always confirmed this throughout the years. For example, Tellez and Waxman (2004) found out that nearly half of all teachers have received no training in teaching methodology or any other kind of preparation to teach these students. According to Franco-Fuenmayor et al. (2015), "bilingual/ESL teachers are not being provided with information about research on bilingual education and on best practices to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students" (p. 349). These researchers advocate that "[t]eachers could benefit from more PD in regards to research about bilingual programs, knowledge related to second language development, vocabulary and language development, literacy, program implementation, technology-based instruction, and differentiation" (p. 349). These findings are still relevant today in our schools and different states have developed different plans and different requirements for their teachers to face this challenge. The state of Texas is not an exception in this case. Teacher shortage in this area constitutes another challenge that faces the state. For example, from 1990 to 2016, the state of Texas reported not having enough teachers for EL students, according to the US Department of Education (2020). The teacher shortage in content area types listed in that report include ESL, bilingual education, and dual-language education.

Although there has been an overall increase in attention to multicultural issues in teacher education curriculum and instruction, only one-sixth of higher education institutions require teacher education programs to include coursework that adequately prepares mainstream elementary and secondary teachers to work effectively with English learners (Menken & Antunez, 2001; Ballantyne et al., 2008). In a survey conducted with 279 teachers in a school district, Reeves (2006) found that 81.7% of the teachers felt that they did not have adequate training to work effectively with ELs, and 53% of the teachers wanted more preparation. Surveys of attitudes and feelings of preparedness signify that ESOL-certified teachers are uneasy with their lack of knowledge in the area of applied linguistics.

To meet the growing need for ESOL-licensed teachers, some states allow teachers to add ESOL endorsement by passing a pencil-and-paper test of applied linguistics and second language teaching methodology. According to Tellez and Waxman (2004), teachers of ELs in some states such as Texas tend to choose to pass the test and obtain certification in place of completing coursework because it is a faster process. Goldhaber (2007), states that "licensure test performance is clearly not a silver bullet." (p. 31). This researcher's finding argues for a much more comprehensive system for assessing teachers to determine their preparedness. Sehlaoui and Shinge (2013) corroborated this and other findings regarding the importance of quality coursework and formal teacher education preparation as opposed to the test-only policy that proves to be ineffective. These researchers also call for the need for offering relevant professional development services and quality teacher education programs to empower educators with culturally-responsive pedagogy to meet the needs of ELs.

In describing some features of successful in-service professional development, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995 and 2000) emphasize that "one-shot" in-service programs are not

likely to alter teaching practice. Instead, they argue that teacher-knowledge growth should be built on what we know about human learning. Longitudinal data from graduates of teacher education programs indicates that quality education coursework is a more powerful predictor of teacher effectiveness than content expertise alone (Ferguson & Womack, 1993).

With the above issues and challenges in mind, this study was designed to describe the various professional development services that Texas Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) offer teachers of English learners as well as identify areas of need when it comes to the education of ELs. According to Ausburn (2010), research on Education Service Centers in Texas is limited. Therefore, this study particularly focused on the extent to which the need of ELs is met in the state of Texas and what areas of inservice teacher professional development remain challenging based on input from the state's RESCs that participated in this study. To contextualize the study, the next section will provide more background information and the research methodology used.

Method

Setting and Background Information

This study was conducted in the state of Texas. There are twenty RESCs in the state. These twenty RESCs were invited to voluntarily participate in this study. Eleven (11) RESCs or 55% completed the Qualtrics electronic survey. To contextualize the study, the following is a brief background description of how these regional service centers were created and what their goals and purposes are.

According to TEA (2021), “the Centers are service organizations, not regulatory arms of the Texas Education Agency, and participation by schools in services of the centers is voluntary”. Chapter 8 of the Texas Education Code, enacted by the 75th Texas Legislature in 1997, specified the following purposes of RESCs:

1. Assist school districts in improving student performance in each region of the system;
2. Enable school districts to operate more efficiently and economically; and
3. Implement initiatives assigned by the legislature or the commissioner.

The first purpose of RESCs is the most relevant to this study as it attempts to describe the various professional development services that RESCs offer teachers of ELs to help these students succeed academically and identify areas of professional development that are most needed.

Research Design

The research questions for this exploratory study were:

1. Is there a need for more collaboration between RESCs and Institutions of Higher Education?
2. What professional development services do RESCs offer teachers of ELs?
3. What areas of those professional development services are most needed in the state of Texas and what areas are least needed based on input from the state's RESCs?

A descriptive case study was selected for this research project to address and explore these questions. Qualtrics software program was used to design the survey. A secure survey link was sent

to participants. Project participants answered the online survey questions anonymously. The anonymized data were then stored and maintained through Qualtrics software program. All Institutional Research Board (IRB) guidelines and protocols were followed in this study (IRB#2019307).

The questionnaire used a scale of 1-4 where 1 is for strongly agree and 4 is for strongly disagree. The participants were asked to provide their answers to whether the RESC would be interested in collaborating with one of the IHEs in the state to provide quality professional education opportunities in their region (Question 1). The participants were also asked if there was need for collaboration with IHEs to provide more professional development opportunities for teachers in the school districts that they serve (Question 2). Question 3 asked participants to check all the services and types of professional development activities that are offered to educators in their region. Question 4 asked the participants to rank order a list of 9 professional development services on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 as the least needed in their region and number 10 as the most needed. The 9 items included things such as instructional methodology in ESL and Bilingual education; assessment and evaluation methodology in ESL and Bilingual education; and diagnosing language vs. learning challenges in ESL and bilingual learners. The survey also included an open-ended question where participants were given the opportunity to describe any suggestions, services, or types of professional development activities that they would like to see offered to educators and school districts in their region based on their needs. Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of questions 1, 2, and 4. This analysis was conducted for questions 1 and 2 of the questionnaire based on a 1-4 Likert scale and was found to be adequate (Cronbach's $\alpha = .784$). A frequently cited acceptable range of Cronbach's alpha is a value of 0.70 or above (Nunnally, 1978), given the nature of this study. Cronbach's Alpha was also used to measure the internal consistency of question 4 and was found to also be adequate (Cronbach's $\alpha = .62$). According to Hair et al. (2010), values as low as 0.60 may be acceptable for exploratory and descriptive research. The survey was also pilot-tested with some educational leaders at an IHE to seek and incorporate their feedback in its design.

Both quantitative and qualitative data analyses were used to explore the patterns that emerged from these data. Qualitative data were analyzed using a domain and thematic analysis, based on the research questions, by generating categories and then themes from the answers given (Ely et al. 1991; Miles and Huberman 1994). Descriptive statistics were used to describe, analyze, and summarize quantitative data (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell 2019).

Results

Figure 1 summarizes participating RESCs' answers to the following first questions:

- Question 1: Your Education Service Center will be interested in collaborating with Institutions of Higher Education to provide quality education to English learners and professional development opportunities for teachers in the school districts where you serve.
- Question 2: There is need for more collaboration to provide professional development opportunities for teachers in the school districts where you serve.

Ten out of the eleven (90%) participating RESCs expressed interest in collaborating with Institutions of Higher Education and agree that there is need for providing quality education to ELs and professional development opportunities for teachers in the school districts where they serve.

Figure 1 Need for Collaboration



Results obtained from question 3 below are summarized on Figure 2. Question 3 asked participants to check all the services and types of professional development activities that are offered to educators in their region. While all RESCs offer PD services in instructional methodology (100%), parental and community engagement was offered by 91% of the RESCs, crosscultural training for ELs’ teachers and the area of assessment was reported as a service provided by 82% of the RESCs, use of technology received 64%, crosscultural training for academic leaders, classroom supervision, and the topic of language vs. learning challenges were found to be offered by only 56% of the respondents. ELs refugees and EL with limited schooling as a topic for PD was offered by 45% only (see Figure 2). Under “Other”, 9% corroborated the results from the open-ended survey item (Question 5) below.

Results from Question 4 that asked participants to rank-order the following services from 1 as most needed to 10 as least needed in their area are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 2 Professional Development Services Provided by RESCs

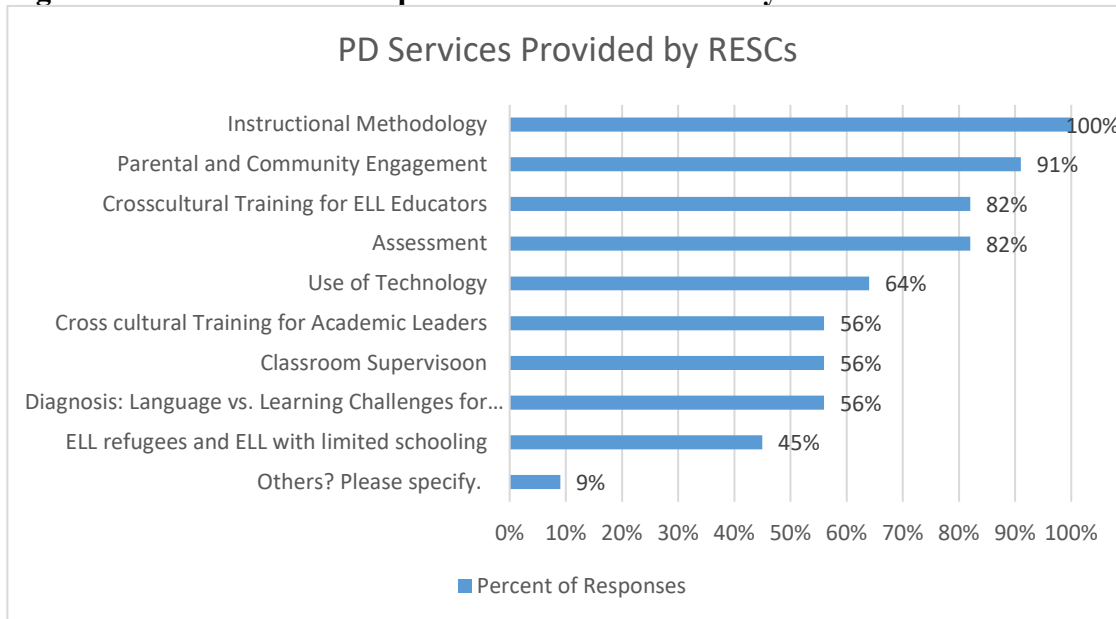
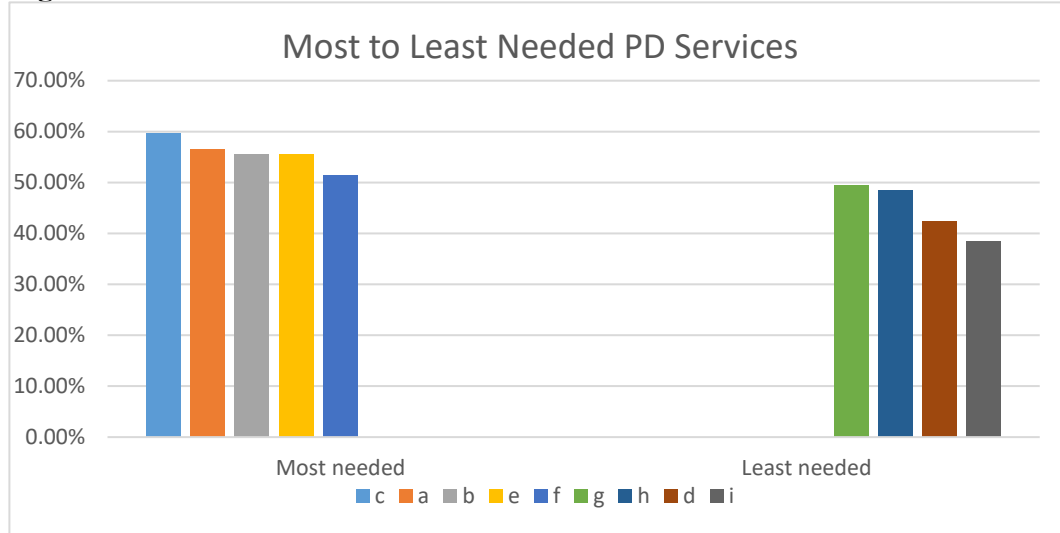


Figure 3 Most to Least Needed PD Services



Note:

- a. Instructional methodology in ESL and Bilingual education (57%).
- b. Instructional, assessment and evaluation methodology in ESL and Bilingual education (56%).
- c. Diagnosing language vs. learning challenges in ESL and bilingual learners (60%).
- d. Use of technology and Computer-assisted language learning as it relates to teaching and assessment methodology in ESL and Bilingual education (42%).
- e. Crosscultural communication training and culturally responsive methodologies for ESL and bilingual educators (56%).
- f. Crosscultural communication training and culturally responsive methodologies for administrators and academic leaders (52%).
- g. Classroom supervision and evaluation of teaching for school principals who serve English learners and linguistically- and culturally-diverse learners in your region (49%).
- h. ELs who are refugees and ELs with interrupted or limited schooling (48%).
- i. Parental and community engagement to support the needs of English learners (38%).

As shown on Figure 3, RESCs rank-ordered the listed professional development services from most needed to least needed. Items a, b, c, e, f (items underlined above) were found to be the most needed in the regional education service centers that completed this survey. Items d, g, h, and i were described as the least needed areas.

Regarding the open-ended question #5 in the survey, 100% of Texas Education Service Centers who completed the needs assessment survey indicated that more professional development is also needed in the following areas:

1. Training for ESL and Bilingual supplemental teaching certification for teachers to pass the certification exam in this content area.
2. Bilingual and ESL program implementation and support.
3. Meeting state and federal fiscal and program requirements.

Discussion

Need for More Collaboration

To address the first research question regarding the need for more collaboration between the participating RESCs and IHEs, ten out of the eleven (or 90%) participating RESCs expressed interest in collaborating with institutions of higher education to provide quality education to English learners and professional development opportunities for teachers in the various school districts and regions served by these RESCs. Professional partnerships and collaboration is exponentially more effective and more satisfying than the sum of its parts. This finding is supported by research where

emphasis on collaboration between and among different stakeholders in the educational system has been found to be key in their success (e.g. Sehlaoui & Albrecht, 2011; Sehlaoui & Albrecht, 2009). At the center of such professional collaboration is the powerful concept of “Community of Practice” (CoP). CoP is defined by Wenger et al (2002) as “...groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). CoP is a social-organizational structure that offers a promising approach for engaging partners in collaboratively solving complex problems and promoting best practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) identified relationships as an essential component for learning and defined a community of practice as a system of relationships between people and activities developing with time. Although there are various forms of CoP, 3 fundamental elements are needed to make up a CoP. These are domain of interest, a community that shares that interest, and practice or shared resources. Peters and Svedkauskaite (2008) explain that as follows:

Current educational climate of radically increasing expectations for states to assist districts and schools in meeting accountability requirements, some states are building relationships with other entities in the broader statewide systems of support, such as with institutions of higher education, educational service agencies, and private organizations. Building such relationships is necessary in order for SEAs to more effectively transition from their traditional role of oversight to that of capacity building. (p.1)

This is exactly the case here between RESCs and IHEs in Texas based on data results of the study.

Type of Professional Development Services Most Needed and Offered by RESCs

As to what professional development services the participating RESCs offer teachers of ELs, it was found that these service centers offer many PD services to the school districts that they serve in their area. However, not all listed PD services were offered by all participating RESCs. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that the needs of the regions and districts these centers serve are different, given the unique characteristics of each region. Gabriel (2007) discusses the importance of prioritization of ESCs professional development services in connection to the strategy of prioritization and the sense of urgency pertaining to school improvement as a “new emphasis on student learning [that] has created an unprecedented need for quality teachers and quality staff development, and the services of ESA's are in more demand than ever” (p. 37). This seems to be the case with RESCs in Texas as well.

The third research question explored the areas of PD services that are most needed in the state of Texas and areas that are least needed based on input from the state’s RESCs. Both qualitative and quantitative results revealed that the following PD areas or topics are the most needed:

- Instructional methodology in ESL and Bilingual education.
- Instructional, assessment and evaluation, and methodology in ESL and Bilingual education.
- Diagnosing language vs. learning challenges in ESL and bilingual learners.
- Crosscultural communication training and culturally responsive methodologies for ESL and bilingual educators.
- Crosscultural communication training and culturally responsive methodologies for administrators and academic leaders.

Previous research does corroborate these areas of need (e.g. Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015; Waxman & Padrón, 2002; Gándara et al., 2005; Sehlaoui & Shinge, 2013). In his program evaluation research, Sehlaoui (1999; 2011) documented a need for educators to develop their critical crosscultural communicative competence. This need was also documented among academic leaders (Chun and Evans, 2018) who need more culturally-responsive and inclusive leadership training (Sehlaoui, 2019). The area of assessment and evaluation methodology in ESL and Bilingual education remains a challenge and an area of need. Across our nation, a significant number of educators (48%) report no formal training in developing, administering, scoring, and interpreting tests, according to the Education Week’s National Survey of Public School Teachers, conducted in 2018. Instructional methodology in ESL and Bilingual education, especially when it comes to making the connection between research-based practices and findings from applied linguistics remains a big challenge, according to Sehlaoui and Shinge (2013). Finally, the issue of diagnosing language vs. learning challenges in ESL and bilingual learners was reported as most needed area for PD for educators by the participating RESCs. This is also corroborated by research as an area of need for more professional development for teachers of ELs (e.g. Ortiz et al, 2020; Ortiz & Yates, 2001).

Three other common areas of need emerged from the qualitative data results in response to question 5. All participating Texas RESCs who completed the needs assessment survey indicated that more professional development is needed in the following three areas:

1. Training for ESL and Bilingual supplemental teaching certification
2. Bilingual and ESL program implementation and support
3. Meeting state and federal fiscal and program requirements.

The first area reflects the pressure that the state is facing, as far as the need for more ESOL-certified teachers who qualify to serve the needs of ELs by passing the ESL and Bilingual supplemental teaching certification tests. This need is corroborated by previous research. For example, Téllez and Waxman (2004) explained that teachers of ELs in some states such as Texas tend to choose to pass the test and obtain certification in place of completing coursework because it is a faster process. Goldhaber (2007), states that “licensure test performance is clearly not a silver bullet.” (p. 31). This researcher’s finding argues for a much more comprehensive system for assessing teachers to determine their preparedness rather than a pencil and paper test. Sehlaoui & Shinge (2013) also corroborated this and other findings regarding the importance of quality coursework and formal teacher education preparation as opposed to the test-only policy that has proven to be ineffective. Thus, while this area remains a challenge for many states, including Texas, with more collaboration between Texas RESCs and IHEs as well as a combination of the test-only and quality coursework training and PD services will certainly address this challenge.

The second area, which relates to Bilingual and ESL program implementation and support, has also been documented in the review of literature as a challenge not only in Texas, but many other states as well (Palmer et al., 2016). The challenge that this area of need faces comes from the high stakes tests that start assessing students beginning in 3rd grade. This practice has been shown to constrain teachers, leaving little space for curricular or instructional agency (Au 2007; Bach, 2020; McNeil & Valenzuela 2001; Sloan 2005).

The third area that needs more PD services relates to meeting state and federal fiscal and program requirements. The challenge that the state faces in regards to lack of funding is alarming. In 2010 based on data from the United State Census, Texas was ranked 44th in the nation in spending

per student. Ausburn (2010) explains that “[d]espite the fact that the state has fallen among the lowest in the nation with school funding, larger issues of funding inequity exists between neighboring districts” (p.35). Hence comes the challenge that RESCs and school districts face in meeting state and federal fiscal and program requirements.

It should be noted here that there were other areas of concern that need more training and professional development for Texan educators of ELs as reported by the literature review that was not listed by the participating RESCs. The first one relates to the alarming increase of the number of Long-Term English Learners (LTELs) as reported by researchers such as Cashiola and Potter (2021). More than 72,500 EL students who started first grade in 2014-15 in Texas became LTELs which is more than 67% of the ELs student population, according to Cashiola and Potter (2021). This is a significant increase. These researchers warned that “[t]he increased number and proportion of ELs becoming LTEL means an untold magnitude of students are positioned for future academic struggles if quick action is not taken” (p.3). The second area concerns the need for professional development services and support for teachers of English learners to assist their ELs in navigating the processes related to preparing for, applying to, and enrolling in universities to close the opportunity gap in this area.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper calls for equitable and quality education for ELs through professional development and support for teachers of ELs when only 1 out of 10 of this student population is prepared to go to college and are not provided with quality education that they deserve. This study explored and described the various professional development (PD) services that Texas Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) offer teachers of English learners (ELs). It identified important areas of need when it comes to the education of ELs, based on the needs assessment data. The study particularly focused on the extent to which the need of ELs is met in the state of Texas and identified the areas for inservice teacher PD that remain challenging, based on input from participating RESCs,. Both qualitative and quantitative data revealed that the participating RESCs provide many PD services that meet the needs of ELs while both types of data results corroborated the described areas that need more attention and more collaboration among RESCs and IHEs. The reviewed literature emphasized that the population of ELs continues to grow but the number and quality of ESOL-certified and trained teachers who can provide effective instruction to these students has not kept pace with their growing numbers. This challenge led some states, including Texas, to adopt a test-only policy. Based on the results from this study and guidance from previous research, some research-based recommendations are provided to support and inform related future professional development activities to create more equitable and socially-just quality education for English Learners. These include:

- Need for more collaboration between and among RESCs and IHEs to provide quality PD services and meet the needs of ELs. This recommendation can be achieved by:
 - a) Establishing more networks and partnerships (CoPs) between RESCs and IHEs in various regions in Texas;
 - b) Building more consortia to engage in grant writing and grant-related research projects that support and meet the identified needs;
 - c) Creating more mentoring and supportive programs to meet the needs of culturally- and linguistically-diverse students and close the opportunity and achievement gaps.

- In collaboration with RESCs and IHEs, we can provide quality professional services in the identified areas of need based on input from RESCs and findings from previous research as reported in the literature review on the following topics:
 - a) Providing quality coursework that will allow inservice and preservice teachers to pass the ESL and Bilingual certification exams.
 - b) Providing professional development services that address the need for more strategies for implementing Bilingual and ESL programs and their support.
 - c) Providing professional development services that address the need for more strategies and resources for meeting state and federal fiscal and program requirements.
 - d) Offering professional development services that address the need for more strategies and a comprehensive action plan for meeting the needs of Long-Term English Learners in the state.
 - e) Offering professional development services that address the need for more strategies and a comprehensive action plan for supporting teachers of ELs in the area of preparing these students for college, helping them in the process of navigating the complex process of securing scholarships and applying, and enrolling in institutions of higher education.

- Finally, and based on insights gained from the above reviewed research studies, more collaboration between and among IHEs and RSCs is needed to offer inservice teachers quality teacher education coursework opportunities that meet the needs of ELs and their teachers in addition to passing the content test and attending research-based professional development programs. This recommendation is supported by longitudinal data from graduates of teacher education programs indicating that quality education coursework is a more powerful predictor of teacher effectiveness (Sehlaoui & Shinge, 2013; Ferguson & Womack, 1993).

It should be noted here that this was an exploratory case study with its own limitations. For example, in addition to the survey instrument used, more in-depth interviewing could have been used with some of the participating RESCs in the state. The study focused on RESCs in one state which limits the applicability of the findings to other settings and states. Future research could expand to include education service centers from various states and involve school districts' administrators and ESL and Bilingual Program coordinators to shed more light on some important issues and challenges that face educators today.

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