

Missouri ELL policies and mainstream teachers' preparedness perceptions: A three-article
dissertation

by

John Kearbey

B.S., Friends University, 2008
M.A., Kansas State University 2016

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

This dissertation examined mainstream teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach English Language Learners (ELLs) in Missouri's public schools through a three-article format, consisting of a systematic literature review, policy analysis, and quantitative evaluation. Grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and Siemens' Connectivism, the study addressed gaps between policy mandates and classroom realities amid increasing linguistic diversity.

The first article reviewed 14 studies from 2003–2024, and revealed persistent under-preparation among mainstream teachers, influenced by inadequate pre-service training, variable professional development (PD), teacher beliefs, and institutional support. The second article traced Missouri's ELL policies from the Bilingual Education Act (1968) to the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), and highlighted advancements like the ELL endorsement (5 CSR 20-400.570) and noted implementation inconsistencies, funding disparities, and rural-urban divides. The third article analyzed Missouri's First-Year Educator Survey data (2016–2024) using multiple linear regression and found that teachers rated their ELL preparedness lower than for other areas ($R^2 = .1599$ for teacher predictors), with principal evaluations showing limited alignment ($R^2 = .0054$).

Findings underscored systemic gaps: teachers lacked SLA training, policies failed to ensure equitable resources, and rural districts struggled more than other districts. Implications included embedding ELL pedagogy in teacher preparation, mandating sustained PD, and reforming policies for better accountability. This work ultimately calls for equity-focused reforms to enhance ELL outcomes and sought to inform broader educational practice.

Keywords: professional development, rural education, ELL, equitable resources, reforms

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Approved by:

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To all the people who said I could not do it, kicked me while I was down, and treated me less than human, I have two very different words for you:

Dedication

Mom and Dad

Preface

This dissertation grew out of a tension I kept noticing as an educator: in classrooms across Missouri, mainstream teachers are asked to serve English Language Learners (or ELLs) every day, yet most of them will quietly admit they were never really shown how. The problem is rarely about effort or goodwill. I have met teachers who pour their energy into reaching multilingual students, yet still feel like they are guessing, unsure how to scaffold a writing task for a newcomer, or how to grade a science project when half the rubric hinges on English vocabulary. Watching these same teachers evaluated on their performance with ELLs, even when they had little preparation or support, raised uncomfortable questions for me about how the system defines readiness and who carries the weight when policies do not quite line up with realities.

Those questions shaped the three interrelated studies that made up this dissertation. This work was not offered as a final word on the topic, but as a contribution to an ongoing conversation about educational equity. My hope is that it helps policymakers see the human cost of abstract policy gaps, encourages educators of teachers to reimagine how preparation can build real confidence, and reassures teachers that their struggles are not personal failings but structural ones we can change. If nothing else, I hope it reminds readers that behind the acronyms, frameworks, and test scores are students who deserve teachers fully equipped to see their strengths, not just their language barriers.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The aim of this dissertation was to take a closer, and perhaps a more candid look at how prepared first-year mainstream teachers in Missouri's public schools feel when it came to teaching English Language Learners (ELLs). With classrooms becoming more linguistically diverse every year, the expectation that only ELL specialists have the responsibility of language support feels increasingly outdated. Teachers, regardless of subject or grade, are now expected, explicitly or implicitly, to adapt their instruction for students who do not speak English.

Currently, there is an uneasy gap between policy language and classroom experience (Shanahan, 2014). The legal requirements in Missouri may insist on progress, but whether those requirements translate into meaningful skills for first-year teachers, especially those in small or rural districts with limited resources, is less certain. This tension, between what is written into law and what happens when the bell rings on a Monday morning, is at the heart of the questions driving this dissertation. The first-year teacher's survey that is part of the third article has included the question of how prepared a new educator feels about teaching ELLs in class has shown the least confidence (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016–2024).

Statement of the Problem

The number of ELLs in Missouri as well as across much of the Midwest, continues to rise. Unfortunately, teacher education practices designed to prepare teachers for this reality seem to be running behind. The legal requirements are clear, as *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) established that failing to provide adequate support denies equal educational opportunity, *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) gave the standards for program quality, and ESSA (2015) codified most recently that ELLs must have meaningful access to the curriculum. In practice, implementation appears

inconsistent, and many teachers enter classrooms with an incomplete understanding of second language development or strategies like sheltered instruction.

Survey data from Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education highlights this gap as even more concrete. Since 2016, first-year teachers have routinely marked themselves as reasonably well-prepared in areas such as classroom management, differentiating instruction, or working with students who have IEPs. When asked about readiness to support ELLs, their confidence drops. Principals, when surveyed, often echoed these concerns, which suggests that this is not just about new teachers feeling unprepared but points to larger problems in teacher preparation programs and professional development.

When teachers lack the tools to scaffold instruction for ELLs, students may fall behind in both language growth and content mastery. In rural districts where staffing is harder to achieve and bilingual resources are scarce, (Monk, 2007) many keep ELLs in general classrooms without additional support, simply because alternatives do not exist. Urban districts have a different problem, as they might have more specialists but struggle with overcrowding or fragmented programming (Lundien, 2009). Both situations can leave ELL students with lower ACCESS scores, fewer opportunities for advanced coursework, and a greater likelihood of disengagement.

The problem is that mainstream teachers are asked to carry the responsibility without the preparation or ongoing support they need. This is not just a failure of teacher education programs, but includes district-level professional development, state accountability systems, and even the federal funding mechanisms tied to Title III.

Structure of the Three-Article Dissertation

This dissertation employed a three-article format to provide a more complete examination of mainstream teachers' preparedness for ELLs, integrating systematic reviews, historical

analysis, and empirical evaluation. Each article stood alone as a publishable piece while contributing to bridging policy mandates with classroom realities. Each article was important in addressing the problem and the methods used to study it.

Article 1: Systematic Literature Review on Mainstream Teachers' Preparedness for Teaching ELLs (Chapter 2)

This article systematically reviewed 14 empirical studies (2003–2024) on mainstream teacher readiness, synthesizing themes like training deficits and belief influences. It was important because it established national patterns of under-preparation, highlighted gaps in pre-service and PD that mirrored Missouri's inconsistencies and informed the other articles' contextual focus. The study followed Cooper's (2018) methodology: keyword-driven searches in ERIC, Google Scholar, and SciSpace; quality checklists for inclusion; and qualitative thematic synthesis to identify trends, gaps, and equity implications.

Article 2: Longitudinal Policy Study of English Language Learner Education Policy for the State of Missouri (Chapter 3)

This article traced Missouri's ELL policies from the Bilingual Education Act (1968) to ESSA (2015), and analyzed mandates, implementation barriers, and equity shifts via content analysis. It was crucial because it gave a timeline of the policy-practice gap, explaining why legal requirements failed to translate equitably, especially in rural areas, and provided a framework for the quantitative evidence in article three. The study used deductive coding (guided by Kingdon, 2011, and equity theories) on key documents, with Google Sheets for theme organization and a timeline for visualizing evolution.

Article 3: Exploring the Preparedness of First-Year Teachers in Missouri in Addressing the Needs of English Language Learners (Chapter 4)

This article analyzed First-Year Educator Survey data (2016–2024; $n \approx 2,000/\text{year}$) using multiple linear regression to compare teacher self-assessments and principal evaluations of ELL readiness. It was essential because it quantified the problem empirically, revealing low confidence (e.g., $R^2 = .1599$ for predictors) and misalignments, validating the literature review and policy findings while highlighting actions that can be taken, such as more professional development. Methods included STATA for regression modeling, controlling for variables like district type, to assess trends post-ESSA.

These articles uncovered critical gaps in teacher readiness, offering evidence-based insights for reform.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this research, there are several specific terms that must be clarified:

DESE Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

ELL (English Language Learner) Student learning English alongside their home language.

EL (English Learner) Federal term for ELLs; used interchangeably.

ESL English as a Second Language program or course.

DLL Diverse Language Learner; often used in early childhood contexts.

ACCESS Annual WIDA test of English listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

First-Year Educator Survey Missouri survey of novice teachers and principals on preparedness.

Mainstream Teacher General education teacher without ESL certification.

Teacher Preparedness How ready teachers feel to adapt instruction for ELLs.

Sheltered Instruction (SIOP) Teaching model that blends content and language goals.

Title III (ESSA) Federal funds and rules supporting English learner programs.

IEP Individualized plan for students with disabilities.

NCLB No Child Left Behind Act (2002–2015), precursor to ESSA.

Rural District Smaller, often isolated schools with limited ELL resources.

Urban District Large, diverse schools that may face overcrowding and fragmented supports.

Policy-Practice Gap Mismatch between what policy requires and what schools can implement.

Research Questions (Overarching)

This dissertation was guided by four overarching research questions, designed to dissect mainstream teachers' perceptions of ELL preparedness, literature trends, research limitations, and expert-informed approaches. These questions drove the three-article structure, with each article addressing aspects of them through targeted methods. These four overarching questions were:

1) How do mainstream classroom teachers perceive their readiness to effectively teach ELLs? Primarily addressed in chapter four, a quantitative analysis of self- vs. principal-reported confidence via regression, revealed lower ELL ratings compared to other domains, and is also supported by chapters two and three.

2) What themes and trends emerge in the scholarly literature regarding mainstream teachers' readiness to educate ELLs? Chapter two addresses this with a systematic review synthesizing 14 studies on trends like under-preparation and PD variability. Chapter four employed empirical validation of literature trends and chapter three used policy for context and themes.

3) What gaps or limitations exist in current research on mainstream teachers’

perceptions of their readiness to educate ELLs? This was explored in chapter two by identifying methodological inconsistencies and was reinforced by chapter three, which looked at policy research gaps, and chapter four’s interpretation of the first-year teacher survey.

4) How do experts and existing research inform how educators should conceptualize and approach ELLs in mainstream classrooms? Each of the different chapters explored equity frameworks, policy implications, and predictive factors for practice that emphasized asset-based, scaffolded approaches.

Research Questions (Chapter Specific)

In addition to the overarching questions which guided the analysis of each article, there were also chapter specific questions which guided the analysis of each chapter.

The purpose of chapter two was an article called Systematic Literature Review on Mainstream Teaching Preparedness for Teaching English Language Learners and sought to systematically review studies on mainstream teacher preparedness to educate ELLs. Across 14 studies published between 2003 and 2024, a recurring theme emerged: many teacher preparation programs failed to provide adequate training in culturally responsive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and strategies for integrating ELLs into academic classrooms (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas & Villegas, 2008). This lack of comprehensive preparation forced teachers to rely on piecemeal solutions or ad hoc professional development once they are already in schools (Villegas et al., 2018).

The problem driving this article was clear. Missouri, like much of the U.S., has policies on paper that outline expectations for ELL instruction, but these policies have not translated into

consistent practice. Teacher preparation looks very different depending on the institution. Some universities provide only a two- or three-credit course on ELLs without clinical experience, while others embed the content into broader coursework (Ollerhead, 2016). This variability has left new teachers unevenly prepared, with many feeling unconfident in their ability to modify instruction for multilingual learners (Smith, 2021; Wissink & Starks, 2019).

Three central research questions thus guided this chapter. The review asked whether existing literature presented a consistent picture of teacher readiness to work with ELLs, or whether findings diverge by context, methodology, or timeframe (Bennett, 2021; Mehu, 2023). Second, it considered which policy, and regulatory milestones have most shaped teacher preparation for ELLs, and how these have filtered into Missouri's programs (5 CSR 20-400.570, 2016). Finally, it explored the degree to which federal mandates, demographic shifts, and the expansion of equity-focused frameworks have influenced not only the structure of teacher preparation but also how teachers perceive their own readiness (Tran, 2011; Johnson, 2020).

Together, these studies suggested that while policy frameworks like ESSA and state-level endorsements exist, their impact has been uneven. Teachers often expressed willingness to support ELLs but noted they lacked the concrete tools to do so effectively (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Rural districts, in particular, remain under-resourced, leaving mainstream teachers to fill instructional gaps without adequate preparation (Show-Me Institute, 2023).

The purpose of chapter three, entitled Longitudinal Policy study of English Language Learner Education Policy for the State of Missouri, was to trace how Missouri's policies for English Language Learners (ELLs) have evolved from the 1970s through the current Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This article highlighted how shifts in federal mandates,

demographic changes, and evolving understandings of equity have shaped teacher preparation and ELL instruction. By examining decades of legislation and regulation, the chapter sought to uncover not only which reforms endured but also which failed to materialize in practice.

The problem here is that Missouri's ELL policies, while aligned with federal laws, have often treated language support as an optional add-on rather than an integral part of instruction. Teacher preparation has remained inconsistent across institutions, with coursework varying in depth and little incentive for mainstream teachers to pursue ELL endorsements. Professional development, when offered, is short, generic, or inaccessible, leaving teachers with no solutions.

Important questions addressed in the analysis of this chapter included: 1) What major legislative and regulatory milestones have defined Missouri's ELL policy from 1968 to the present?; 2) to what extent have federal mandates, demographic shifts, and research on language acquisition influenced Missouri's teacher preparation policies?; and, 3) how have these shifts shaped the everyday realities of mainstream teachers asked to provide instruction for ELLs?

The purpose of chapter four, called Exploring the Preparedness of First-Year Teachers in Missouri in Addressing the Needs of English Language Learners, was to investigate how first-year teachers in Missouri perceived their preparedness to teach ELLs and how those perceptions aligned with principals' evaluations. Using Missouri's First-Year Educator Survey, this article compared teacher self-assessments with principal observations across multiple years, putting the findings within broader debates about the adequacy of teacher preparation programs and endorsement requirements (Umansky & Porter, 2020; Coady et al., 2016)

The problem this study tackled was that most existing evidence about ELL preparedness comes from small, isolated surveys. There is a lack of longitudinal data on how teacher confidence and administrator judgments can change over time. Initial findings suggested that

teachers felt somewhat prepared in areas like differentiation and working with diverse learners, while their confidence in teaching ELLs remained lower than in other domains. Principals, however, often assess these teachers differently, raising questions about whether administrators have the tools to evaluate ELL instruction accurately or whether they prioritize other areas over language support.

The research questions embedded in this chapter asked whether first-year teachers believed they were prepared to modify instruction for ELLs and whether principals share that perception. It also considered whether preparedness for ELL instruction differs from other areas, such as teaching diverse learners, using differentiated strategies, or covering core content. The study investigated whether significant differences emerged in perceptions after Missouri's policy shifts under ESSA.

Combining these three distinct yet interrelated articles allowed for the uncovering of critical gaps in existing knowledge regarding teacher readiness to support ELL students effectively. By exploring perceptions of teacher preparedness from multiple angles, literature consensus, policy analysis, and empirical quantitative evaluation, this study provided actionable insights. It also endeavored to articulate clear expectations for educators, while addressing the fundamental question: How should mainstream educators perceive ELLs within their classroom environments, and what are the implications of these perceptions for pedagogical practice and student achievement?

Theoretical Framework

The literature review portion of this study employed Cooper's (2018) method of systematic literature review. This method was designed to systematically and objectively compile and assess research, ensuring transparency, replicability, and minimizing bias as articles

were being reviewed. The research questions were clearly outlined to provide a distinct direction as the literature is reviewed (Cooper, 2018). The objectives of the review were to determine whether to summarize existing evidence, identify research gaps, or provide recommendations for future studies (Cooper, 2018). The specific keywords and search terms relevant to the research questions defined previously were used to develop search strategies (Cooper, 2018).

Standardized tools or checklists were used to assess the methodological quality and risk of bias in the included studies. The validity, reliability, and relevance of each study were critically evaluated, and the characteristics and findings of the included studies were summarized through descriptive analysis (Cooper, 2018). A qualitative summary of the findings was also provided, identifying patterns, themes, and relationships (Cooper, 2018). The findings are discussed in the context of existing literature, theoretical frameworks used, and their practical implications, with potential impacts of the results on practice, policy, and further research identified (Cooper, 2018). By following these steps, Cooper's method ensured a thorough, unbiased, and transparent review process, and provided a reliable synthesis of the existing literature on mainstream teachers' preparedness for teaching ELLs.

The second article was a longitudinal policy study on the education laws specific to ELLs starting from the Bilingual Act of 1968 (Bilingual Education Act, 1968). The evolving laws at the federal level mandated changes to Missouri laws such as the NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002) and ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). This has led to specific changes and accountability at a more local level (Missouri Code of State Regulations, N.D.)

The third article was a quantitative article looking at the first-year teacher survey data from the state of Missouri. I had access to several of the questions on the survey from 2016 to 2024, with approximately 2000 teachers responding each year, then during the same years,

principals evaluating the teachers responding to the survey. I used multiple linear regression, which took the independent variables and showed how they influenced the dependent variable (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This helped to show a clear line between the variables and provides a rationale for predictions.

Methodology

This dissertation adopted a layered, mixed-methods approach to investigate the intersections of teacher preparedness, policy shifts, and institutional practices in educating ELLs in Missouri's public schools. Recognizing the limitations of isolated methods, the study was formatted as three interconnected articles: a systematic literature review, a longitudinal content analysis of policy documents, and a quantitative regression analysis of statewide survey data. This design encouraged cohesiveness so that qualitative insights from literature and policies supplement quantitative findings, and vice versa, enhancing overall validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The approach prioritized practical solutions to real-world educational gaps amid increasing linguistic diversity.

Chapter two uses Cooper's (2018) systematic literature review methodology, emphasizing transparency, replicability, and bias minimization. Beyond mere article collection, the process involved several steps including: 1) the defining of research questions to focus on summarizing evidence, identifying gaps, and recommending future studies; 2) the development of search strategies with predefined keywords; and 3) the searching of academic databases such as ERIC, Google Scholar, and SciSpace for studies published between 2003 and 2024. Studies that were included prioritized empirical, peer-reviewed works relevant to U.S. contexts, particularly Midwest states, while exclusion criteria eliminated non-English sources, duplicates, and opinion pieces.

Selected studies (n=14) were evaluated using standardized checklists for methodological quality, validity, reliability, and relevance, with data extraction focusing on themes like inadequate pre-service training and teacher beliefs. Analysis employed qualitative synthesis to identify patterns, contradictions, and gaps, interpreted through theoretical lenses (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978; Krashen, 1985) to link findings to policy and practice implications. This structured process ensured the review not only aggregated knowledge but also criticized the field's evolution.

Chapter three focused on a longitudinal content analysis of federal and state education policy documents, emphasizing ELL mandates in Missouri. Extending beyond keyword scanning, this method entailed immersive reading of legislation and guidance (Bowen, 2009), with deductive coding to generate categories informed by prior research and theory (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Categories included: certification and endorsement requirements, accountability mechanisms, references to instructional equity, and policy evolution markers. Key documents analyzed federal laws and court cases such as the Bilingual Education Act (1968), *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), *No Child Left Behind* (2001), and ESSA (2015). Missouri-specific items such as DESE guidance and state regulations were included to show the dates and effects of the federal mandates.

Coding was conducted manually using Google Drive for document storage and shared annotations, with Google Sheets for organizing codes and themes. There was initial familiarization through repeated digital readings and highlighting in Google Docs, code application via color-coded labels and comments in Sheets, theme refinement by sorting and grouping data in spreadsheets, and discrepancy resolution through collaborative reviews in shared Drive folders. The longitudinal aspect featured a timeline mapped in Google Sheets or

Slides to visualize policy changes. This hybrid qualitative-quantitative lens revealed not just policy content but also its practical impacts on educators.

Chapter four employed multiple linear regression on data from Missouri's First-Year Educator Survey (2016–2024; University of Missouri, n.d.), which was ideal for handling large datasets with approximately 2,000 annual responses from teachers and principals. Per Creswell and Creswell (2018), this models the influence of independent variables such as teacher experiences has on dependent outcomes like self-reporting, while controlling for confounders. STATA was used to compare ratings across years and domains, yielding R^2 values to assess explanatory power. This complemented the qualitative articles by providing empirical evidence of perception gaps.

All together, these methods offered a holistic view of Missouri's ELL ecosystem, grounded in both policy intent and classroom realities, to discuss equitable reforms.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this dissertation rested in its attempt to unpack a persistent and often underexplored challenge: how well mainstream educators feel prepared to support English Language Learners in their classrooms? While the topic is not new, the literature still shows a surprising amount of inconsistency. Teachers' self-reported readiness varies widely, and there is little agreement on what "preparedness" should actually look like in practice. Even with decades of legislative efforts, from the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and *Lau v. Nichols* in 1974 to NCLB and ESSA, it remains unclear how much these policies have really improved classroom-level instruction for ELLs. There is often a gap between the intent of policy and the realities faced by first-year teachers as well. Combining a systematic literature review (following Cooper's 2018 framework), an extended policy analysis, and a set of regression models drawn

from large-scale survey data, this dissertation offered something more grounded than other similar studies; evidence that not only outlines the problem but helps clarify what's actually happening at the intersection of policy, training, and teacher perceptions.

Using a multi-methodological approach, this research directly contributes to educational training by offering insights into how mainstream educators perceive and address the needs of ELL students. These findings will benefit teacher preparation programs and educators. For policymakers and administrators, this study provides valuable data with recommendations to change current policies and increase support for educators. Teacher preparation programs can utilize the insights gained to revamp their curriculum along with training approaches. By making these changes, it will ensure educators are better equipped to meet a diverse classroom. Teachers will directly benefit from clearer guidance and strategies by understanding the relationships between policy, perceived preparedness, and instructional practice.

This research addressed an explicit call from the literature for an investigation into mainstream teacher preparedness for ELL instruction as well as the longitudinal effectiveness of educational policies. The findings presented promise to enhance the foundational knowledge within the field by systematically clarifying the interaction between teacher perceptions, policy implementation, and educational outcomes. This dissertation aimed to foster improved educational practices and more equitable learning opportunities for ELL students. This will contribute to ongoing efforts to close educational gaps and improve instructional quality.

Target Journals

I plan to submit the literature review article to *Urban Education* because they regularly publish literature reviews, and have numerous articles on ELLs, and I was unable to find any recent literature reviews on ELLs and teacher preparedness/perceptions. The systematic review

of recent literature is appropriate for this journal because it intersects with a significant portion of their interdisciplinary topics. In particular, the article covers teacher education, educational policy, curriculum and instruction. The high percentage of ELLs in urban environments is also relevant to the target audience, and the article will inform them about teacher interactions with ELLs. The journal *Urban Education* has an H-index of 72, a Citescore of 6.1, and an SJR of 1.57. It is ranked 130th out of 1,469 journals in education. The journal's audience focuses on inner-city education, including, but not limited to, coordinators of Curriculum and Instruction, counselors, social workers, leadership within urban schools, and those interested in teacher education. It covers eight main interdisciplinary topics: Curriculum and Instruction, Counseling, Educational Policy, Equity in Urban Education, Leadership, Psychology and Human Development, Special Education (SPED), and Teacher Education.

I am planning to submit the policy analysis article to *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. The journal has a wide range of readers from journalists to education associations to scholars. The people who read this journal are the ones who make decisions at local, state, and national levels. They look at a wide variety of policies involving an array of disciplines from early childhood through early adulthood. With ELLs being educated in public schools up to 21, this journal is ideal for my article. It has a 2-year impact factor of 2.4, a five-year impact factor of 3.7, and a JCI of 1.49. It has a cites core of 6.6 and is ranked 156 out of 1543 journals with a SNIP of 2.465. There are few journals out there that take strict policy papers, so this one is the best fit for this particular subject as they have also published policy articles on different English Language Learners (ELLs) in the past and recently.

My quantitative article, Teacher Preparedness for ELLs, will be submitted to *Culture and Education* because this journal targets schools and universities but also welcomes those working

within the education field such as linguists, psychologists, sociologists, and people in the communication field. They have a 2-year impact factor of 1.1 and a 5-year impact factor of 1.3 with 560 citations in the JCR. This is a little lower than some other journals but I believe this Journal is important because they also publish in Spanish and the largest percentage of students we have that are ELLs speak Spanish (Education Week, 2024) so educators reading this would find value in this article.

Bias

It is essential to mention my professional background as an educator specializing in English language instruction for the past nine years within public school environments. This experience influences my viewpoint and could affect the interpretation of research data and policy evaluations. By identifying this influence in advance, the integrity and rigor of the research findings are preserved, enabling readers and other stakeholders to evaluate the results within an informed framework.

Organization

As this dissertation was a three-article style, which is a newer method of doing a dissertation, it is laid out differently than a traditional dissertation. Chapters two, three, & four are the individual articles I plan on submitting to the target journals mentioned above. Chapter five includes a general discussion of the articles and how they are interrelated to each other as well as future research considerations. Chapter five also includes applications, implications and conclusions from the articles which relate to each other. The final part of the dissertations includes a complete list of references and appendices.

Chapter 2 - Systematic Literature Review on Mainstream Teaching

Preparedness for Teaching English Language Learners

Abstract

Teachers' perceptions of students influence how students learn, and this is especially true for students whose first language is not English. Student teachers need to be placed in more inclusive classrooms with English Language Learners (ELLs) to better prepare for the possibility of their first teaching assignment. Coursework should include more preparation for working with ELLs, as this population has steadily grown throughout the United States. This is a systematic review of literature dating from the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to 2024, using multiple search engines and the AI system SCISCAPE. Articles related to in-service and pre-service teachers' perceptions of educating ELLs were analyzed, with a focus on the United States due to the specific legal requirements of ESSA.

Keywords: Teacher perceptions, ESL, English Language Learner, ELL, Language Acquisition, Education practice

Introduction

The United States of America is a nation of immigrants, and with the numerous countries that come to America, we have a multitude of languages plus cultures that accompany every person who enters this country. The United States has no official language (U.S. Government, n.d.), although over 30 states have designated English as their official language (Omar, 2023). Despite the absence of an official language at the federal level, there are laws in place that affect immigrant children in schools. Under Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), specific requirements exist for those eligible for English language instruction, including Americans of Indigenous descent. Many people born in this

country have parents who do not speak English, yet their children have the same right to educational opportunities as children with English-speaking parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

There have been numerous court cases in which ELLs have sought to protect their rights, leading to significant legal precedents and the codification of those rights into law such as *Horne v. Flores* (2009) which reiterated the right to funding and *Diana v. California State Board of Education* (1970) where you cannot place an ELL in special education based on their language ability. A major case that helped establish these rights was *Lau v. Nichols* (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). This case arose from the situation of approximately 1,800 Chinese children in the San Francisco school system who were provided no English language instruction. The court found that under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Civil Rights Act of 1964), these students' rights were violated by not providing them with some form of education, either in their native language or in learning English. On the second page of the *Lau* decision, there is a powerful quote: “Imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the educational program, he must already have acquired those basic skills is to make a mockery of public education” (*Lau v. Nichols*, p. 2). This landmark decision has far-reaching effects and still requires coordinators to fill out what are termed “Lau Plans” as part of ESSA. The *Lau* precedent further established that the Department of Education would develop regulations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (Civil Rights Act of 1964).

After the landmark *Lau* decision, a string of federal court cases kept pushing for stronger language rights in schools. Cases like *Cintron v. Brentwood* in 1978, *Rios v. Reed* the same year, and especially *Castañeda v. Pickard* in 1981 built on that foundation. *Castañeda* is particularly interesting; it is where things got practical. The court ruled that the school district had violated

the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, and they did not stop there. They laid out a clear, three-part test, now called the Castañeda test, to check if a school's language program is actually doing its job. The Castañeda test requires that schools need to base their ELL programs on solid educational theory recommended by experts or a legitimate experimental model. Schools have to use real resources to implement the theory, which includes trained teachers, proper materials, and actual plans. If the program's not getting results, they have to evaluate what is wrong and make corrections.

Significance of Addressing the Needs of ELLs

“General education teachers spend the most time with ELLs and need training to access the strategies to support their students” (Olds, 2021, p. 19). Once an ELL starts school in the United States, there are often many assumptions made about the student, such as the assumption that an ELL is able to read and write in their own language (Wissink, 2019). This is problematic because teachers may go out of their way to translate documents into a student's native language without realizing that the ELL is not literate in their own language. This is not the teacher's fault, as they often have little to no training in teaching ELLs. According to research, teaching programs in college have been slow to change with the increase in ELLs (Correll, 2016). Currently, across the United States, ELLs make up over 10% of all students (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

Purpose of the Study

When a mainstream teacher looks at an English Language Learner (ELL) student and sees a challenge they are not trained to handle, it can put that student at a disadvantage right from the start (Chen-Worley, 2022). It is important to keep up with the latest studies because teaching methods, expectations, and even teachers' attitudes shift over time. A good look at current

literature can shine a light on biases or misunderstandings that might affect ELLs' academic progress. Current literature points to practical, research-backed strategies that actually work (Chen-Worley, 2023).

Taking a closer look at how teachers view ELL students can uncover what kind of support or training they need to feel more confident and capable in the classroom (Guler, 2020). It is not just looking for gaps in education, it is about building a more welcoming and fair learning environment. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs shape everything from their lesson plans to how they interact with students, so understanding those perspectives is critical (Guler, 2020; Harkins et al., 2023). Looking at current ELL test scores, there is doubt whether enough schools are acting on this research or if it is just sitting in academic journals, waiting for someone to take it seriously.

The purpose of this systematic literature review is to evaluate how well mainstream teachers are being prepared to teach ELLs. Drawing on fourteen studies published between 2003 and 2024, the review examines both teachers' perceptions of their readiness and the specific strategies emphasized in preparation programs. The review looks at whether training includes culturally responsive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and language acquisition strategies, areas scholars have long identified as central but often missing in practice (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas & Villegas, 2008). This focus is important because while federal and state mandates have expanded over the past two decades, the day-to-day experiences of teachers still reveal significant inconsistencies in how language support is integrated into mainstream classrooms. Without examining these gaps in the literature, it becomes difficult to explain why so many ELL students continue to face barriers to academic achievement even as policies promise equity (Villegas, SaizdeLaMora, Martin, & Mills, 2018).

Research Questions

1. What is the overall perception of readiness of mainstream teachers to educate ELLs in their classroom?
2. Is this the consensus of articles about readiness?
3. Where are the gaps in knowledge on the perception of readiness?
4. How should educators perceive ELLs in their classroom?

Scope and Parameters of the Review/Inclusion Criteria

Clarifying the terms used throughout this review is necessary, especially given how much the language surrounding ELLs shifts across states, time, and even disciplines. The phrase mainstream teacher refers here to any K–12 educator who is not classified as a specialized resource teacher. That could mean a middle school math teacher, a high school PE coach, or an elementary teacher responsible for most of the instructional day. We are talking about general education teachers who interact with all students, ELLs included, by default, not by assignment.

As for the term ELL (English Language Learner), it is one of many, and the variation is part of the challenge. In Missouri, ELL is the official designation (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.), but at the federal level, it is more common to see EL (English Learner). In other states, you will find an alphabet soup of alternatives: ESOL in Florida (English for Speakers of Other Languages), LOTE in Texas (Languages Other Than English), or terms like ENL, DLL, EFL, L2, and so on in academic journals.

Research has shown that terminology for multilingual learners varies widely across states and organizations, often reflecting equity concerns and competing policy agendas (SupportEd, 2022). While these labels might shift depending on policy or context, this article will use ELL

for clarity and consistency, with the understanding that many of the terms used for ELLs are varied in the literature but are discussing the same group of students.

The geographic focus of this review concentrates on articles solely from the United States, as the legal requirements are established at the federal level. Another significant reason for focusing solely on the United States is that English is treated as a foreign language in other countries, leading to different designations, such as EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in journal literature. This focus also excludes U.S. territories like Puerto Rico, where the official language is Spanish (Napoleoni, 2020). The review includes only recent studies from 2001 onward, coinciding with the last two major education acts, NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act) and ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act). Articles will be sourced from double-blind or single-blind peer-reviewed journal publications and dissertations to ensure the neutrality of results as much as possible.

Exclusion Criteria

Articles that are not peer-reviewed and at least single-blind have been excluded. I excluded all articles published before 2001 and the enactment of NCLB. Any articles involving students outside the purview of federal law, such as those in private schools, will also be excluded since ESSA and the NCLB do not apply to those students. Studies conducted outside of the United States that are not required to follow federal law, such as those at international schools near embassies and military bases, have been excluded as well.

Search Strategy: Databases, keywords, & search process

The search strategy involved using the internet search engines Google Scholar™, ERIC.ed.gov, and the AI research tool SciSpace™. The keywords used in the search included the acronyms ESL (English as a Second Language), DLL (Diverse Language Learners), EAL

(English as an Additional Language), L2 (Second Language Learner), ENL (English as a New Language), and ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language). These terms, combined with keywords teacher, educator, and pre-service, along with K-12, primary, and secondary, narrowed down the articles and excluded any that are college-oriented. The previous terms focused on the targeted research personnel, while additional search terms prepared, prepared, and phrases "capable of teaching" and "ready to teach," are used to reflect the mindset of the target personnel.

Selection Process

The databases Google Scholar™, ERIC.ed.gov, and the AI research tool SciSpace™ were selected due to their distinct characteristics. Google Scholar™ serves as both a database and a search engine, ERIC.ed.gov is a government-run database, and SciSpace™ is a newer database that utilizes artificial intelligence. Articles were selected based on their inclusion in academic journals that allow single- or double-blind peer-reviewed studies. Single-blind studies were included to ensure that a sufficient number of articles since 2001 could be researched, given the narrowness of the field, although the vast majority were double-blind, peer-reviewed studies. The review will exclude any study focused solely on kindergarten, as only 17 states mandate kindergarten attendance (Camera, 2022). Dissertations were used as an additional resource. The content criteria for the resources included specific words and acronyms such as preparedness, mainstream, ELL, ESL, ESOL, DLL, LOTE, ENL, pre-service, and preservice.

Data Extractions

Data was extracted from peer-reviewed articles solely by the author using a standardized template, ensuring consistency, and minimizing bias by focusing on specific keywords. The articles are organized in a chart showing the frequency of term usage in each article. There is a table listing the author(s), publication, date, study design, year, and population detail included.

Articles that are freely available through institutional access or public access were used due to limited funds. To maintain consistency, no longitudinal studies will be included; only studies covering one school year or less will have data extracted. Qualitative studies will be the norm and constitute the majority of the review. The primary outcome measure is the level of preparedness that mainstream teachers feel when educating ELLs, with a secondary outcome measuring their training, including both preservice and post-service. Potential biases from the author may include past experiences with unprepared mainstream teachers, specialized knowledge of the ELL field, and extensive teaching experience in the public school system.

Quality Assessment: Criteria used & tools

Quality was ensured by restricting the articles to those published in single-blind and double-blind journals, and dissertations with strict adherence to studies conducted solely after the passage of ESSA and NCLB. All extraction tools were used consistently across each article to maintain reproducibility. A minimum standard for the use of specific terms was applied to ensure that each article meets a consistent baseline for inclusion.

Limitations

The limitations of this review include the fact that not all academic databases will be searched due to time constraints, availability, and word count limits. Journals requiring paid access will not be used due to limited funds and the need for reproducibility. Longitudinal studies extending beyond one year are not evaluated. Only journals published in English or those with an English translation were considered.

Rationale for Scope & Parameters

The limits on the scope of this review are due to several factors. The time frame restricts the number of databases that can be effectively searched using the various terms for ELLs

commonly used in the education field. The limited space available in journals also reduces the number of articles that can be reviewed effectively and in depth. Funding for journal subscriptions is limited for both universities and researchers, so the preference is for public access and university-subscribed or downloadable articles. The inability to perfectly translate academic articles restricts the review to journals published in English. Since most of the articles are qualitative in nature and of short duration, to maintain consistency, the author limited the studies to those covering one school year or less.

Methodology

Systematic Review Design & Search Process

I followed the systematic literature review process outlined by Cooper (2018) to gather a synthesis of meaningful literature. The method involves making the process transparent, consistent, and as bias resistant as possible. I started with clearly defined research questions to guide the review, and made sure the goals, summarizing current findings, highlighting gaps, or offering next steps, were firmly in place from the outset.

Search strategies were built using targeted keywords tied directly to the research questions, and three main databases were used: ERIC.ed.gov, Google Scholar, and, more recently, SciSpace, which helps with sorting academic content efficiently. The criteria for including or excluding studies were established earlier in the process (see Scope and Parameters), which helped reduce selection bias. Each study that met those criteria was reviewed using a structured approach, and data were extracted using predefined categories to keep things consistent and comparable.

I used standardized tools to assess the strength of each study. How rigorous the methods were, what kind of bias might be included, and whether the findings could reasonably apply to

real-world settings. The studies were grouped into thematic clusters and summarized the key findings qualitatively, identifying patterns across the literature, some encouraging, others more concerning. All of this was framed using theoretical models relevant to teacher learning and ELL education, and the goal was never just to describe what the research says but to ask what it means for policy, for classroom practice, and for future studies that haven't been done yet. Following Cooper's steps did not guarantee perfect objectivity, but it did help anchor the review in a process that values clarity, consistency, and critical reflection, three things the conversation desperately needs.

Categorization & Principles of Data Analysis

The data from the 14 included studies were categorized into qualitative and quantitative dimensions where applicable, with qualitative studies (n=11) emphasizing thematic patterns in teacher experiences and quantitative ones (n=3) providing metrics on preparedness. Analysis proceeded with initial descriptive coding to summarize findings, followed by interpretive grouping into emergent themes, and finally synthesis to identify patterns, gaps, and implications. Themes were derived deductively from the research questions and inductively from recurring themes across studies, ensuring a balanced approach that minimizes bias (Cooper, 2018). To preview the structure, major themes were refined into four interconnected categories, building on contrasts like prepared versus unprepared and training in teaching ELLs versus no training. These include persistent under-preparation, professional development differences in post-certification training access and effectiveness, teacher beliefs, and barriers within the system. This categorization allowed for cross-study comparisons, with contradictions flagged for deeper theoretical interpretation.

Theoretical Framework

This article is guided by two related theoretical frameworks: Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) and Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985). These frameworks provide a solid lens that evaluates how teacher preparedness impacts instructional delivery for ELLs in mainstream classrooms. These theories emphasize the importance of context, interaction, and language accessibility in facilitating second language acquisition and academic growth.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory believes that learning is inherently a social process shaped by interactions with more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory highlights the key role that teachers and classroom discussions play in encouraging both language development and academic achievement. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is especially relevant in the context of ELL instruction, where teachers must scaffold new content in a way that is linguistically and cognitively accessible to students. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is used to interpret how mainstream teachers perceive their ability to support ELLs through differentiated and scaffolded instruction, as well as how those perceptions align with culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) complements the sociocultural lens by focusing on the type of language input necessary for effective second language acquisition. According to Krashen, learners acquire language most effectively when exposed to "comprehensible input" that is slightly above their current proficiency level ($i+1$). The role of the teacher is not only to deliver content but to do so in a way that ensures students understand and engage with the material. Krashen also emphasized the importance of reducing affective filters such as anxiety, boredom, or fear, which can hinder language acquisition. Input Hypothesis supports an analysis

of teacher perceptions of their preparedness to deliver content in ways that are both comprehensible and emotionally supportive for ELLs (Krashen, 1985, 2013).

These theoretical frameworks are important to interpreting the reviewed literature, particularly studies that examine the intersection of teacher effectiveness, instructional strategies, and the needs of linguistically diverse learners. They offer insight into how a lack of training in language acquisition theory may limit a teacher’s ability to effectively scaffold content and create inclusive classroom environments (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). By applying Sociocultural Theory and the Input Hypothesis, this review provides a foundation for understanding the pedagogical shifts needed to improve ELL instruction within mainstream classrooms and highlights the theoretical underpinnings that should inform teacher preparation programs.

Results

Descriptive Statistics of the Dataset

This review analyzed 14 peer-reviewed studies and dissertations published between 2003 and 2024, all focused on mainstream teacher preparedness for working with English Language Learners (ELLs). The sample includes: Eleven qualitative studies, two systematic reviews, and one quantitative study.

Temporal Range: 2003–2024

Source Types: Peer-reviewed journals (7), doctoral dissertations (7)

Focus Populations: Pre-service teachers, in-service general education teachers, veteran educators

Contexts: Urban and mixed settings; K–12 education

Table 2.1.Types of Studies

Study Type	Quantity
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Qualitative	11
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Quantitative 1

Systematic 2

Table 2.2 List of Studies

Article Title	Authors	Year	Journal/Source	Study Type
The role of leadership guidance for teachers of English language learners: A basic qualitative study	Jenkins, A.	2024	Doctoral dissertation, American College of Education. ProQuest LLC	Qualitative
Teachers' perspectives on effective English language teaching practices at the elementary level: A phenomenological study	Imran, M., Almusharraf, N., Sayed Abdellatif, M., & Ghaffar, A.	2024	Heliyon, 10(8), e29175. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e29175	Qualitative
K–12 teachers' perceptions of preparedness and training to provide instruction and support to English language learners	Doxsee, R.	2023	Ed.D. dissertation, Lincoln Memorial University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing	Qualitative
Teacher perceptions of preparedness to teach a diverse group of English language learners with different literacy levels and languages in the	Mehu, J.	2023	Ed.D. dissertation, Nova Southeastern University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing	Qualitative

mainstream elementary classroom				
Article Title	Authors	Year	Journal/Source	Study Type
Novice general education teachers' perceptions of preparedness in U.S. public schools	Kiramba, L. K., Deng, Q., & Viesca, K.	2022	Teaching and Teacher Education, 116, 103757. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103757	Quantitative
Using professional development to strengthen teaching of English language learners: A qualitative study	Bennett, T. N. G.	2021	Ed.D. dissertation. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing	Qualitative
Article Title	Authors	Year	Journal/Source	Study Type
Veteran elementary teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach English language learners	Smith, L.	2021	Ed.D. Dissertation, Walden University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing	Qualitative
A qualitative case study: Teacher perceptions of the support provided by school leaders for English language learners	Johnson, M.	2020	Ed.D. dissertation, Bethel University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing	Qualitative
Elementary teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach English language learners	Wissink, B., & Starks, S.	2019	Educational Research and Reviews, 14(10), 351–360	Qualitative
Preparing future mainstream teachers to	Villegas, A. M.,	2018	The Educational Forum, 82(2), 138–155.	Systematic Review

teach English language learners: A review of the empirical literature	Saiz de La Mora, K., Martin, A. D., & Mills, T.		https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2018.1420850	
Article Title	Authors	Year	Journal/Source	Study Type
Perceptions of teachers' preparedness and efficacy beliefs for teaching English language learners	Tran, Y. K.	2011	Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin. University of Texas Libraries	Qualitative
Inservice preparation for mainstream teachers of English language learners: A review of the empirical literature	Lucas, T., Villegas, A. M., & Freedson-Gonzalez, M.	2008	The Educational Forum, 72(2), 255–270. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131720701803679	Systematic Review
Preparing mainstream teachers for English-language learners	de Jong, E. J., & Harper, C. A.	2005	Educational Leadership, 62(4), 8–14	Qualitative
A qualitative study of classroom teacher practices with English as a second language students	Patten, R.	2003	Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee. https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/5170	Qualitative

Thematic Analysis

The 14 studies come together with a central narrative of systemic shortfalls in teacher readiness yet diverge in emphasis and urban vs. rural. This reveals patterns of persistent gaps that have evolved over time but have been resistant to resolution. The following themes build a

layered understanding: under-preparation as the root issue, PD as a variable bridge, beliefs as a mediating force, and leadership as an enabling (or limiting) possibility. This study highlighted emerging patterns, such as how early-career gaps (12/14 studies) got worse without sustained PD, while contradictions on the willingness of teachers to learn new skills underscores the need for integrated approaches. From these data, four core themes emerged: 1) Persistent under-preparation; 2) professional development as a mitigation tool; 3) the role of teacher beliefs and efficacy; and 4) leadership and structural support.

Persistent Under-Preparation

A recurring theme across the literature was that mainstream teachers consistently report feeling underprepared to teach ELLs. This under-preparation was not seen as an individual problem but as a systemic issue tied to how teacher education programs. Professional development was also seen as being an issue as teachers were not being trained by school districts to address ELL needs. Studies over the past 20 years show this issue in diverse ways. For example, de Jong and Harper (2005) and Lucas and Villegas (2008) both emphasize how educating ELLs was often treated as an add-on rather than a central aspect of teacher education. Samson and Collins (2012) demonstrated that teachers themselves felt less prepared to support ELLs compared to other subgroups such as students with IEPs or those in gifted programs. More recent work by Umansky and Porter (2020) suggested that differences between teacher and principal perceptions of preparedness further complicated the issue. Other studies highlighted that many preservice teachers never encountered foundational theories of second language acquisition (Bennett, 2021; Mehu, 2023). This limited their ability to implement strategies such as scaffolding or comprehensible input in practice. Professional development has been explored as a corrective measure, but research indicated that short, one-off workshops are ineffective; only

sustained, job-embedded, theory-driven PD shows measurable impact (Johnson, 2020; Jenkins, 2024). The table below summarizes how these studies address the persistent problem of under preparedness in mainstream teacher education for ELLs.

Table 2.3 Studies Addressing Mainstream Teacher Under preparation for ELLs

Study	Year	How the Study Addressed Under preparation	Key Takeaway
de Jong & Harper	2005	Found that teacher preparation programs rarely embed ELL strategies across coursework.	Teachers enter classrooms without systematic training in language-focused pedagogy.
Lucas & Villegas	2008	Argued that programs treat ELL pedagogy as peripheral, not central, to teacher education.	Mainstream teachers are left without the tools to connect content learning with language development.
Study	Year	How the Study Addressed Under preparation	Key Takeaway
Samson & Collins	2012	Compared preparedness perceptions for ELLs versus IEP/gifted students, showing national gaps.	Teachers consistently feel less prepared for ELLs than for other subgroups.
Umansky & Porter	2020	Studied differences between teachers' and principals' perceptions of preparedness.	Under preparation is compounded by

			administrators' limited tools for evaluating ELL instruction.
Bennett	2021	Documented lack of exposure to second language acquisition (SLA) theory in preservice training.	Without SLA grounding, teachers struggle to apply strategies like scaffolding or comprehensible input.
Mehu	2023	Highlighted the continued absence of SLA theories in many preparation programs.	Teachers remain underprepared to integrate language development with content.
Johnson	2020	Examined professional development as remediation.	Found that short workshops are ineffective; only sustained, theory-based PD improves readiness.
Study	Year	How the Study Addressed Under preparation	Key Takeaway
Jenkins	2024	Analyzed PD models for ELL instruction.	Job-embedded PD aligned to SLA theory increases teacher confidence and practice.

These studies underscored Missouri's current approach to ELL education. While state policies such as the ELL endorsement requirement under 5 CSR 20-400.570 and alignment with ESSA demonstrated a commitment on paper, current teaching seems to not meet these standards. Teacher preparation programs remain inconsistent, often offering only minimal coursework in ELL instruction, and professional development opportunities are too uneven to make a sustained difference. The persistent under preparation documented in the above national studies mirrored what Missouri's First-Year Educator Survey and DESE have reported. Most mainstream teachers enter the classroom with insufficient training to meet the needs of ELLs, and policies alone have not been enough to close this gap.

There is a disconnect between what pre-service teachers are taught in class and what they encounter in practice. Several respondents in Bennett's (2021) study recalled being told that good teaching is good teaching, with little emphasis on how language proficiency influences what is possible for a student in a mainstream classroom. That kind of oversimplification may downplay the specialized knowledge and skills required to make content accessible for emerging bilinguals. Field experiences seem to vary widely in quality and relevance. Some pre-service teachers never had the opportunity to work with multilingual learners during student teaching. Others were placed in linguistically diverse schools but lacked mentors who modeled effective ELL pedagogy. The result was a cohort of first-year teachers who, while potentially confident in their subject matter, often entered classrooms unsure of how to support a student who spoke little or no English. That lack of confidence can quickly change into instructional hesitation, lowered expectations, or reliance on exclusionary practices, not intentionally, but out of uncertainty (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas & Villegas, 2008; Samson & Collins, 2012).

Professional Development as a Mitigation Tool

Professional development (PD) often gets pitched as the go-to fix for helping teachers better support ELLs after they have earned their certification. Studies such as Johnson (2020) and Jenkins (2024) support this claim as they demonstrated how PD can bridge gaps in teacher preparedness. Unfortunately, however, not all PD is the same. Some programs are little more than a quick workshop, while others dig deeper, aligning with solid educational theories and stretching out over time to have an influence.

The problem with those singular workshops is that they are often too short to make any significant impact on pedagogy. While a teacher might leave a three-hour session on ELL strategies feeling inspired, without follow-up or practical tools, the initial energy of the teacher may soon evaporate. Studies have suggested that sustained PD, which is the kind that are rooted in theories like Vygotsky's ideas about social learning or Krashen's focus on comprehensible input, tend to work better, and have more significant impact (Jenkins, 2024). These programs often give teachers time to practice new techniques, reflect on what is working, and ultimately, alter their approach. For example, a year-long PD program in a Chicago school district had teachers meeting monthly to design culturally responsive lessons for ELLs, and the results showed not simply better teaching but also happier, more engaged students (Johnson, 2020).

PD is not the answer in every situation. In many districts, it is treated more like a requirement than a learning opportunity. Teachers are sent to a short seminar, and then the matter is considered resolved. Without follow-up coaching or classroom-specific application, the impact is minimal. Research has shown that when training is generic and disconnected from teachers' actual classrooms, such as when it does not address how to scaffold math lessons for middle school ELLs or how to manage classrooms with multiple home languages, teachers struggle to

transfer it into practice (Samson & Collins, 2012; Missouri DESE, 2021). Teachers are already balancing multiple responsibilities each day, and being asked to attend extra sessions without structural support can reduce motivation rather than build it. Johnson (2020) cautioned that one-off workshops are rarely effective, while Jenkins (2024) pointed out that PD has the most impact when it is part of a broader, schoolwide system in which leaders also commit to providing resources, feedback, and time to practice new strategies. There is also the question of whether PD addresses the right issues. Some programs focus heavily on language acquisition strategies, which is great, but what about the cultural component? Teachers might need help recognizing their own biases or understanding the backgrounds of their students, as students arriving from other countries will come from a different kind of school system. A PD session that included role-playing scenarios from ELL students' perspectives can change how a teacher approaches lessons, making them more inclusive.

Not every teacher approaches professional development with enthusiasm, and the reasons are understandable. Some believe their current strategies are adequate, while others see PD as one more obligation competing with grading, planning, and family responsibilities. Studies have suggested that the difference often lies in how school leadership frames and supports PD. When leaders foster a culture where ongoing learning is seen as meaningful rather than punitive, teachers are more likely to engage (Samson & Collins, 2012). Research also shows that short, isolated workshops rarely produce change; instead, PD must be practical, sustained, and tied directly to classroom needs in order to improve confidence and instructional competence (Johnson, 2020; Missouri DESE, 2021). Jenkins (2024) further emphasized that the most effective PD occurs within a system where administrators commit resources and feedback,

creating an environment where professional growth feels possible. Without such alignment, PD risks becoming little more than a checkbox exercise, with limited impact on ELLs' success.

The Role of Teacher Beliefs & Efficacy

It comes as no surprise that how teachers think about ELLs shapes how prepared they feel to have them in their classroom. Studies such as Tran (2011) and Wissink & Starks (2019) made it clear that a teacher's beliefs about ELLs can affect their confidence in the classroom. When teachers see ELLs as bringing valuable experience to the classroom, like their cultural backgrounds, they are more likely to use inclusive strategies. Integrating a student's home language into a normal classroom lesson, such as vocabulary, can increase the enthusiasm of ELL students and keep them engaged.

When teachers view ELLs as a negative in their classroom and assume they are "behind" or cannot keep up, it tends to decrease their own confidence and effort. Tran (2011) pointed out that teachers with these assumptions often feel less equipped to handle diverse classrooms. This then has a chance to become a self-fulfilling prophecy, with lower expectations, less creative teaching, and weaker outcomes for students. Once begun upon the path of expecting lower standards it becomes difficult to change that path. Teachers need to understand that their mindset can hold them back until they go through training that challenges those biases.

It is not an easy matter to change someone's beliefs. Some teachers might not even recognize their own assumptions, especially if they have never had much exposure to ELLs before. Wissink & Starks (2019) suggested that professional development needs to go beyond just teaching strategies and should include honest conversations about biases and how they can affect the classroom. Not every school has the time or resources to look at the way every teacher

in a building think. Some teachers might push back, feeling like they are being unfairly criticized instead of supported.

The evidence suggests that teachers who see ELLs as an asset instead of a deficit do not just feel more ready; they are more likely to try new things like scaffolding lessons or creating space for students to share their cultures. This is important for ELLs, who often need that extra encouragement to feel they belong in a classroom. We are asking a lot of teachers today without always giving them the tools or time to rethink past pedagogy. It is one thing to read about these ideas in a study, another to make them work in a packed classroom on a Tuesday morning after a three-day weekend.

Leadership & Structural Support

Reflecting on recent scholarship, like Jenkins (2024), Johnson (2020), and Imran et al. (2024), it is striking how much a school's leadership can influence teachers' readiness to work with ELLs. It is not just about administrators offering encouraging words during a faculty meeting. The real impact comes from what they do to back up those words in the day-to-day grind of teaching.

Principals who are serious about supporting ELLs go beyond approving lesson plans that check a diversity or differentiated lesson checkbox. They make sure teachers have the tools they need, whether that's time to plan, access to solid resources, or opportunities to team up with colleagues. Jenkins (2024) highlighted schools where co-teaching is part of the mindset in the school, not just a single experiment. In those school settings, general education teachers and ELL specialists constantly worked together, sharing ideas during scheduled planning sessions. The payoff? Both teachers and students seemed more invested, and classrooms felt more dynamic.

Unfortunately, every attempt at including mainstream teachers into planning does not always work. Johnson (2020) pointed out that in some schools, inclusion is more of a gesture than a reality. ELLs might be sitting in mainstream classrooms, but without thoughtful scaffolding, such as clear visuals or modified assignments, students may not move forward. Educators who have been in those situations can be frustrated. They want to help their students but often lack the training or structure to make inclusion work, so preparedness barely budes, and sometimes it even takes a hit.

Imran et al. (2024) offered a new way to look at it, suggesting that a school's overall culture can shape teachers' mindsets just as much as their strategies. When a school embraces multilingualism, such as bilingual posters in the halls, or parent nights that welcome non-English speakers it seems to get teachers approach their work differently. School leadership learning a few phrases in her students' home languages can show a level of respect. It may not be perfect, but it can send a message that carries into how teachers engage with their classes.

The evidence points to a clear conclusion that meaningful administrative support, structured co-teaching, and a schoolwide culture that values ELLs are critical for helping teachers feel ready. The gap between expectation and reality grows, leaving both teachers and students frustrated. Schools, especially those lacking time and money, may not consistently deliver this kind of support. It is one thing to read about best practices in academic journals; it is another to make them a reality in a busy school environment.

Discussion

Synthesis of Findings

The 14 studies analyzed collectively advanced the understanding of teacher preparedness for ELLs by revealing a pattern of systemic under-preparation. This is perceived as low readiness across different districts and is being addressed by divergent trends in remedial strategies and persistent gaps in rural/structural focus. Emerging patterns show that pre-service issues (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas & Villegas, 2008) continue without sustained PD or belief shifts (Tran, 2011; Wissink & Starks, 2019), with leadership enabling breakthroughs in inclusive cultures (Jenkins, 2024). This synthesis underscores that while policies like ESSA promise equity, preparation remains unequal, limiting concepts to asset-based approaches.

Mainstream teachers in the U.S. are not prepared to support ELLs in the classroom, according to the findings in the reviewed literature. Although national policies such as the ESSA emphasize equitable access and inclusive practices for all students, the actual implementation of this vision within teacher preparation programs remains inconsistent. Many educators enter the classroom with little to no formal training on language acquisition, multilingual development, or culturally responsive pedagogy. This difference between policy intent and practical training contributes to ongoing gaps in teacher confidence and instructional quality when it comes to serving ELLs effectively.

Several studies emphasize the theoretical underpinnings necessary to inform and reform ELL instruction. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), which focused on the importance of "comprehensible input" slightly beyond a learner's current level of proficiency ($i+1$), is cited in foundational studies such as Villegas et al. (2018) and de Jong and Harper (2005). These studies stressed that teachers must be able to deliver content in ways that are linguistically

possible, allowing language acquisition and content mastery to occur. The literature also made clear that most mainstream teachers lack exposure to this concept during their training, resulting in a disconnect between theoretical best practices and classroom realities.

Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) was another foundational theory that emerged during the analysis. ZPD emphasized the importance of scaffolding instruction, so teachers can support learners as they transition from what they can do with assistance to what they can do independently. In studies such as Lucas et al. (2008) and Bennett (2021), ZPD was used to frame how teachers can effectively differentiate instruction for ELLs by offering structured support and modeling, which can lead to independent work. Despite the practical application of this theory, few educators reported intentionally using scaffolded strategies or being trained to do so, suggesting a gap in pre-service training.

The body of literature studied here pointed to limitations in the training of pre-service teachers and leadership development for principals. Linguistic diversity is often treated as a peripheral concern rather than a central necessity of educational equity. Until programs elevate ELLs as a normal part of classroom life and a classroom teacher's responsibility, mainstream educators will continue to enter classrooms without the tools or mindsets necessary to instruct all students effectively.

Critical Evaluation

Across the 14 studies in the review, a few methodological habits showed repeatedly useful trends but were not without consequences. One recurring issue was the heavy reliance on self-report surveys, which often asked teachers or principals to rate preparedness or confidence on Likert scales. While that can capture their immediate perceptions, it also may invite common-method bias and social desirability effects (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A teacher who just had a

breakthrough with a newcomer might rate themselves as highly prepared, while one struggling with a multi-grade ELL cluster may underrate their skills out of frustration. Either way, self-ratings do not map cleanly onto actual practice (Lucas & Villegas, 2008). The result is that the magnitude of under preparedness may be exaggerated or understated, depending on context.

There is also the fact that most of these studies are cross-sectional, giving only instant snapshots. That makes them efficient to administer, but it also means they cannot show change or causality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). If a district rolled out targeted professional development in the fall and survey scores improved by winter, the uptick might reflect training, seasonal burnout easing, or even just more generous principals. Without longitudinal designs or pre/post comparisons, any claims about impact remain tentative at best.

Sampling patterns raise another flag. Many studies drew from convenience samples of large urban or suburban districts with existing ELL infrastructure, while rural and small districts were underrepresented (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). This imbalance likely skewed findings toward contexts with access to specialists, planning time, and bilingual resources, conditions not typical in rural areas (Show-Me Institute, 2023). Generalizing those findings to the entire state, or to mainstream teachers broadly risks overstating the feasibility of certain models like co-teaching or newcomer programs in resource-limited districts (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016).

Measurement design also showed similar cracks. Several studies used locally developed preparedness scales with little or no reported evidence of validity or reliability, and only a few aligned their items to established SLA constructs (Samson & Collins, 2012). Broad composite categories like differentiation or diverse learners sometimes combined unrelated practices, grouping, visuals, tiered texts, or cultural inclusion making it unclear which elements were

actually driving results (Lucas & Villegas, 2008). When constructs are this loose, it becomes easy to claim PD had no effect when the real problem might be misaligned measurement.

Inconsistencies in how studies defined and grouped ELLs also weaken the evidence base. Some studies lumped newcomers, long-term ELLs, and reclassified students together, despite their vastly unique needs and trajectories (Umansky & Porter, 2020). Without disaggregation by years in U.S. schools, home language literacy, or program model, outcomes get averaged together in ways that may obscure pockets of success or mask specific barriers (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016).

Another pattern is the near-total absence of fidelity of implementation data. Studies often reported the presence of co-teaching, sheltered instruction, or pull-out services without describing how consistently those models were enacted. Co-teaching might mean two teachers planning and teaching as equals, or an ESL specialist hovering as a classroom aide (Friend et al., 2010). Without checks on consistency, program labels become more like slogans than evidence, and mixed or null findings could reflect weak implementation rather than ineffective models.

Most studies used single-level statistics despite teachers being nested within schools and districts. This violates the independence assumption and risks underestimating school or district-level effects (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Few studies reported effect sizes or confidence intervals alongside significance tests, making it hard to judge practical impact (Cohen et al., 2017). A p-value can say something happened; an effect size quietly admits it was not much.

Professional development studies show a similar weakness: most evaluated one-off workshops or brief trainings without follow-up coaching or classroom artifacts. When they found minor impact, the design itself invites a different interpretation, that such workshops were never structured to change practice in the first place (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Without job-embedded

cycles and artifacts like lesson plans or student work, it is hard to tell if strategies actually reached classrooms.

Finally, student outcomes were rarely measured. Studies overwhelmingly tracked teacher beliefs, self-efficacy, or perceived strategy use, while few examined student ACCESS growth, content mastery, or access to advanced coursework. When student data did appear, they were usually broad proficiency levels without subgroup breakdowns (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). This imbalance risked over-centering teacher experiences while underestimating whether students benefitted (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016).

Implications for Practice

The reviewed literature advances understanding of teacher preparedness by highlighting actionable pathways from theory to practice, particularly for program design and PD. Teacher-preparation programs need to integrate SLA theories like Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Vygotsky's ZPD across core methods courses, not as isolated electives. In addition, there should be 15+ student contact hours with mandatory ELL-inclusive field placements in diverse settings (Lucas & Villegas, 2008; de Jong & Harper, 2005). This could shift perceptions from deficit to asset-based, with ELL teachers modeling co-teaching to build a better understanding of what ELL educators do.

For PD design, prioritize sustained, job-embedded models such as 6-12 month cycles with coaching over one-off in-service days, encouraging self-reflection on teaching practices with ELLs (Tran, 2011; Wissink & Starks, 2019) and structural supports like co-planning time (Jenkins, 2024). In poorer rural districts, virtual networks could facilitate peer collaboration, addressing gaps in leadership (Johnson, 2020). These recommendations are grounded in the

evidence of PD's potential and offer solid steps to elevate readiness, ensuring policies like ESSA translate into equitable classrooms.

If we are serious about getting mainstream teachers, school boards, districts, and administrative personnel need to address the deficit of teacher training. Too many new teachers are thrown into diverse classrooms with little idea about how language learning actually works. School districts need to take a more comprehensive look at classes that make second language acquisition (SLA) a priority, not as an optional seminar. A solid SLA course should not just quickly go through theories like Krashen's Input Hypothesis or Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. It should dig into how those theories are used in a classroom and use them to shape lesson plans, guide assessments, or help a teacher decide what to say to a student who is struggling to follow along in a history class.

A single course is rarely enough to shift how teachers view their responsibility ELLs. As de Jong and Harper (2005) argued, reading about strategies in a textbook is quite different from applying them to real students. Teacher candidates may be placed in schools with few or no ELLs, making their practicum experiences almost irrelevant once they begin working in more diverse districts. Lucas and Villegas (2008) emphasized that field placements should be intentional, giving future teachers daily interaction with multilingual learners under the guidance of mentors who understand ELL pedagogy. Without that deliberate, authentic interaction with ELLs strategies remain theoretical and often fade away when teachers step into their own classrooms.

For teachers already in the field, PD presents its own set of challenges. Research shows that one-day workshops rarely have lasting impact; the most effective PD is sustained, directly connected to teachers' actual classrooms, and grounded in second language acquisition principles

(Johnson, 2020; Missouri DESE, 2021). As Jenkins (2024) pointed out, effective PD moves beyond “sit and listen” models and emphasizes cycles of trying, reflecting, and trying again. Coaching, collaborative planning, and teacher learning communities can be powerful, but only when districts invest in follow-through. Without that commitment, PD risks becoming little more than a box-checking exercise with limited influence on ELL instruction. Additionally, school leadership sets the tone for how ELLs are supported. As Umansky and Porter (2020) noted, leaders play a critical role in shaping whether ELL instruction is seen as a shared responsibility or left to a specialist. When principals and administrators prioritize multilingual learners, teachers are more willing to experiment with approaches such as co-teaching. As Samson and Collins (2012) cautioned, co-teaching only succeeds when schools create a culture of collaboration otherwise it risks feeling like extra work layered on top of existing responsibilities, particularly when schedules and planning time do not align.

The deeper issue extends beyond structures and into teacher beliefs. Lucas and Villegas (2008) emphasized that training cannot stop at distributing strategies; it must challenge teachers to reflect on their assumptions about ELLs. Too often, students are viewed through a deficit lens, as learners who need to be fixed rather than as children who bring valuable home languages, cultural perspectives, and strengths to the classroom. Without this shift in mindset, even well-intentioned strategies may be mistaught, reinforcing low expectations (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Approaches such as culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy may sound abstract, but in reality, they ask teachers to think about language matters, what counts as knowledge, and how instruction can improve ELLs learning.

Future Research

Research on teaching ELLs shows we have learned a lot, but there are still some big questions hanging out there, that are too critical to just shrug off. There is a lack of solid, large-scale studies that directly connect teacher training to student success. We like to think that teachers who are well-prepared will naturally help their ELL students do better in subjects like reading or math, but where is the proof? If a teacher takes a serious look into SLA and inclusive teaching methods, do their students' test scores or classroom performance actually improve? A study across different schools that reports hard numbers. This could give school boards and policymakers a stronger case for investing in specific training programs.

Much of the research analyzed throughout seems to be short-sighted and only provided a snapshot of what teachers are doing at one moment in time. Teaching is not a one-and-done deal, teachers grow, schools change, and policies shift. What if we tracked new teachers over, say, their first five or ten years? A long-term study could show us which training strategies stick, and which ones are quickly lost. Teachers tend to have faith in the techniques they learned in their certification program, only to find them less useful as their classrooms or district expectations evolve. Figuring out what holds up over time could really shape how we prepare teachers.

Additionally, more effective research could pull from a wider range of fields. Teaching ELLs is not just about education, it is tied up with linguistics, how the brain processes language, and public policy. Bringing these perspectives together might help us understand why substantial changes, like new state guidelines, sometimes fail even before they reach the classroom. A first-year teacher in a small rural Missouri school with just one or two ELL students is navigating a different world than a teacher in Kansas City, where a single classroom might be full of kids speaking half a dozen languages. What would we learn if we compared those experiences head-

to-head? It might point to ways to spread resources more fairly, so no teacher feels like they are figuring it out alone. Without clearer answers, we are left making educated guesses about what works best, and that feels like it is selling everyone short.

Conclusion

A review of the 14 empirical and theoretical sources pointed to a familiar and troubling pattern: many mainstream teachers in the United States do not feel ready to effectively teach ELLs. It is important to note this is not about laziness or indifference, if anything it shows frustration, the teachers in these studies often appear deeply committed to their students. The problem seems to lie somewhere else, in the programs where teacher preparation falls short, where access to sustained PD is uneven, and where school systems do not seem to provide the structural supports needed to make inclusion a part of school culture.

Across the studies, one message comes through clearly: professional development and leadership support matter. When teachers are given training that is anchored in theory and also paired with real-world instructional modeling, their confidence grows. Teachers are willing to try strategies that actually engage ELLs. Short workshops rarely produce these effects; the studies suggested that ongoing, embedded PD that is supported by administrators who prioritize multilingual learning can make a noticeable difference.

Often research-backed frameworks, such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis or Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, are mentioned as valuable yet underused. These are not fringe theories, they have been central to language acquisition research for decades, yet they appear inconsistently, in many pre-service programs and district-level training plans. The result is that teachers may hear these names in passing during a course or PD session but rarely have the continuing opportunity to practice applying them in real classrooms. That difference between

theory and implementation seems to be one of the enduring weak spots in preparing mainstream teachers to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students.

Limitations

While this chapter synthesized 14 studies spanning more than two decades, there are limits to what such a review can accomplish. The available literature does not fully capture the everyday realities of Missouri teachers. Much of the research comes from national or multi-state samples, and although those findings seem comparable within Missouri's context, it is impossible for them to be the same. Teacher preparation programs differ widely, and what holds true in Texas or California may not directly compare neatly districts in the Midwest. This does not invalidate the insights, but it does mean that the patterns identified here should be seen as similar to what is found elsewhere.

Another limitation lies in the reliance on self-reported measures of preparedness. Many of the studies in this review asked teachers to rate their own confidence in teaching ELLs. That approach has value and tells us how teachers perceive their readiness. Unfortunately, it does not necessarily reflect what happens when the classroom door closes. A teacher may feel confident but implement strategies poorly, or they may feel unprepared yet still manage to provide useful scaffolding. The literature reviewed here appears to lean more towards perception rather than direct observation or outcome-based measures, which may distort our understanding of actual instructional quality.

There is also a matter of time. Educational research often lags behind practice. Studies published in the early 2000s examined teacher preparation in a No Child Left Behind context, while more recent work was conducted under ESSA. Federal frameworks shifted, demographic pressures increased, and state endorsement policies evolved, yet some studies treat teacher

preparation as if these changes happened in isolation. The result is a patchwork of findings that do not always account for how policy environments shape practice on the ground.

One more subtle limitation involves absent voices. Much of the literature comes from surveys and program evaluations designed by researchers, not teachers themselves. While teacher responses are central, there is relatively little qualitative work that lets teachers describe in their own words what it feels like to face a class with several students who speak little or no English. Without those stories, the review may unintentionally reduce the complexity of teacher experience, treating preparedness as a number rather than an ever-changing dynamic.

The selection of studies reflects my own inclusion criteria, which emphasized peer-reviewed articles and policy-relevant analyses. This choice may have excluded useful insights from practitioner journals, district reports, or unpublished dissertations that capture ground-level realities. The evidence presented here provides an important snapshot, but it is hardly the whole picture.

Acknowledging these limitations does not negate the value of the review but instead underscores the need for caution in interpretation. The themes identified, persistent under preparation, inconsistent professional development, the influence of beliefs, and the role of leadership, are clearly shown. Yet they come from a body of literature that is uneven, often perception-driven, and context-dependent. Future research will need to fill these gaps, by pairing quantitative survey data with accurate qualitative accounts from teachers, administrators, and even the students who experience the consequences of teacher preparedness every day.

Chapter 3 - Longitudinal Policy study of English Language Learner

Education Policy for the State of Missouri

Abstract

This study is a longitudinal look at Missouri's education policies on English Language Learners (ELLs) and how they have shaped mainstream classroom teachers. This study traces the history of ELL policies in Missouri which starts with the federal 1968 Bilingual Education Act, continuing to policy changes in response to the Every Student Succeeds Act. Shifting demographics, along with advancements in educational theory, have also led to policy changes in addition to the federal laws that research involves a detailed analysis of Missouri's laws, regulations, and policy documents. The study highlights key developments in ELL education, such as the shift from local bilingual programs to a more uniform statewide approach. It will explore the effects of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) on accountability. In addition to federal laws the study looks at the creation of formal ELL endorsement requirements under Missouri's 5 CSR 20-400.570. These policies have impacted teacher training programs, professional development efforts, and the integration of ELL instruction into mainstream classrooms. Using a long-term perspective, this research identifies trends, challenges, and gaps in Missouri's ELL policy, with a focus on the support of mainstream teachers who work with an increasingly diverse student population. The findings aim to allow broader discussions on state-level ELL policy development with practical recommendations for future policy changes to ensure effective language instruction. This study provides policymakers, educators, and researchers with insights into the historical and current factors shaping Missouri's approach to ELL education.

Introduction

The history of English Language Learner (ELL) policy in Missouri is long, uneven, and, at times, contradictory. From the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 to the current Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), lawmakers have promised equity, but the path from policy to practice has been anything but straightforward (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). On paper, Missouri has taken some important steps. The state formalized the ELL endorsement through 5 CSR 20-400.570, setting coursework and clinical expectations for educators (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). It also aligned with the WIDA consortium to standardize assessments and frameworks (WIDA, 2018). These efforts certainly suggest a seriousness about meeting the needs of multilingual learners. Unfortunately, what exists in regulation often struggles to find its way into everyday classrooms (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021).

One of the challenges is the uneven implementation across districts. Larger urban districts tend to have more infrastructure, though even they complain of fragmented programs and overcrowded classrooms (Flores et al., 2017). Smaller, rural districts, meanwhile, may barely manage to find a single endorsed teacher, let alone sustain a program that meets the standards written into law (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). This discrepancy does not necessarily reflect bad intentions, but resource shortages, staffing problems, and competing demands appear to undermine the follow-through (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016).

It also seems worth noting that teacher preparation programs themselves have not always been consistent in how they interpret these requirements. A university in Kansas City may integrate multiple courses on second language acquisition, while a smaller institution might confine ELL preparation to a single seminar. The result is a system where two graduates, each

technically certified to teach in Missouri, can walk into their first classroom with strikingly different toolkits for supporting language learners (Lucas & Villegas, 2008; de Jong & Harper, 2005). This is not a minor detail, it is the sort of unevenness that ripples outward, shaping both how teachers feel about their own readiness and how ELL students experience school.

There is also the question of accountability. Federal law, through cases like *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981), has made clear that schools are required to provide meaningful access for ELLs. The way Missouri interprets and enforces these obligations, however, appears to be inconsistent. Some districts report proactive monitoring and guidance from DESE; others describe the system as hands-off until a compliance issue arises (Umansky & Porter, 2020). This unevenness may suggest that Missouri's policies are better at setting standards than ensuring they are met.

This chapter traces how Missouri's ELL policies have evolved and how they actually operate in practice. It asks not only what the laws and regulations say, but how those policies intersect with teacher preparation, professional development, and district capacity. It acknowledges a tension that runs throughout the state: policies that read well in statute books but appear far less convincing once tested in classrooms. The goal here is not to reduce Missouri's story to failure or success, but to examine the uneven terrain where policy intentions collide with everyday realities.

Research Questions

This study is guided by two research questions:

1. What are the major legislative and regulatory milestones in Missouri's ELL policy development from 1968 to the present, and how have these shaped the state's approach to ELL instruction and teacher preparation?

2. To what extent have federal mandates, demographic shifts, and educational research influenced the development and implementation of Missouri's ELL endorsement policies?

To explore these questions, the study used Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework to identify how policy windows emerged in response to specific problems, such as growing ELL enrollment, available solutions, and shifting politics. Along with Kingdon, educational equity frameworks provided a lens through which to assess whether these policies have equitably addressed the needs of all students and meaningfully improved mainstream teacher readiness.

Why This Analysis Matters

This study contributes to a growing but underdeveloped body of literature on state-level ELL policy evolution. While national studies have tracked federal mandates and their implications, (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016; Morita-Mullaney, 2014) fewer have explored how specific states like Missouri have adapted, or struggled to adapt to those mandates (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017). Even fewer have analyzed the long-term consequences of these policies on teacher preparation, classroom practice, and student outcomes (Umansky & Porter, 2020; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008.)

The findings of this study offer evidence-based recommendations for closing policy gaps and improving the consistency and effectiveness of ELL instruction across Missouri. By highlighting both the structural and instructional implications of ELL policy, this research supports informed decision-making at multiple levels, legislative, administrative, and pedagogical, plus it provides a model for other states facing similar challenges in ELL education reform (DESE, 2021; Jenkins, 2024; Johnson, 2020).

Policy Background & Context: Early Developments & the Bilingual Education Era (1968-1990s)

Missouri tackled education for ELLs, without some comprehensive plan guiding the way, instead opting for a plan that was far more patchwork in nature, with local schools trying to keep up with federal changes (Morita-Mullaney, 2014). When the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 came along, it changed how the country thought about languages other than English (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988). Districts in Missouri were left to figure it out on their own, inventing bilingual programs based on whatever resources they had that met the immediate needs of their students (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017). Some schools had stacks of translated worksheets, others leaned on basic ESL lessons, but there was no set policy to follow.

There was a patchwork of efforts that varied wildly from one district to the next. Some places did their best to help non-English-speaking students, maybe offering a Spanish-speaking aide or simplified vocabulary lists, but it was often about getting through the day rather than setting students up for long-term academic success (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Early programs were reactive, shaped more by what was on hand than by any deep understanding of how students learn a second language (de Jong & Harper, 2005). These early, reactive policies underscore Missouri's continual prioritization of compliance over statewide cohesiveness. Missouri granted local autonomy that empowered urban districts but eroded equity in rural ones, where resource scarcity limited teacher effectiveness and left ELLs with fragmented support (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). This pattern of federal mandates was met with decentralized implementation and continues to shape uneven teacher preparedness, treating ELL instruction as a local "add-on" rather than a statewide imperative.

Educators wanted to help, but the system was not set up to prepare teachers or schools for the challenge of linguistic diversity. There was no statewide standard to lean on (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012) nor were there teacher programs that could handle the complexity of teaching ELLs in a way that went beyond just breaking down language barriers (Samson & Collins, 2012).

Literature Review

Missouri's approach to educating ELLs over past several decades shows that the journey has been anything but straightforward. The policies have changed much since the late 1960s and have been shaped by a mix of federal Acts and state-level decisions (Morita-Mullaney, 2014). It started with the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, which was an important piece of legislation with far-reaching effects. For the first time, the federal government provided mandated support for ELLs, and they even put some money behind bilingual programs (Ovando, 2003). This beginning started the evolution of Federal legislation addressing the needs of ELLs.

Fast forward to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002, where legislation became more specific. Schools were put under pressure to show measurable results through standardized tests, and teachers felt the heat to prove their students were progressing (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). NCLB forced a significant amount of focus on test scores, but it could feel like the system cared more about numbers than students' progress. Next was the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, which seemed to take a step back and try for a more balanced approach. It pushed states like Missouri to produce plans that fit their local needs while still keeping equity in mind (Umansky & Porter, 2020).

Missouri's policies did not just follow the federal lead, though, they have also been shaped by what was happening within school districts across the state. As the number of ELL

students grew, and as research on language learning evolved, the state had to adapt (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017). In the beginning there was a lack of consistency. Some schools had decent bilingual setups; others just handed out translated worksheets and called it a day (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], n.d.). Without a clear standard though the results across the state were inconsistent.

Things started to change with rules like 5 CSR 20-400.570, which laid out specific requirements for teacher certification and ELL endorsements (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). The idea was to make sure teachers had the training to handle linguistic and cultural diversity. The law put into place a necessary amount of coursework on language acquisition, regular assessments, and ongoing professional development (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). Teachers who have gone through the endorsement process can still feel overwhelmed in classrooms where students speak multiple languages. Missouri is in a difficult place, trying to meet federal demands while figuring out how to make education fair and effective for ELLs (Umansky & Porter, 2020).

Previous Longitudinal Policy Studies

Digging into the history of policies for ELLs feels like piecing together a puzzle with a few missing bits. The research studies like Morita-Mullaney (2014), Flores et al. (2017), and Umansky & Porter (2020) all offer solid starting points, but the question about how well these policies are serving students and teachers remains largely unanswered. Despite this, these works shine a light on how accountability, resources, and policy decisions have shaped outcomes for ELLs over the years, with lessons that hit close to home for Missouri's ongoing debates (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], n.d.). This analysis

should encourage some thoughts on how we can build smarter, long-term policies to make education fairer for linguistically diverse students.

Morita-Mullaney's (2014) dive into Indiana's ELL policies, from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) to 2014, laid out the facts. She walked through how federal and state rules have either brought ELLs to the forefront or left them on the sidelines when it comes to tracking their progress over time. NCLB's push for standardized testing changed the way schools approach ELL education, sometimes making it harder to focus on what ELLs actually need. Her work showed that while some reforms have made ELLs more visible in accountability systems, there are still gaps that affect how we measure their success (Umansky & Porter, 2020). There are similar struggles to balance federal demands with local realities (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.).

Flores et al. (2017), focused on how different state policies affected ELLs' academic paths. They looked at three case studies and found that when policies like funding or accountability measures are tailored to ELLs' needs, you see real gains in test scores, retention, and graduation rates. Unfortunately, when policies miss the mark, they can make inequities between ELLs and other students worse. When resources are inadequate to support the ELL program it can affect a teacher's ability to provide for her students. The study's point is clear: thoughtful, targeted policies matter, and they can make or break a student's shot at success (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). For Missouri, where resources can vary wildly from one district to the next, this should be a call to action (Missouri DESE, n.d.).

Umansky and Porter (2020) took a different angle, pushing for a long-term view of ELL policies. Their framework was all about looking at the big picture, tracking how policies play out over years, not just months, and keeping up with changes in student populations, research, and

politics. They argued for things like fair resource allocation, better teacher training, and ongoing accountability that was driven by data (Umansky & Porter, 2020). As a district's demographics shift over time, training for teachers needs to be kept up to date. Their approach makes sense: policies need to evolve with the times, and we should be checking in regularly to see what is working (Flores et al., 2017). It is a practical lens for Missouri, where we are still figuring out how to support a growing number of ELLs without leaving teachers stranded (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016).

These studies together make a compelling case for why we need to keep digging into ELL policies with a long-term, evidence-based mindset. There is a question whether policymakers are ready to take on the kind of sustained effort these researchers are calling for, as it is a lot easier to slap on a quick fix than to rethink the system.

Gaps in the Literature

While national studies on ELL policy are plentiful, the literature is missing when it comes to tracking the long arc of state-specific policy development, especially in Missouri (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017; Umansky & Porter, 2020). Federal laws like No Child Left Behind (2001) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) control the conversation, because they reshaped accountability structures across the country. Knowing that these policies exist is not the same as understanding how they have trickled down, shifted, or been interpreted at the state level over decades (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). In Missouri's case, there is very little scholarship tracing how endorsement requirements for ELL educators have evolved or whether those requirements adequately prepare mainstream teachers for multilingual classrooms (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], n.d.). One missing piece in the existing research is the long-term effect of

regulations like 5 CSR 20-400.570 on actual classroom practice and student learning (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.).

Federal Legislation & the Supreme Court

There have been a number of important federal regulations and legislation that have had a significant impact on classroom practice and learning. These include:

Bilingual Education Act of 1968: This landmark federal law recognized the unique educational needs of students with limited English proficiency and provided federal funding to support bilingual education programs. Bilingual Education Act (1968): (Bilingual Education Act, 1968)

Lau v. Nichols (1974): A pivotal U.S. Supreme Court decision that affirmed the rights of non-English-speaking students to receive meaningful instruction, leading to the requirement for schools to take affirmative steps to overcome educational barriers faced by ELLs. Lau v. Nichols (1974): (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001: This act reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, emphasizing accountability and standardized testing, including specific provisions for the assessment and progress of ELLs. No Child Left Behind Act (2001): (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015: Replacing NCLB, ESSA shifted more accountability to states while maintaining a focus on the progress of ELLs, requiring states to establish standardized criteria for English language proficiency and integrate these into their accountability systems. Every Student Succeeds Act (2015): (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

Missouri State Legislation & Regulations

Additionally, there have been a number of Missouri regulations and legislations that have further impacted classrooms across the state, including:

Missouri Code of State Regulations (CSR) 5 CSR 20-400.570: This regulation outlines the certification requirements for educators teaching English Language Learners in Missouri, detailing the necessary qualifications and competencies. (Missouri Code of State Regulations, n.d.)

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) English Language Development Guidelines: DESE provides comprehensive guidelines and resources for the implementation of English Language Development programs, including standards, instructional strategies, and assessment tools. (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.)

DESE Title III English Learners Program: This program offers guidance on the implementation of Title III provisions under ESSA, focusing on ensuring that ELLs attain English proficiency and meet the same academic standards as their English-speaking peers. (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.)

Missouri English Learner Identification and Placement Guidance Document (2024-25): A collaborative publication by DESE and WIDA, this document provides detailed procedures for the identification and appropriate placement of English learners in educational programs. (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education & WIDA, n.d.)

Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) Standards: These standards include specific provisions related to the education of ELLs, emphasizing the need for an aligned

curriculum, effective instruction, and assessment practices that accommodate the needs of linguistically diverse students. (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.)

Problem Statement

Missouri's current policies for educating ELLs and for preparing mainstream teachers to work with them still carry some noticeable gaps. The largest problem is the way ELL-specific strategies remain outside of general instruction. In many classrooms, language support is treated like an optional add-on rather than something that should be included into everyday teaching (Samson & Collins, 2012). This is not usually because teachers do not care; it is because their preparation programs did not make it a priority in the first place (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008).

Teacher preparation looks different depending on the College or University a pre-service teacher attends. Some programs weave in coursework on second language acquisition within classes, while others have a dedicated class of two to three hours. Those different experiences mean teachers step into classrooms with widely different skill sets, which can lead to uneven results for students (de Jong & Harper, 2005). The state does have an ELL endorsement process, but for most general education teachers, there is no compelling incentive to go through the process. There is no extra pay, no reduced workload, not even a clear signal that the effort will be valued in hiring or evaluation (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], n.d.).

Professional development (PD) might help close some of these gaps, but what is offered is often too short, generic, or out of touch with current research on second language acquisition (SLA) and culturally responsive teaching (Johnson, 2020; Jenkins, 2024). Collaboration between

general education teachers and ESOL specialists is inconsistent, especially in smaller districts where one specialist might be stretched across multiple schools. Rural and underfunded districts face their own problems: less staff, fewer PD opportunities, and teachers having to just figure it out (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012).

That is where a longitudinal policy analysis becomes necessary. Looking at ELL policy in Missouri over decades, starting with the locally improvised programs of the 1970s, through the NCLB era's test-based accountability, to the ESSA years can help us see patterns that are not obvious when we focus on a single moment (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017). What parts of Missouri remained unchanged? What parts of the law were forced to change due to Federal mandates? And which had unintended consequences that no one anticipated?

This kind of historical view also lets us see how Missouri's policies shift, copy or ignore national trends. Federal policies usually set the minimum, but states like Missouri have to decide on what the minimum for school districts looks like (Umansky & Porter, 2020). Those policies shape whether mainstream teachers are prepared to teach ELLs. If we are serious about educational equity, future policy cannot just say inclusion, it has to be backed by teacher preparation, ongoing support, with enough resources to make those ideals work in real classrooms (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016).

Federal Influence & the Standardization Shift (1990s-2000s)

The early 2000s brought a new kind of pressure. With the arrival of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, schools were suddenly required to show results. Not just for the average student, but for every subgroup, including English learners (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). Missouri started tightening its grip on accountability. ELL education, which had previously been unavoidable, now had to be assessed (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). That change pushed the

state toward a more standardized system: clearer expectations for teachers, emphasis on testing, and the beginnings of formal teacher preparation in this area (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017). It often meant that teaching strategies were shaped as much by test preparation as by students' actual learning needs (Umansky & Porter, 2020).

In classrooms, this often meant increased use of scripted ELL curricula, test-aligned practice materials, and structured daily language objectives, even in content classes (Umansky & Porter, 2020). Teachers were expected to teach to state language proficiency standards, give frequent benchmark assessments tied to standardized tests, and narrow instruction to tested domains, sometimes at the expense of speaking and listening activities (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Many districts began requiring daily sheltered English instruction blocks, and mainstream teachers were urged to incorporate word walls, sentence frames, and test-like question stems into regular lessons to align with ACCESS and state content exams (Flores et al., 2017). While standardization aimed to reduce inequality, it also risked sidelining the cultural and contextual factors that make ELL education both complex and deeply human (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). NCLB's standardization reinforced Missouri's compliance focus, boosting data collection but limiting teachers' ability to try new things through test-driven curricula that ignored culturally responsive practices, ultimately widening equity gaps for ELLs in under-resourced districts where adaptation remained uneven (Umansky & Porter, 2020).

Formalization of Teacher Certification & Endorsement Processes (2000s-2010s)

In the mid-2000s, Missouri made a more deliberate effort to make ELL instruction a profession. The state introduced a specific ELL endorsement (K-12) for teachers of English learners and codified it in regulation 5 CSR 20-400.570 (Missouri Code of State Regulations,

n.d.). This included coursework in second language acquisition, supervised clinical experiences, and a content-area test to show teachers knew what they were doing (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], n.d.). These efforts signaled a shift, ELL teaching was not just an afterthought or an optional skill, it was being treated as a legitimate area of expertise (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). While the policies provided structure, the way they played out in districts was not always consistent. Universities varied widely in how they interpreted and implemented the requirements (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017). Field experiences could range from deep, hands-on mentoring to little more than observational hours (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). The intention to raise the bar for ELL educators was clear, but the reality did not always match the blueprint (Umansky & Porter, 2020). This formalization reflects Missouri's policy evolution toward credentialing as a nod towards equity. Since it is optional for mainstream teachers, it perpetuates the politics of exclusion, where it is confined to specialists. This causes rural programs to lag behind, undermining the unity needed for systemic inclusion (de Jong & Harper, 2005).

Contemporary Policy Developments Under ESSA (2015-Present)

ESSA's passage in 2015 gave Missouri another chance to address ELL education. Unlike NCLB, which leaned heavily on punishment (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015), ESSA offered more flexibility, though not without requirements. Missouri's policies began to reflect a better understanding of ELL needs, at least on paper. Schools were encouraged to use data not just for compliance, but for decision-making. Schools were encouraged to use data not just for compliance, but for decision-making. This meant teachers were expected to use student-level ACCESS scores to set language growth targets, track WIDA can-do descriptors, and modify assignments. As an example, this would include breaking writing prompts into sentence frames

for Level two students or providing bilingual glossaries during science labs (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2017; WIDA, 2018).

PD became more of a focus, and districts were urged to think beyond “pull-out” ESL models toward collaborative, schoolwide strategies. Some urban districts like Kansas City Public Schools began co-teaching models where mainstream and ELL teachers shared classrooms and planned lessons together, using real-time formative language assessments during content instruction. Smaller rural districts often offered after-school PD on scaffolding strategies, like using visuals, gestures, and simplified syntax, but struggled to provide ongoing coaching (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012; Ilana Umansky & Lacey Porter, 2020).

There has also been some movement toward incorporating digital tools, whether that through the use of language apps, translation tools, or online platforms that allow for more individualized instruction. The rhetoric now includes terms like “culturally responsive” and “whole child,” which is encouraging, though implementation still varies wildly depending on geography and funding (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). ESSA’s flexibility allowed Missouri to refine tools like WIDA alignment, but persistent geographic disparities highlight a policy favoring urban access over rural equity, where teacher resources remain hampered by inadequate PD, perpetuating fragmented implementation (Flores et al., 2017). What is clear is that Missouri, like many states, is trying to respond to its changing demographics (Umansky & Porter, 2020). Whether it is doing so effectively is still an open question, but the intent to modernize ELL education is, at least, part of the current conversation.

Regional Policy Comparisons: Missouri, Kansas, & Illinois

While looking at Missouri, it helps to remember that neighboring states responded to the same federal pressures in separate ways. While Missouri moved from locally improvised

bilingual support toward standardized test-driven expectations under the NCLB (2002), Kansas took a more centralized path. Kansas adopted the WIDA English Language Development standards as early as 2003, well before Missouri did. Kansas began requiring all districts to use the state's Language Assessment Scales (LAS) to identify and exit ELLs (Kansas State Department of Education [KSDE], 2010). Kansas also embedded ELL-focused modules into its induction and mentoring programs for first- and second-year teachers. This meant even general education teachers had to show evidence of planning with language objectives during formal observations (KSDE, 2010). Missouri did not require language objectives in observed lessons statewide until well into the 2010s (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2017).

Illinois went further, under its 1991 Transitional Bilingual Education Act and strengthened again post-NCLB where Illinois already had a mandated bilingual education model for districts with 20 or more ELLs of the same language background (Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2012). By the mid-2000s, Illinois had launched state-funded bilingual teacher scholarships and required all teacher preparation programs to include ESL or bilingual pedagogy coursework (ISBE, 2012). Missouri did not adopt its own formal ELL endorsement regulation, 5 CSR 20-400.570 until the late 2000s, and even then, left it optional for mainstream teachers (Missouri DESE, 2017).

By ESSA (2015), Kansas was one of the first states to incorporate ELL growth directly into its school accountability model. Kansas disaggregated ELL data on state report cards by proficiency level and years in program (KSDE, 2018). Missouri eventually followed suit by including ELL growth in its Annual Performance Report, though only for schools with ten or more ELLs, which effectively excluded many rural districts from accountability metrics

(Missouri DESE, 2021). Missouri's decentralized model, compared to Illinois' mandates or Kansas' early standardization, illustrates a broader policy generalization: prioritizing local flexibility fosters innovation in resourced areas but erodes cohesiveness and equity elsewhere, limiting teacher effectiveness and leaving rural ELLs underserved (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). Illinois not only included ELL growth in accountability but also required districts to submit annual bilingual program plans describing staffing, curriculum, and parent outreach (ISBE, 2018). Missouri has never required such plans from districts.

Taken together, these contrasts suggest Missouri's trajectory has been more decentralized and compliance-driven, while Kansas and Illinois took earlier, more system-wide approaches. Missouri's patchwork approach allowed local flexibility but likely produced the variation in preparation and support as seen later in chapter four (Umansky & Porter, 2020; Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012).

Methods

Content analysis is justified as the core method for this longitudinal policy study, enabling a rigorous, replicable look at textual data to uncover themes, shifts, and implications in Missouri's ELL policies (Bowen, 2009). Unlike surveys or interviews, it allows direct engagement with primary sources which minimizes researcher bias through deductive coding guided by prior literature (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (1995) complements this by providing a theoretical lens to interpret policy evolution, tracking how "problems", "policies", and "politics" converge. This is essential for a "so what?" analysis of cohesiveness vs. compliance across decades (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). The longitudinal scope (1968–present) justifies the approach by revealing patterns invisible in cross-sectional work, while qualitative synthesis ensures depth on equity and teacher implications

(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Limitations are reduced by cross-verification with secondary sources like DESE reports.

Research Design

Policy content analysis is a way to track how policies shift, change, and sometimes reverse over time, spotting not just changes on paper but the patterns and consequences those changes create (Umansky & Porter, 2020). In education, where laws and regulations rarely arrive fully formed and tend to evolve in fits and starts, this approach becomes especially relevant (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). Political climates change, demographics shift, research advances, and the result is a policy landscape that looks different every few years. Scholars like Morita-Mullaney (2014) have shown how such an approach can uncover the ways state and federal accountability systems either bring ELLs into the picture, or leave them out entirely. Others, like Flores, Park, Viano, and Coca (2017), made the case that differences in state-level rules do not just exist, they actively shape the academic outcomes of ELLs, which is why it's not enough to study policy in snapshots. The long view matters (Umansky & Porter, 2020).

This longitudinal study focuses on Missouri's ELL policies, particularly how the state has approached preparing mainstream teachers and defining what it takes to earn an ELL endorsement (Missouri DESE, n.d.). The timeline stretches from the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, an early signal that Washington was beginning to recognize the needs of linguistically diverse students (Ovando, 2003). This continues through decades of federal reforms, demographic changes, and advances in second language acquisition research. Missouri has responded to pressure from federal laws, most notably No Child Left Behind (2002) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), both of which raised the stakes on accountability (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016; Umansky & Porter, 2020).

Policy changes, as Sabatier and Weible (2007) and Kingdon (1995) pointed out, is rarely straightforward. It is influenced by politics, economics, and the slow churn of institutional culture. A longitudinal approach makes it possible to see not just the official intentions of laws like 5 CSR 20-400.570, which formalized Missouri's ELL endorsement requirements but also their unintended consequences (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). This study uses historical document analysis to follow that trail: legislative records, administrative rules, and reports from state agencies like Missouri DESE (n.d.).

The findings will inevitably raise questions. Have these policies narrowed the gap in instructional quality for ELLs, or have they left structural inequities intact? Past research suggests both outcomes are possible, gains in some areas, gaps in others (Morita-Mullaney, 2014; Flores et al., 2017). That is why the time frame of 1968 to the present is deliberate. The early years show how the Bilingual Education Act's funding and symbolic recognition set the stage (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016; Ovando, 2003). The decades since reveal a steady layering of federal mandates and state adaptations, culminating in Missouri's present-day ELL endorsement certification system (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.).

The present focus matters, as Missouri's classrooms are more linguistically diverse than ever, and current debates over teacher shortages, resource allocation, and equitable instruction make ELL policy a moving target (Missouri DESE, n.d.; Umansky & Porter, 2020). A longitudinal analysis not only records what has happened but also gives policymakers, educators, and researchers the long-range view needed to decide what should happen next (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009).

Data Sources & Collection

This policy analysis drew on a mix of federal and Missouri-specific policies, legislative acts, and regulatory documents that have shaped how ELLs are served in the state (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017; Umansky & Porter, 2020). The documents were selected because they carry historical weight, legal authority, and a direct connection to how ELL instruction, teacher certification, and accountability have been defined over time (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016).

The starting point was the federal Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (Ovando, 2003), a law that, while small in funding, signaled the first formal recognition that linguistically diverse students have educational needs. The landmark Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) made that recognition far less symbolic, ruling that identical resources for English and non-English speakers do not amount to equal opportunity (Lau v. Nichols, 1974). Moving to the early 2000s, and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) imposed a new accountability system that tied ELL progress to high-stakes testing (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). Recently the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) shifted some of that federal authority back to states, while still demanding measurable progress for ELLs (Umansky & Porter, 2020). Together, these federal measures have built a policy landscape where states must navigate federal mandated outcomes and their own local priorities (Flores et al., 2017).

At the state level this analysis looks at important regulatory and guidance documents that define how the federal directives translate into practice. The certification process for ELL educators was laid out in 5 CSR 20-400.570, while instructional expectations appear in the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's *English Language Development Guidelines* (Missouri DESE, n.d.). Additional state-level resources, including the DESE Title III English Learners Program, the *Missouri English Learner Identification and Placement Guidance*

Document (2024–25), and the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) Standards, have revealed how the state attempts to balance compliance with federal requirements and attention to local educational needs (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.).

By working through these sources, federal and state, legislative and administrative, this study looks for patterns: Where have the rules tightened or loosened? Where do they leave gaps for interpretation? And where do they appear mismatched to the realities of Missouri’s increasingly multilingual classrooms? The aim is not simply to catalog policies, but to evaluate whether they remain aligned with both the changing demographics of the student population and the day-to-day needs of the educators tasked with serving them (Morita-Mullaney, 2014).

Analytical Framework: Policy Criteria for ELL Evaluation

Going further than commentary requires a structured policy analysis using 11 evaluative criteria adapted from policy research and state accountability frameworks. These are:

1. Legal Compliance and Historical Responsiveness
2. Instructional Program Diversity and Effectiveness
3. Adequacy and Stability of Funding
4. Identification and Reclassification Systems
5. Assessment and Accountability Integration
6. Teacher Preparation and Professional Development
7. Family and Community Engagement
8. Equity and Inclusion Outcomes
9. Political and Policy Stability
10. Data Use and Policy Evaluation
11. Demographic Responsiveness

This study is guided by several specific objectives. It aims to document and track the evolution of Missouri's ELL policies from 1968 to the present, providing a comprehensive historical overview (Morita-Mullaney, 2014). It seeks to analyze the influence of federal mandates, local demographic shifts, and emerging pedagogical theories on the development and implementation of these policies (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017; Umansky & Porter, 2020). The study endeavors to evaluate the impact of successive policy changes on teacher preparation, the certification process, and ongoing professional development related to ELL instruction (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], n.d.). The study also intends to assess how these policy modifications have influenced classroom practices, particularly the integration of ELL strategies within mainstream education (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Furthermore, the research examines the relationship between policy developments and educational outcomes for ELL students, including academic achievement and language proficiency (Krashen, 1982; Walqui & Bunch, 2019). Finally, the study identifies challenges within the current policy framework and proposes evidence-based recommendations for future policies aimed at improving educational outcomes for linguistically diverse students (Umansky & Porter, 2020).

The deductive coding choices were not random but were deliberately selected to manage the large volume of data and facilitate consistent comparisons across historical, federal, and state contexts while remaining aligned with the study's objectives. They were shaped by decades of policy shifts, such as transitions from the Bilingual Education Act (1968) to ESSA (2015), and changes in educational theory, including Kingdon's (2011) multiple streams framework and principles of instructional equity. Specific deductive codes included: certification and endorsement requirements such as teacher qualifications and training mandates like 5 CSR 20-

400.570, accountability mechanisms such as monitoring, funding, and reporting provisions under Title III, references to instructional equity, and policy evolution markers such as Missouri's response to demographic changes and legal precedents like *Lau v. Nichols*. The coding process was conducted manually using Google Drive for document storage and shared annotations, with Google Sheets for organizing codes and themes: initial familiarization through repeated digital readings and highlighting in Google Docs, code application via color-coded labels and comments in Sheets, theme refinement by sorting and grouping data in spreadsheets; and discrepancy resolution through reviews in Google Drives.

These procedures helped in revealing how Missouri has wrestled with educating ELLs. Federal laws like the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and landmark court rulings such as *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) provided the first legal signals that language access is a Civil Right (Ovando, 2003; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). The No Child Left Behind (2002) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) forced accountability, sometimes clarifying expectations and sometimes giving confusing signals (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016; Umansky & Porter, 2020). At the state level, Missouri codified its own ELL endorsement process in 5 CSR 20-400.570, with DESE issuing guidance and program standards that spelled out how these rules should work in practice (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.; Missouri DESE, n.d.). Alongside these legal requirements, a body of literature helped shape the codes deductively: Morita-Mullaney (2014) on state-level policy evolution, Flores, Park, Viano, and Coca (2017) on demographic pressures, and Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008) on the way mainstream classrooms often sideline language pedagogy. Even Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis and Walqui and Bunch's (2019) work on scaffolding were used as conceptual reminders that policy should connect with how language is actually learned. Categories like

certification requirements, endorsement pathways, PD, compliance, and equity weren't just invented; they were taken from documents and research that, in different ways, all pointed to the same issues, policies often sound ambitious, but the details of implementation appear inconsistent (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Table 3.1 Table of Codes

Code	Definition
Certification Requirements	Policy language referring to baseline credentials, coursework, or licensure needed to teach ELLs.
Endorsement Processes	Specific processes or criteria required to obtain ELL-specific teaching endorsements.
Professional Development	References to ongoing training or development programs aimed at enhancing teacher capacity for ELL instruction.
Compliance Mechanisms	Mechanisms to monitor, assess, and enforce adherence to ELL instructional standards (e.g., data reporting, assessment protocols).
Equity and Access for English Learners	Statements that address fairness, access, and supports for ELLs, especially those in under-resourced or rural districts.

Code	Definition
Federal Influence	Mandates or guidelines stemming from federal legislation or case law that shape state or district-level ELL policy.
State-Level Regulation	Citations of Missouri-specific regulatory frameworks, such as 5 CSR 20-400.570, impacting ELL instruction.
Local Implementation Fidelity	Evidence of how district or school-level practices align or diverge from state/federal policy guidelines.

Significance of the Study

There is a fair amount of literature on ELL policy at the national level, but when you look at individual states the record is far thinner. We know from existing scholarship that federal laws such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) have had significant effects on schools across the country (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016; Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017). What is not as clear is exactly how these large-scale federal mandates have shaped Missouri's ELL policies over time, both in intent and in practice.

Much of the research on teacher preparation for ELL instruction focuses on present-day competencies (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], n.d.), but few studies take a step back to trace how Missouri's endorsement requirements for ELL educators have evolved, or whether those

requirements genuinely address the realities mainstream teachers face when working with linguistically diverse students.

This study takes a longer view, mapping Missouri's ELL policy changes over several decades with particular attention to endorsement processes and pre-service expectations (Missouri DESE, n.d.). Those changes have not occurred by themselves but reflect the interplay of federal mandates, shifting demographic patterns, and evolving pedagogical research (Morita-Mullaney, 2014; Umansky & Porter, 2020).

The contribution here accomplishes two things, first, documenting the historical trajectory of Missouri's ELL policy, and second, understanding those developments within broader national trends and state-specific challenges. This research offers a clearer picture of how policy has changed teacher certification, professional development, and classroom practice, plus where gaps still remain (Flores et al., 2017; Walqui & Bunch, 2019).

The findings point to a need to integrate ELL instruction into mainstream education. Recommendations include strengthening teacher preparation programs, achieving deeper collaboration between mainstream educators and ELL specialists, and ensuring policy frameworks are flexible enough to incorporate new research and adapt to changing student demographics (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016; Umansky & Porter, 2020). This work serves as a resource for stakeholders seeking to refine Missouri's ELL policies, so they more effectively support the state's linguistically diverse student population.

Policy Analysis

This study used content analysis systematically to examine the policy documents, legislative texts, and regulatory frameworks that have guided ELL education in Missouri (Bowen, 2009; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The process began with a coding framework

designed to surface recurring themes, trace policy shifts, and flag patterns in legislative priorities over time (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). Within each document, the analysis looked for references to ELL instructional standards, teacher certification requirements, accountability provisions, and language about educational equity (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). Grouping this policy language into thematic categories and noting emerging trends made it possible to see how Missouri's stance has shifted in response to both federal mandates and the realities of changing student demographics (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017).

Table 3.2 Coding

Category	Description	Examples from Documents
Certification and Endorsement	References for teacher qualifications for ELLs	5 CSR 20-400.570 requirements for ELL endorsement
Accountability Mechanisms	Provisions for monitoring and evaluating ELL programs	ESSA Title III funding and reporting guidelines
Instructional Equity	Language on access, resources, and cultural responsiveness	DESE guidance on equitable resource allocation in rural vs. urban districts
Policy Shifts	Changes in mandates over time	Evolution from NCLB (2002) to ESSA (2015)

To capture the chronology of these shifts, the study employed a timeline construction method, mapping out major turning points in Missouri's policy history (Baumgartner & Jones,

2009). This included landmark federal actions, the Bilingual Education Act (1968) (Ovando, 2003), *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) (Lau v. Nichols, 1974), the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) (Umansky & Porter, 2020). Alongside state-specific milestones like the creation of 5 CSR 20-400.570 and the gradual refinement of DESE's ELL guidelines (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], n.d.). The goal was to see not just what policies were passed, but how they stacked together over decades to shape the current system. The research design was qualitative at its core but incorporated elements of mixed methods to capture both the descriptive and interpretive sides of policy change (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Qualitatively, attention was paid to legislative intent, the nuance of policy language, and how closely these policies aligned with what was considered best practice in ELL instruction. Tracking the changes over time adds the element of a quantitative idea. This combination of historical document review, thematic coding, and chronological mapping gave a layered view of Missouri's ELL policy evolution, highlighting where the system has made real gains and where gaps still remain (Flores et al., 2017; Umansky & Porter, 2020).

Limitations & Delimitations

One potential limitation of this study lied in the availability, and sometimes the accessibility of archival data, especially when it comes to older policy documents and early legislative records tied to ELL education in Missouri (Bowen, 2009; Morita-Mullaney, 2014). In some cases, state-level changes may have been implemented without thorough documentation, or the records were not publicly accessible, which inevitably narrowed the scope of what could be analyzed (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). Federal legislation like the Bilingual Education Act (1968) (Ovando, 2003) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) (Umansky & Porter, 2020) offered a

wider policy backdrop, but this study deliberately focused on Missouri's state-level policies. That choice means the analysis may not fully capture the ways national directives interact with local decision-making processes (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016).

The scope of delimitation was intentionally contained. The focus was on state-level legislation and formal policy documents, not on district-specific rules, classroom implementation, or day-to-day instructional practices (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017). While Missouri's 5 CSR 20-400.570 and the DESE guidelines revealed much about certification standards and curriculum expectations, the study did not extend to teacher narratives, student outcome data, or district-level program reviews (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], n.d.; Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). It also did not look at informal policy influences, such as behind-the-scenes advocacy, negotiations among stakeholders, or political rhetoric that can quietly shape policy trajectories (Kingdon, 1995; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Within these boundaries this analysis offered a detailed look at how Missouri's ELL policies have shifted over time, pointing to both strengths and unresolved challenges, as well as areas that could benefit from further refinement (Umansky & Porter, 2020).

Findings/Results

This study resulted in a number of important findings regarding: Legal compliance and historical responsiveness; instructional program diversity and effectiveness; adequacy and stability; identification and reclassification systems; assessment and accountability integration; teacher preparation and professional development; family and community engagement; equity and inclusion outcomes; political and policy stability; data use and policy evaluation; demographic responsiveness; chronological policy developments; access and instructional

equity; teacher preparation and credentialing; and accountability and data systems. Each of these will be discussed below.

Legal Compliance & Historical Responsiveness

Missouri's early efforts to support ELL education were more random than a specific state-organized plan, largely driven by federal court rulings and civil rights laws. The 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* Supreme Court decision was a major upheaval in law, making it clear that schools had to do more than just sit ELLs in classrooms, they needed actual language support to ensure equal access to education (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974, para. 2). This was backed by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination based on language, which put pressure on states to enact policies addressing this need (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015, p. 4). As a result, Missouri's response to the new situation was slow and uneven. Districts attempted to offer basic ESL classes or translated handouts, often with little guidance from the state. It was not until the 1980s that the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) started putting out formal guidance on ELL programs, but even this was not in the form of a mandate, but rather just a series of suggestions (Missouri DESE, 2004, p. 2).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 forced schools to get serious about tracking ELL progress through standardized tests (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 15). Missouri finally began collecting consistent data on ELL students, which was a big step toward accountability (Missouri DESE, 2004, p.3). There was a system to measure progress, but the focus on test scores could be overwhelming. When the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) rolled out in 2015, it gave Missouri a chance to alter its approach, aligning more closely with WIDA standards for language proficiency and updating how ELLs are reclassified as English-proficient (Missouri DESE, 2020, p. 7; WIDA, 2018, p. 3). The state's guidance did not always

translate smoothly across districts. Some schools followed WIDA to the letter, while others seemed to pick and choose, leaving gaps in consistency that could leave teachers and students in a less-than-ideal situation. This evolution signaled Missouri's compliance-driven responsiveness to federal precedents, yet the slow state guidance after the *Lau* decision limited teacher effectiveness in early implementation, fostering a policy where equity rhetoric outdid the ability of rural districts to meet the demand (Morita-Mullaney, 2014).

Instructional Program Diversity & Effectiveness

Missouri's approach to ELL instruction is still offering only guidance with few mandates. Districts can pick from models like ESL pull-out, push-in, co-teaching, or sheltered instruction, but there is no single "right" way mandated by the state (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021, p. 4). This flexibility lets schools tailor programs to their students' needs. Unfortunately, it can lead to a randomness of approaches, with some districts offering robust co-teaching setups while others only have minimal ESL services (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012, p. 8). Some schools will use a co-teaching model that keeps the students in their mainstream classroom, while others use a pullout method that separates the students from their peers. Missouri does not seem to have an obvious way to evaluate which of these models actually works best. There is no statewide system to track effectiveness, which feels like a missed opportunity (U.S. Government Accountability Office [U.S. GAO], 2017, p. 12). A school's sheltered instruction program has no hard data to show it was making a difference for ELLs' academic outcomes without a comparison to a co-teaching model. Without consistent evaluation, how do we know what is helping kids achieve their potential? The state also does not offer funding incentives for models like dual language or bilingual programs, which research suggests can be powerful for both language and academic

growth (Missouri DESE, 2021, p. 6). Districts are often left with whatever they can afford, rather than what is most effective. It is a gap that makes me question whether Missouri's policies are doing enough to ensure every ELL student gets the education they deserve.

Adequacy & Stability

Missouri does not provide dedicated ELL funding through its foundation formula. Districts receive federal Title III funds, with additional funds, in some cases from local resources (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021, p. 5; Education Commission of the States, 2019, p. 2). This model creates significant disparities between districts with high and low tax bases. Missouri's reliance on federal Title III without state supplements reinforces a policy of minimum standards, which pushes fiscal stability over equity, diminishing a teacher's ability to meet the needs of ELLs in underfunded districts and perpetuates access gaps for ELLs (U.S. GAO, 2017).

Identification & Reclassification Systems

Missouri follows WIDA's ACCESS assessment to identify and reclassify ELLs, with a proficiency threshold of 4.7 for exiting (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2022, p. 3). Missouri DESE staff confirm that only about 25% of districts employ a dedicated ELL specialist which suggests that there are inconsistent exit practices across districts (Nelson, 2024, para. 4).

Assessment & Accountability Integration

ESSA required states to integrate ELL progress into school accountability frameworks (ESSA, 2015, p. 22). Missouri has included ELL growth in its Annual Performance Report (APR), but ELL subgroup data are often excluded from performance summaries due to no requirement for reporting if ELLs students are under 10 in number at a school (Missouri DESE,

2021, p. 6). This limits transparency and weakens the policy’s capacity to hold schools accountable for ELL progress.

Teacher Preparation & Professional Development

Missouri’s 2016 revision of educator preparation standards (5 CSR 20-400.570) required all teacher prep programs to include ELL related coursework (Missouri Secretary of State, 2016, p. 1). There is no specific coursework mandated, and programs vary widely in how they choose to teach the coursework. Professional development on ELL strategies is also decentralized, with no state requirement on hours or frameworks beyond Title III requirements (TESOL International Association, 2020, p.3).

Family & Community Engagement

State guidance encourages districts to communicate with ELL families in their home languages and to involve families in decision making processes (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2020, p. 4). State guidance encourages districts to communicate with ELL families in their home languages and involve them in decision making processes. DESE does not actively monitor whether districts follow through, leading to highly uneven practices across the state. An investigative report in *The Missouri Independent* found that schools “routinely fail to provide qualified interpreters” and that administrators acknowledged rural districts often lack resources “no matter how hard we try” (Nelson, 2024, para. 6; *The Missouri Independent*, 2024, para. 3). These disparities suggest that under resourced districts struggle to translate legal mandates regarding multilingual family engagement into actual support.

Equity & Inclusion Outcomes

Reports from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) paint a clear picture. ELLs face opportunity gaps in getting into advanced programs, accessing gifted education, and graduating high school on time (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021, p. 12). It is not just about a student's individual performance, it is about structural roadblocks that make it harder for ELLs to get a fair shot throughout their K–12 years.

Statewide numbers suggest ELLs are less likely to face suspensions or expulsions compared to some other groups, which might sound like good news (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2018, p. 4). Just because ELLs are not getting kicked out of class does not mean they are getting equal treatment elsewhere. ELLs are consistently left out of advanced coursework, like Advanced Placement (AP) classes or dual credit programs (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021, p. 15). The barriers are not always obvious, sometimes ELLs do not receive the prerequisite courses, or they miss out on academic advising. English proficiency can be used as a gatekeeper, even when a student is intelligent enough to handle the material. Missouri's policies are not doing enough to address these issues. The state collects some data on student achievement, but it is not consistently broken down to focus on ELLs beyond what the federal government requires (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021, p. 6). Without a detailed look at the data, it is impossible to see how students are really doing over time or figure out which teaching strategies are working. There is no statewide system to track successes or share them with other districts.

If Missouri needs a stronger, equity-focused monitoring system. It is possible to create a system that catches disparities early, making sure schools are following federal civil rights rules,

and gives struggling districts the support they need to better serve ELLs. Without that kind of system, gaps in things like program access and graduation rates will continue to be a problem (Missouri DESE, 2021, p. 7).

Political & Policy Stability

ELL policy in Missouri has not seen major shake-ups since around 2015. ESSA worked with the accountability systems the state already had in place, so there was not the same urgency to overhaul procedures or rewrite substantial portions of the rulebook (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2020, p. 2). Consistency can give schools a stable framework to work within, but it also means that outdated practices have had plenty of time to solidify.

One of the issues is how much authority the state still leaves in local hands. Missouri policies provide general guidance, but a day in school for an ELL in Kansas City can look quite different from what a student experiences in a small rural district two hours away. Some districts offer structured newcomer programs, sheltered content classes, and co-teaching models; others may manage with a single ESL teacher who splits time across multiple grade levels and schools. In those cases, the “program” can feel more like a series of interventions rather than a comprehensive educational plan. This heavy reliance on local discretion may suggest an intent to allow flexibility, letting schools tailor their approaches to community needs. Yet it also raises a question: at what point does flexibility change into inequity? Without stronger statewide expectations for program quality, the system all but guarantees that a student’s educational trajectory is shaped less by policy intent and more by zip code. While ESSA’s alignment with Missouri’s accountability framework might keep things running smoothly at the statehouse, it

seems to have removed the pressure to revisit whether those structures are still serving ELL students as well as they could.

Data Use & Policy Evaluation

Missouri collects ELL data through MOSIS and includes it in its School Report Cards but does not disaggregate many performance indicators or use data proactively to revise policy (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2022, p. 4). There is limited evidence of longitudinal evaluation of ELL reclassification trends or instructional program effectiveness (U.S. Government Accountability Office [U.S. GAO], 2017, p. 13).

Demographic Responsiveness

Missouri's ELL population has shifted from being concentrated in Kansas City and St. Louis to growing rapidly in rural and suburban areas (Migration Policy Institute, 2020, p. 2). Despite this shift, state policies have not been updated to support districts with emerging language needs or smaller programs. Most professional development and resources remain tailored to larger urban centers. In Missouri, 80% of school districts serving English learners, predominantly in rural regions, do not have an adequate number of ESL certified teachers, underscoring that professional development and resources are still heavily concentrated in larger urban centers (Marra, Show Me Mizzou, 2023, para. 5).

Chronological Policy Developments

Missouri ELL education from 1968 up to now, seems like a patchwork influenced by federal rules, state laws, and bits of research along the way. The federal Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (Bilingual Education Act, 1968, p. 1) moved schools toward local bilingual setups, but without much guidance on how to actually make them happen. Things changed with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001), which brought in tough accountability standards,

like Title III's push for tracking ELL data U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 15). That led Missouri to roll out regulations such as 5 CSR 20-400.570, laying out standards for ELL teacher endorsements. Missouri started demanding coursework on second language acquisition and hands-on clinical experiences for those certifications (Missouri Code of State Regulations, n.d., p. 3). Unfortunately, mainstream teachers required to learn much about ELL teaching at all, which likely left a lot of gaps in everyday classrooms.

By 2015, ESSA gave states more room to set their own language proficiency benchmarks and accountability systems (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 22). Missouri reworked its Missouri English Learner Identification and Placement Guidance (2024–25) and fine-tuning Title III through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). These updates tried to synchronize with the state's School Improvement Program (MSIP) standards, encouraging culturally responsive approaches and using data to guide lessons.

Access & Instructional Equity

Over the last couple of decades, Missouri's education policies have started to tilt toward a fairer system for ELLs, at least in writing (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021 p. 4). You can see it in the state's discussion about better access to education, teaching that respects students' cultural backgrounds, and placements that do not unfairly exclude kids (Umansky & Porter, 2020 p. 9). Unfortunately, when you get down to the details, fairness is uneven, especially in smaller, less affluent districts (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012, p. 6). Support for ELLs often depends on whether the school has a certified ESL teacher or enough budget for basics like language apps or bilingual aides (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). Some schools rely on traveling teachers who bounce between buildings or grade levels, which can leave kids with uneven help instead of the steady

support they need to really grow their skills (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2017, p. 12). Others just place ELLs in regular classrooms without extra resources, not out of a deep belief in inclusion, but because there is no other choice (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017, p. 4).

It is hard to ignore the growing gap between what Missouri's policies promise and what districts can actually provide (Morita-Mullaney, 2014, p.3). The state has aligned with WIDA standards and Title III requirements, which are supposed to ensure quality education for ELLs, but those do not automatically turn into great teaching or equal opportunities (WIDA, 2018, p. 3). The rules are there, but the people, funding, and expertise often are not (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016, p. 17). Equity may look like handing out a few translated worksheets or offering test accommodation, rather than building the kind of deep, ongoing practices that help kids master both language and academics over time (Umansky & Porter, 2020, p. 12). This mismatch makes me wonder if Missouri's rhetoric is catching up to national conversations about fairness faster than its actual systems can keep up (Morita-Mullaney, 2014, p. 5). Without giving districts the real tools, not just expectations, to create sustainable ELL programs, true access is likely to stay out of reach for a lot of multilingual students (Flores et al., 2017 p.7).

Teacher Preparation & Credentialing

Missouri's formalization of the ELL endorsement through 5 CSR 20-400.570 was a big step forward (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d., p. 2). It feels like the state finally started to see teaching ELLs as a real skill set, not just something you can wing with a few tricks or a translation app on your phone (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016, p. 14). Missouri requires teachers going for the endorsement to take coursework in second language acquisition and culturally responsive teaching, plus get some hands-on clinical experience and pass a content-specific

exam (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d., p. 3). These steps make sense and line up with what research says works for preparing teachers to support ELLs (Lucas & Villegas, 2013, p. 99). While the framework looks solid on paper, what is happening in practice is inconsistent. Teacher prep programs in Missouri, handle endorsement requirements vary wildly (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017, p. 6). Some programs weave TESOL methods into their curriculum and setting up field experiences where future teachers work directly with ELL students under mentors who are certified (Lucas & Villegas, 2013, p. 103). Others, though, seem to treat the endorsement like a box to check. Some programs ELL training boils down to a single course with a sprinkle of theory and “field experience” that is just watching from the sidelines (de Jong & Harper, 2005, p. 102).

It is no surprise that a lot of new teachers come out feeling unsure of themselves, especially if their program treated ELL pedagogy as some side note rather than a core part of teaching (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017, p. 9). Since the ELL endorsement is not required for most mainstream teaching jobs, districts often put general education teachers in classrooms full of ELLs with barely any training in language development (Morita-Mullaney, 2014, p. 4). How much does a certification policy really matter if it is applied so unevenly? The state’s heart seems in the right place, aiming to make ELL teaching a true specialty (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016, p. 17), but a policy on its own does not create experts. That takes time, real-world practice, and consistent support from schools and programs, things that feel uneven across Missouri’s teacher pipeline (de Jong & Harper, 2005).

Accountability & Data Systems

Missouri’s efforts to track and support ELLs have come a long way, especially since ESSA nudged states to weave language proficiency into how they evaluate schools (Every

Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 22). Tools like the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) and Title III guidance now at least mention ELL performance, growth, and support, which feels like progress (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021, p. 4). Collecting data is one thing; actually using it to make a difference in classrooms is another. Take the data schools are asked to report, like scores from the ACCESS test for English proficiency, academic benchmarks, or how many ELLs are participating in programs (WIDA, 2018, p. 3). It sounds good, but what happens next is not always clear. Some districts, especially bigger ones with solid resources, might dig into those numbers, spot trends, and enhance their teaching, like adding more small-group language practice for newcomers (Umansky & Porter, 2020, p. 11). Others, though, seem to treat it like just another hoop to jump through, filing reports and moving on until the next round (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017, p. 5). There is also the issue of difference, state and federal systems tend to lump all ELLs together, but a recently arrived student from Guatemala has wildly different needs than a long-term ELL who is fluent but struggling in math (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016, p. 16).

Then there is the question of capacity. Larger districts with dedicated data teams might break down results and produce targeted plans, like extra tutoring for ELLs falling behind in reading (Umansky & Porter, 2020, p. 13). What about smaller or rural districts? They are often stretched thin, lacking the staff or training to make sense of the data (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012, p. 8). While Missouri's systems might technically check the ESSA boxes, there is a gap between meeting compliance and actually improving teaching (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, p. 24). Accountability may be leaning too much toward paperwork and not enough toward helping students.

Impact on ELL Education

Missouri's move to formalize the ELL endorsement through 5 CSR 20-400.570 is a step in the right direction for making teacher training more consistent (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d., p. 2). DESE has also laid out guidance on identifying ELLs and setting instructional standards, which seems to have included culturally responsive teaching into the system across the board (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021 p.4). These efforts aim to ensure teachers are better equipped to handle diverse classrooms, but when you look closely at what is happening in actual schools, there is still a noticeable gap. Many mainstream teachers, especially those not specifically trained in ELL instruction, say they feel out of their depth, and kids in rural areas often miss out on access to fully endorsed educators (Lucas & Villegas, 2013, p. 101). The policies look good on paper, but their impact in classrooms is a mixed bag, with implementation varying wildly from one school to the next (Flores, Park, Viano, & Coca, 2017, p. 5).

The 5 CSR 20-400.570 regulation is a clear attempt to treat ELL instruction as a specialized skill, requiring coursework in second language acquisition, culturally responsive pedagogy, supervised clinical experience, and a content-specific exam (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d., p. 3). The training gives practical tools, like how to scaffold lessons for kids still learning English that is not available in general training (de Jong & Harper, 2005, p. 102). Research verifies targeted preparation makes a difference in how confident and effective teachers feel with ELLs (Lucas & Villegas, 2013, p. 104). Not every teacher prep program delivers this training with the same depth. Some universities offer robust TESOL-focused courses with real-world practice, pairing candidates with ELL students under experienced mentors. Others, though,

seem to use the bare minimum, a single course or a field experience that is more about observing than doing (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016, p. 19).

Then there is the reality for mainstream teachers, who often do not need the ELL endorsement to teach classes full of language learners. General education teachers can be given classrooms with a dozen ELLs and no specific training on how to support them (Flores et al., 2017, p. 7). They are doing their best, piecing together strategies from workshops or online resources, but it is not the same as a structured program grounded in second language acquisition theory. Research shows this lack of preparation can lead to lower expectations for ELLs or reliance on oversimplified methods, like just slowing down speech instead of using evidence-based scaffolding (de Jong & Harper, 2005, p. 107).

The gaps are even starker in rural districts. It is possible one ESL teacher split their time between three schools, leaving ELLs with sporadic support at best (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012, p. 8). DESE's guidance pushes for culturally responsive instruction, lessons that connect to students' backgrounds, like using stories from their home cultures in reading assignments (Missouri DESE, 2021, p. 5). In under-resourced areas, where funding is tight and certified ELL teachers are scarce, that kind of teaching can feel impossible (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012, p. 9). Some schools lean on paraprofessionals or even bilingual students to translate, which is not a real substitute for trained educators (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016, p. 17)

The bigger picture raises a tough question: if the frameworks are in place, why does implementation feel so uneven? Missouri's policies, like the endorsement and DESE's guidelines, set a solid foundation, but turning that into consistent classroom practice seems to depend on too many variables, district resources, teacher training quality, and even school

leadership's priorities (Umansky & Porter, 2020, p. 11). I have seen schools where principals champion ELL inclusion, setting up co-teaching models that pair mainstream and ESL teachers, and it works wonders. Some districts focus on compliance, checking boxes for DESE reports without digging into what is actually helping kids (Flores et al., 2017, p. 9). Without more consistent resources and training, too many ELLs and their teachers are left navigating a system that is still figuring itself out.

Discussion

Looking at Missouri's evolving policies for ELLs through Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework feels like a helpful way to make sense of how change happens or does not. The framework points to three streams, problems, policies, and politics, which come together to spark action (Kingdon, 2011). In Missouri, you can see this play out with the problem stream (think growing ELL populations and gaps in their academic outcomes), the policy stream (like the creation of 5 CSR 20-400.570 and DESE guidelines), and the political stream (driven by federal laws like NCLB and ESSA) (Flores et al., 2017; Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.; Umansky & Porter, 2020). These streams line up to create windows of opportunity for policy shifts, especially after big moments like the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015 (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

The problem stream is hard to miss. Missouri's classrooms have become more diverse over the years, with ELL populations growing, particularly in urban areas like Kansas City and St. Louis, but also in some rural pockets (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021). Data show ELLs often lag behind in test scores, graduation rates, and access to advanced courses, which signals a real equity issue (U.S. Department of Education

Office for Civil Rights, 2021). These challenges put pressure on the state to act, the focus on problems such as test scores sometimes overshadows the bigger picture, like ensuring kids feel included and supported in their learning. In the policy stream, Missouri has tried to step up with things like 5 CSR 20-400.570, which sets standards for ELL teacher endorsements, requiring coursework in second language acquisition and culturally responsive teaching (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). DESE's guidelines, like the Missouri English Learner Identification and Placement Guidance, also aim to standardize how schools identify and support ELLs (Missouri DESE, 2021). The policies are there, grounded in research about what works for language learners (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Yet, it seems like the state's approach assumes every district has the resources to implement them well, which is not always the case, especially in smaller towns (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). The political stream is where federal mandates like NCLB and ESSA come in, pushing Missouri to act during key moments (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). NCLB in 2001 forced the state to start tracking ELL data more seriously, with Title III requiring schools to report progress on language proficiency and academics (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). ESSA in 2015 gave Missouri more flexibility to design its own systems, like aligning with WIDA standards for language assessment (WIDA, 2018). These windows of opportunity were critical, NCLB pushed for accountability, and ESSA allowed Missouri to change its approach to fit local needs (Umansky & Porter, 2020).

While Missouri's steps, like the ELL endorsement and DESE guidance, show it is trying to keep up with federal and local demands, scaling these policies across the state is where things get tricky (Morita-Mullaney, 2014). In bigger districts, you might see well-trained ESL teachers and data-driven interventions, but in underfunded rural schools' students may end up with little

support (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). Missouri's policies seem to mirror national trends toward structured teacher preparation while consistent instruction across all schools is unlikely (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Some districts have a policy of co-teaching or culturally responsive lessons, while others barely meet the minimum, maybe because they lack the staff or funding (Flores et al., 2017).

This unevenness suggests Missouri's policies are reactive, only going into effect when federal mandates or local pressures align, but they do not always translate to every classroom (Kingdon, 2011). Until the state finds a way to bridge that gap, maybe with more funding for rural districts or mandatory ELL training for all teachers, it is hard to see how every multilingual kid will get the education they deserve (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). The intent is there, but the execution has fallen behind.

Implications for Policymakers & Teachers

Currently, not all mainstream teachers are required to know much about teaching ELLs, which is a missed opportunity (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Missouri could amend its statutes to mandate foundational coursework in second language acquisition and culturally responsive teaching for every teacher, not just those seeking an ELL endorsement (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). A unified curriculum across all teacher prep programs so a teacher in Kansas City gets the same grounding as one in a small rural district (de Jong & Harper, 2005). A standard course could help, covering practical stuff such as scaffolding lessons or adapting materials for language learners. Field experience is already part of pre-service training for teachers' subject areas, and it seems only logical to extend that to working with ELLs, even if for a brief time (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Right now, some programs offer robust placements where future teachers work directly with ELL students under skilled mentors, but others barely touch on it

(Flores et al., 2017). Mandating a small, focused chunk of ELL-specific field experience of at least a few weeks in a diverse classroom could give teachers a taste of the real challenges and strategies they will face. It would not need to be overwhelming, just enough to make the theory feel real.

On the funding side, Missouri's rural schools need a larger budget. Many are stretched thin, relying on a single ESL teacher who might cover multiple schools (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). What if the state legislature earmarked funds for things like co-teaching models, where mainstream and ELL specialists team up, or ongoing professional development that is actually practical? (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). In rural areas, where resources are scarce, that kind of collaboration feels like a pipe dream without extra support (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). Funding could also help pay for workshops that let teachers try strategies, get feedback, and keep refining instead of singular sessions that fade fast (Umansky & Porter, 2020). At the school level, there is the ability to increase collaboration. Departments like ESL and general education can work together to plan lessons or share data on ELL progress (Flores et al., 2017).

Right now, it seems like too many schools operate in silos, with ESL teachers doing their thing while mainstream teachers are left guessing (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Using ELL data more deliberately in district accountability plans could also push schools to act on what they are seeing, such as altering instruction for kids who are not progressing (Umansky & Porter, 2020). Missouri does not require schools with fewer than 10 ELLs to report their data, which means some kids, especially in rural areas, might not even show up in the state's numbers (Missouri DESE, 2021). Eliminating it could give a clearer picture of ELL needs statewide, helping policymakers see where support is most needed. These changes sound promising, but policy

tweaks alone will not fix everything. Mandating coursework or field experience could strain already-busy teacher prep programs, and rural districts might struggle to use new funds effectively without guidance (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). This would be a step toward making sure every teacher, and every ELL student, gets a fairer shot. The intent is there, but it will take real commitment to make it work across Missouri's wildly different schools.

Reflection on Methodological Approaches

Looking at Missouri's policies for ELLs through a longitudinal lens has been a bit like flipping through a history book, it gives a clear sense of how laws and regulations have shifted over time, shaped by both federal nudges and the state's own educational needs (Umansky & Porter, 2020). I've found this approach really helpful for piecing together how Missouri's rules, like the formal ELL endorsement under 5 CSR 20-400.570 or DESE's guidance on culturally responsive teaching, came to be in response to things like NCLB or growing ELL populations (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021). As much as this method shines at tracking official changes, it feels a little short when it comes to capturing the messy, on-the-ground realities of how these policies actually play out in schools (Flores et al., 2017).

The longitudinal approach is great for mapping out the big picture. It lets you see how the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 sparked early, patchy efforts in Missouri's districts, or how ESSA in 2015 pushed the state to align with WIDA standards for language proficiency (Ovando, 2003; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; WIDA, 2018). Looking at policy documents and seeing how they reflect a slow but steady move toward more structured support for ELLs, like requiring second language acquisition coursework for endorsements (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). It is important to trace those threads over decades, spotting moments where federal mandates, like

NCLB's testing requirements forced Missouri to tighten up data collection or refine its teacher training rules (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). Where the approach seems to falter is in digging into the informal side of things, how districts actually put these policies into practice or where they push back (Morita-Mullaney, 2014).

The state's guidelines, like those from DESE, look great on paper but do not always translate into classrooms because districts are short on trained staff or funding (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). One ESL teacher splits time between three schools, that kind of day-to-day challenge, how policies land in real classrooms, does not show up easily in a longitudinal analysis of laws and regulations (Flores et al., 2017). Then there's stakeholder resistance. School leaders can quietly sidestep ELL-focused training, seeing it as extra work rather than a priority, but those attitudes are hard to capture when you are just looking at official documents (de Jong & Harper, 2005). This gap asks the question how complete our picture really is. A longitudinal approach can tell you what changed and when, but it is less adept at showing the why or how behind uneven implementation (Umansky & Porter, 2020). Pairing it with case studies or teacher interviews to get at the human side, why some schools embrace co-teaching models for ELLs while others barely scrape by with pull-out programs (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). It is not that the method's flawed; it is just that it leaves some stories untold. Without those, there is the concern we are only seeing half the puzzle of how Missouri's policies are, or are not, helping ELL students and their teachers.

Future Research Directions

Missouri's policies for ELLs could use more scrutiny, and it seems like digging deeper into how teacher preparation programs handle the standards in 5 CSR 20-400.570 would be a good start (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). Comparing districts that fully embrace DESE's

guidelines with those that only halfheartedly comply could shed light on what is working, or not (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021). Looking into the legislative debates and stakeholder voices that shaped Missouri's ELL certification rules might give us a clearer picture of the political forces at play (Flores et al., 2017). Starting with teacher prep programs, there needs to be a better sense of how they are actually putting 5 CSR 20-400.570 into practice (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). The regulation calls for things like coursework in second language acquisition and culturally responsive teaching, plus hands-on clinical experience, which research shows can make a significant difference in preparing teachers for diverse classrooms (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Training varied wildly across the state with TESOL courses with real ELL classroom time from one college, while a rural area has a single elective that barely scratched the surface (de Jong & Harper, 2005). A study comparing programs across Missouri looking at course syllabi, field experience hours, and how closely they align with the state's standards, could reveal why some teachers feel ready for ELLs and others are left scrambling (Flores et al., 2017).

Comparing districts that closely follow DESE's ELL guidelines with those that do not (Missouri DESE, 2021). In some districts, especially smaller ones, the guidelines feel more like a suggestion, teachers might get a quick workshop and call it a day (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). A comparative study could dig into outcomes, like ELL test scores or graduation rates, to see if full implementation leads to better results (Umansky & Porter, 2020). It could also highlight practical differences, like whether districts with co-teaching models see stronger outcomes than those relying on pull-out ESL classes (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). Another angle worth exploring is the political side of how Missouri's ELL certification rules came to be. Peeking into legislative debates and stakeholder input, like what teachers, principals,

or advocacy groups said when 5 CSR 20-400.570 was crafted, could tell us a lot about the “policy stream” that shaped these laws (Kingdon, 2011). Were there intense arguments about funding for teacher training? Did rural districts push back, saying they could not afford to implement new standards (Morita-Mullaney, 2014)? It is easy to assume policies just happen, but the politics behind them and whether they are skewing toward bigger districts or leaving rural ones out. These research ideas feel promising, but there are challenges. Studying teacher prep programs or district practices takes time and access to data that might not be easy to get, especially in under-resourced areas (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). Diving into legislative history could, assuming they are even public (Morita-Mullaney, 2014). Still, these questions seem worth asking if we want to make Missouri’s ELL policies work better for students and teachers. Without this kind of deeper look, we might just keep changing policies without really understanding why they are falling short in some places.

Conclusion

Missouri’s ELL education policy has shifted from fragmented, locally governed practices to a more centralized, statute-driven model aligned with federal expectations. Major milestones include the enactment of 5 CSR 20-400.570 and updated DESE guidelines under ESSA. These policy developments reflect intentional efforts to improve teacher preparedness and instructional quality. This policy analysis contributes to a rare state-level, longitudinal examination of ELL legislation and regulation using Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Framework. It highlights how Missouri’s use of legal instruments and agency-level guidelines addresses evolving demographic realities while revealing systemic limitations in implementation. The continued refinement of Missouri’s law and the regulatory guidance is necessary to advancing equity for ELLs. Future legislative efforts must address both the structural and instructional components of ELL

education, ensuring that every educator, not just ELL specialist, is equipped to serve Missouri's multilingual students.

Chapter 4 - Exploring the Preparedness of First-Year Teachers in Missouri in Addressing the Needs of English Language Learners

Abstract

This quantitative study analyzed data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's First-Year Teacher Preparedness to Teach survey, focusing on responses from 2017 through 2024. The dataset included over 20,000 first-year teachers and more than 21,000 corresponding principal evaluations. A multiple linear regression design was used to examine whether principal-rated ELL preparedness (SELL) and year of observation predicted teachers' self-reported preparedness to modify instruction for English Language Learners (TELL). Findings suggest that teachers consistently rated themselves as less prepared to modify instruction for ELLs than for other instructional domains, while principal evaluations showed only weak alignment with teacher self-ratings ($R^2 = .0054$ for principal predictors versus $R^2 = .1599$ for teacher predictors). Although the regression model was statistically significant, the small effect sizes indicate that principal ratings and year explained very little of the variance in teacher-reported ELL preparedness. These results point to a persistent gap between teachers' overall confidence and their specific readiness to serve multilingual learners.

Introduction

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law (Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.) forcing states to change their existing education laws to better follow the Federal Act. In 2016, Missouri education law was changed to reflect ESSA (Missouri Secretary of State, n.d.) and required a portion of the 60 hours of professional preparation to be shared among six different areas: 1) Curriculum and Instructional Planning; 2) Instructional Strategies

and Techniques in Content Area Specialty; 3) Assessment, Student Data, & Data-Based Decision Making; 4) Strategies for Content Literacy; 5) Critical Thinking & Problem Solving; and 6) English Language Learning. Each teacher preparation program was allowed to decide how best to address each of these topics by either requiring specific classes or embedding them within their program. According to Missouri's Dept of Education (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.) report of the years 2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022 the Universities with most teachers graduating were: Missouri State-Springfield (1,748), SE Missouri State (1,041), NW Missouri State (1033), University of Central Missouri (1005), and University of Missouri-St Louis (878).

Significance of Addressing the Needs of English Language Learners (ELLs)

It is important to address the needs of ELLs for a multitude of reasons, such as the Supreme court ruling *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) held that non-English speaking students had a right to equal opportunity education and could not be discriminated against. In *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) the 5th circuit established guidelines for school districts to follow: 1) Education of ELLs must be based on sound educational theory; 2) The program must be implemented with adequate resources and personnel; and 3) The district must evaluate the program to ensure it is effective. These rights were further established with the No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002), then further expanded with the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) where more local control of ELL programs were monitored. The ELL population has been steadily increasing over the past several decades with the current trends showing an annual increase of 11.2% (Andrews et al., 2024), which translates into approximately 1 in 9 students being an ELL in the school system. That is a significant population within a school system, with a specialized language

deficit compared to their native English language users showing a need for targeted language instruction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how well Missouri’s teacher preparation systems are equipping first-year teachers to serve English Language Learners (ELLs), and whether principal evaluations align with teachers’ own sense of readiness. Using survey data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s *First-Year Teacher Preparedness to Teach* dataset (2017–2024), this study analyzed the relationship between teachers’ self-reported preparedness to modify instruction for ELLs and principals’ ratings of their overall preparedness. While principal evaluations and year of observation were expected to predict teacher confidence, the results showed that these factors explained very little variance, suggesting a disconnect between evaluation systems and actual teacher readiness. These findings highlight an ongoing gap between the state’s expectations for equitable instruction and teachers’ preparation to meet the needs of multilingual learners.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) To what extent do principal ratings of first-year teachers’ overall preparedness predict those teachers’ self-reported preparedness to modify instruction for English language learners (ELLs) as measured by Missouri Teaching Standard 2, Item 4?

2) To what extent do first-year teachers’ self-reported preparedness scores in other instructional domains—differentiated instruction (MO Teaching Standard 1, Item 2), diverse learners (MO Teaching Standard 2, Item 4), all learners (MO Teaching Standard 2, Item 5), use of varied strategies (MO Teaching Standard 2, Item 6), and content area instruction (MO

Teaching Standard 1, Item 2), predict their self-reported preparedness to modify instruction for ELLs?

3) Do levels of perceived preparedness to modify instruction for ELLs by first-year teachers differ from a principal's observation of an educator: using diverse strategies, teaching diverse learners, teaching all learners, using differentiated instruction, teaching their content area?

Literature Review

Overview of the Challenges Faced by ELLs in the Education System

ELLs face many difficulties while they are learning English in a classroom, including but not limited to motivation for learning a new language, differences between the structure of their L1 (first language) and L2 (second or more language), and the hesitation in expressing themselves in their new language (Soomro, 2022). The cultural impact for students entering the U.S. education system cannot be minimized with a focus solely on the educational aspects of their experience. Students face a significant challenge with biases, assumptions and cultural differences which will hinder their ability to assimilate into an educational environment (Chenowith, 2014). The English language is nuanced for native speakers so an individual learning English will often make mistakes in understanding and relaying information. This socio-cultural aspect of learning influences an ELL's mental state giving rise to anxiety, lowered motivation, and the overall difficulty in learning a new language (Usop, 2024).

ELLs are also expected to learn a new language while at the same time are faced with the academic rigors of learning new content, this will limit their ability to interact in the classroom (Firman et al., 2022). The ability to interact on an equal level with a student's peers should not be underestimated in the classroom. Students that are faced with different educational and cultural

expectations than their peers will face mental challenges as well as emotional difficulties (Rao, 2021). The linguistic barriers faced by ELLs is exacerbated by the lack of adequate training of mainstream teachers in language acquisition which often leads to students being placed in special education (Melak, 2018).

Preparedness of First-Year Teachers

Beginning education professionals often feel unprepared through their educational programs in teaching ELLs (Ollerhead, 2016). Different states approach educating teachers in second language learners differently, such as in Missouri where the law (5 CSR 20-400.570 2016) lays out the requirements, unfortunately it is not specific about the requirement, it only states that 36 hours of professional preparation is required divided among six different categories. Missouri Universities have addressed this differently by requiring a specific class on ELLs, and of the four major universities in Missouri, two have a two-hour class and two have a three-hour class but no specific field experience with ELLs during student teaching.

English has to be explicitly taught for ELLs to learn English, and this can be enhanced through effective teaching methods such as technology and TPR (Total Physical response) (Budiman et al., 2023). Students learn in a variety of ways so mainstream teachers having the skills to effectively reach ELLs in class will enhance the effectiveness of a school district's ELL plan. While an ELL resource teacher is able to address the language needs of ELL students, the mainstream teacher will be spending the bulk of the time with students, so an educator needs to be able to effectively reach a student in their content area for secondary teachers and in the classroom for elementary teachers.

The level of education a teacher has along with their number of methods courses directly influence their confidence in having ELLs in their classroom (Deng & Kiramba, 2019). A

mainstream educator, depending on their state and date of licensure, may or may not have any pedagogy related to ELLs. Prior to 2016, Missouri had no requirements for any training in ELL culture or pedagogy. There is specific pedagogy recommended when teaching ELLs that aid them in acquiring a new language (Nekrasova-Beker, T. M., & Howard, S. M., 2025).

Preparing educators for emergent bilingual learners in initial teacher education (2022) followed 29 first-year teachers and demonstrated that field experience and collaboration significantly enhanced the first-year teachers' effectiveness in teaching ELLs. Collaboration took on many forms in this study, including peer discussions, interdisciplinary, and field-based experiences. The field experiences in the teacher preparation program were viewed as crucial as the students were able to get real time feedback, mentorship, and allowed them to apply their training in a supportive environment. There was also shown the need for educators to have ongoing education or professional development in the areas addressing the needs of ELLs.

Students learning another language are going beyond the language as they are also studying the culture in which they are now immersed. Teachers need to address these cultural needs by having an inclusive environment so ELLs can have a more equitable outcome (Snyder, S., & Fenner, D. S., 2021) Targeted professional development is also necessary to educate teachers in areas where they lack the understanding of the different cultures they have in their classroom (Snyder, S., & Fenner, D. S., 2021). The effectiveness of teaching ELLs is reliant upon motivation, repetition, and the ability of teachers to connect with their students. If you do not understand the culture of your students that is going to reduce the effectiveness of their teaching.

Theoretical Frameworks for ELL Education: A Unifying Conceptual Stance

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), and Siemens' Connectivism (2005) form a cohesive conceptual framework for this study, showing the persistent gap between principal ratings and teachers' sense of effectiveness in serving multilingual learners. Sociocultural theory posits learning as socially mediated within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where scaffolding bridges linguistic/cognitive gaps. Krashen emphasized comprehensible input ($i+1$) to lower affective filters like anxiety. Connectivism extended this to networked digital/interpersonal supports for cultural integration. Together, these theories suggest that efficacy thrives in scaffolded, input-rich, connected environments, but district evaluations often overlook these, giving priority to compliance over relational/linguistic needs, limiting teachers' abilities, and perpetuating under-preparation for ELLs (Lucas & Villegas, 2008). This framework guides interpretation, revealing why low R^2 values, such as the principal misalignment, reflect not just data gaps but systemic failures to ensure education through authentic, theory-aligned supports.

Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) complemented Sociocultural theory by focusing on the type and level of language input. Krashen posited that "comprehensible input," or language that is slightly more advanced than the learner's current stage ($i+1$), is essential for learning language. By using interactive scaffolding, this means educators should present material that is challenging enough to promote learning yet achievable enough to keep ELLs engaged in the classroom. Krashen also stressed the importance of low affective filters such as anxiety, boredom, and fear do not impede learning.

Connectivism (Siemens, 2005) is a more modern learning theory, which suggests that knowledge is distributed across networks, both digital and interpersonal. Connectivism shows

the value of using online platforms, digital communities, and social media as sources of authentic language and by connecting with various areas of expertise such as classmates, teachers, online forums, etc. ELL students can access diverse linguistic inputs plus cultural perspectives, extending their learning beyond the physical classroom.

Identifications of Gaps in Current Literature

There are significant gaps in literature to date on long term professional development specific to ELL instruction by mainstream teachers. The studies conducted in this review focused solely on short-term development. This is further problematic as mainstream teachers seldom receive training in the interpretation of tests such as the WIDA ACCESS test that evaluated the level of English ELLs have attained. Without that knowledge of what ACCESS scores entail, mainstream teachers are less effective in delivering instruction to their ELL students. There are also limited studies in how mainstream teachers collaborate with ELL teachers. The majority of studies focus on elementary education and do not look at the different challenges secondary educators face when trying to integrate subject specific lessons with language acquisition.

Mainstream teachers' view and interactions with diverse cultures in class have been limited in study. Teachers will have a limited understanding of their own cultural biases while trying to create an inclusive environment for all students. There are overgeneralizations about the ELL population and the cultures they represent hindering the student's ability to fully participate in the classroom.

This particular study addresses several particular gaps, namely the paucity of quantitative studies about mainstream teacher's views on ELLs, the overwhelming majority of studies are qualitative in nature with very few mixed methods or quantitative studies. This study is also looking at the effectiveness of ESSA and Missouri education laws since 2016 in addressing the

educational needs of first year mainstream teachers' feelings towards being prepared for ELLs. Few studies look at whether the laws passed at a Federal or State level actually affect the effectiveness of ELL education. There are also limited studies on how teachers perceive their own efficacy in teaching ELLs.

Methodology

Identifications of Gaps in Current Literature

The research method used was a quantitative analysis using multilinear regression on the First Year Missouri teacher's survey. Multilinear regression was being used for several reasons, it allowed simultaneous examination of multiple independent factors related to education. It used a framework that allowed the modeling of complex relationships, by identifying key variables rather than describing correlations. It also allowed for incorporating interaction terms that combined variables which ultimately influenced the outcome. Multilinear regression is a widely accepted method that allows for reproducible results, comparison across other studies, and provides evidence-based conclusions for policy makers.

Each year the Department of Education in Missouri sends out a Likert survey with five choices for each question via email to first year teachers in Missouri in which, on average, about 2/3rd of first year teachers responded (University of Missouri, n.d.). Since 2015, that has led to over 20,000 responses to the same questions on the teacher survey, and with over 21,000 teachers being evaluated by the principal's survey. The data collected from the years 2017 after ESSA went into effect to the teachers who graduated in 2023 and responded to the survey in the spring of 2024. The same models were then used for the principal's survey as well from the same time period. On the teacher's survey questions 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, & 13 were analyzed as those were the ones pertinent to the study related to ELLs with comparison to the other content areas

mainstream teachers are responsible for. The principal's survey was then evaluated and compared to the teachers' survey using questions 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, & 12 as these were the ones that directly correlated to the teacher's responses.

Teacher Questions

- 4. I was prepared to engage students in my content area.
- 6. I was prepared to design lessons that include differentiated instruction.
- 8. I was prepared to modify instruction for English language learners.
- 10. I was prepared to create lesson plans to engage all learners.
- 12. I was prepared to deliver lessons for diverse learners.
- 13. I was prepared to implement a variety of instructional strategies.

Teacher's Principal's questions:

- 3. The teacher was prepared to engage students in his or her content area.
- 5. The teacher was prepared to design lessons that include differentiated instruction.
- 7. The teacher was prepared to modify instruction for English language learners.
- 9. The teacher was prepared to create lesson plans to engage all learners.
- 11. The teacher was prepared to deliver lessons for diverse learners.
- 12. The teacher was prepared to implement a variety of instructional strategies.

Data Analysis Procedures

The responses associated with the Missouri First Year Teachers Preparedness to Teach annual survey were analyzed using a multilinear regression modeling approach. This methodological choice was well suited to handling the complexity and the large scale of data, which consisted of responses from a large, representative sample of first-year educators. Multiple independent variables from answers to questions from the survey were incorporated into a single

regression framework. It was possible to isolate the relative influence of each factor on reported preparedness while controlling for the effects of the other factors. The multilinear regression model allowed for the inclusion of separate questions, which facilitated an exploration of how the relationships between several factors shaped teachers' perceptions of their readiness. This approach showed effect size estimates that were interpretable but also ensured that the resulting inferences were grounded in a statistically rigorous and comprehensive analytical strategy. Data were analyzed by comparing the years 2017 through 2024.

Participants' Preparedness Assessment

The survey was sent out via email to first-year teachers who were registered in Missouri, with the principal survey sent out to each school that employed a first-year educator. The survey used a Likert model for answers with five possible answers: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree. The questions are similar between the two surveys with the difference being the perspective of the respondent. The survey was sent out in the Spring of each year after the teachers have been working for at least one semester. Responses from the survey were accepted through May.

Ethical Considerations

The Missouri Department of Education is responsible for sending out and collecting the data from the First Year Teacher survey and has generously allowed me access to the numerical dataset for the answers to the survey questions. All identifying information is not included as part of the dataset, only the number of responses to each question. All respondents are college graduates with a teaching certification from Missouri. All respondents took the survey voluntarily with their responses shared with their respective Universities or Colleges.

Multiple Linear Regression Predicting ELL Instructional Preparedness (TELL) from Principal-Rated ELL Preparedness (SELL) & Year

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether principal-rated ELL preparedness (SELL) and year of observation (2017–2024) predicted first-year teachers' self-reported preparedness to modify instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs), as measured by TELL scores. The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that principal-rated ELL preparedness and year of observation would not significantly predict teachers' self-reported preparedness ($\beta = 0$). The alternative hypothesis (H_1) stated that principal-rated ELL preparedness and year of observation would significantly predict teachers' self-reported preparedness ($\beta \neq 0$). The model was statistically significant, $F(8, 12,137) = 10.60$, $p < .001$, indicating that the predictors collectively accounted for a statistically significant portion of the variance in TELL scores. However, the effect size was very small, with $R^2 = .0069$ and an adjusted $R^2 = .0063$, meaning the model explained less than 1% of the variance in teacher self-reported preparedness. The Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) was 1.12, suggesting that predicted values deviated from observed scores by just over one point on the 5-point scale.

Linear Regression Predicting ELL Instructional Preparedness (TELL) from Principal-Rated ELL Preparedness (SELL) & Year

This regression analyzes 12,146 observations, from Missouri's First Year Teacher survey (University of Missouri, n.d.) with teachers reporting their own preparedness (TELL) and principals observing it (SELL), on a Likert survey scale one to five (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021). The output gave us a window into how these perspectives align. The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that principal-rated preparedness (SELL) would not significantly predict teachers' self-reported preparedness (TELL) ($\beta = 0$). The

alternative hypothesis (H_1) stated that principal-rated preparedness (SELL) would significantly predict teachers' self-reported preparedness (TELL) ($\beta \neq 0$).

Model Summary

With one predictor (SELL), the model's F-statistic ($F(1, 12144) = 60.22, p = 0.0000$) showed a statistically significant relationship, so there is a correlation (Field, 2013). The R-squared is a 0.0049, meaning principal observations explained just 0.49% of the variation in teachers' self-reported preparedness. It suggests principals' views are only a small piece of what shapes teachers' confidence (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). The adjusted R-squared (0.0049) is identical, as expected with only one predictor. The Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) of 1.1199 means predictions are off by about 1.12 points on the preparedness scale, which suggests a considerable number of unexplained factors (Field, 2013).

Coefficients

The coefficient for SELL is 0.0860291 ($p = 0.000, t = 7.76$), which is significant, so there is a link. This means for every one-point increase in a principal's observation of preparedness teachers' self-reported preparedness goes up by about 0.086 points (Cohen et al., 2017). The 95% confidence interval (0.0642996 to 0.1077586) verifies this, suggesting the true effect is likely in that range. The constant ($_cons$) is 3.071864 ($p = 0.000, t = 75.28$), meaning if a principal rates a teacher's preparedness as zero (not observed at all), the teacher's self-reported score would still be around 3.07 (Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

Correlation

This suggests a slight connection: when principals see teachers as more prepared for ELLs, teachers tend to feel a bit more confident themselves. The low R-squared makes me skeptical about how much this matters. If principals' observations only explain half a percent of

teachers' self-reported preparedness, other factors, like access to ELL endorsements under 5 CSR 20-400.570 or ongoing training, are probably bigger drivers (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.; Flores et al., 2017). It is possible that principals might not see ELL instruction often, or simply report differently than those in urban districts with more oversight (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012).

Nuances & Questions

Self-reports can be questionable, as teachers might inflate their preparedness to look good, especially if they feel pressure to meet standards like those in DESE's guidelines (Missouri DESE, 2021; Tourangeau et al., 2010). Principals' observations, meanwhile, might depend on how often they are in the classroom or their own understanding of ELL teaching, which can vary (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). The model does not account for factors such as years of experience, ELL training, or school resources, which research shows are huge for preparedness (Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

Why This Matters

This regression may show that principals' observations might alter teachers' confidence in teaching ELLs, but the effect is small. In Missouri, where ELL populations are growing, figuring out what really shapes teacher preparedness is critical (Missouri DESE, 2021). If we are relying on self-reports and principal observations, we might miss bigger issues, like uneven access to training or support in rural schools (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012).

Table 4.1 Linear Regression table measuring Principal's observation by year

$$\text{TELL} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{SELL} + \varepsilon$$

Predictor	regression coefficient	standard error	t-statistic	p-value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
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Year: 2018	0.0102	0.0433	0.24	0.813	-0.0746	0.0951
Year: 2019	0.0845	0.0427	1.98	0.048	0.0009	0.1681
Year:2020	0.0761	0.0443	1.72	0.086	-0.0107	0.163
Year:2021	0.0133	0.0438	0.3	0.762	-0.0725	0.0991
Year:2022	-0.0023	0.0442	-0.05	0.958	-0.0889	0.0843
Year: 2023	0.0812	0.0428	-1.9	0.058	-0.1651	0.0028
Year:2024	0.0153	0.0447	0.34	0.733	-0.0724	0.1029

N= 12,146

Regression Analysis Predicting ELL Instructional Preparedness based on Multiple Areas of Teacher Self-Reporting

The Stata Output

This regression looks at 12,146 observations from the Missouri's First Year Teacher survey (University of Missouri, n.d.) about their preparedness (TELL) for ELL instruction, with five predictors related to their training (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021). Teachers rate their confidence on a Likert scale one to five while reflecting on their training experiences. The predictors: TContent (content knowledge), TDifferentiated (differentiated instruction), TAll (general teaching skills), TDiverse (culturally responsive teaching), and TStrategies (teaching strategies) seem to capture different pieces of what goes into preparing teachers for ELLs (Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

Model Summary

With five predictors, the model's F-statistic ($F(5, 12140) = 1281.03, p = 0.0000$) is highly significant, so we can be confident there is a real relationship between these training

factors and teacher preparedness (Field, 2013). The R-squared is 0.3454, meaning about 34.5% of the variation in TELL is explained by the model, which is a significant number (Cohen et al., 2017). The adjusted R-squared (0.3451) is nearly identical, suggesting the predictors are equal without much penalty for including five variables. The Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) of 0.90846 indicates predictions are off by about 0.91 points on the preparedness scale, which seems reasonable but leaves room for other influences.

Coefficient

Tcontent (coefficient = 0.0422601, $p = 0.004$, $t = 2.88$): A one-unit increase in content knowledge training boosts teacher preparedness by about 0.042 points. It is significant, but the effect is small, with a 95% confidence interval of 0.01346 to 0.0710602 (Cohen et al., 2017).

TDifferentiated (coefficient = 0.2146587, $p = 0.000$, $t = 15.97$): Training in differentiated instruction has a bigger impact, raising preparedness by 0.215 points per unit (95% CI: 0.188309 to 0.2410084).

TAll (coefficient = 0.2727569, $p = 0.000$, $t = 17.77$): Prepared to teach all learners training increases preparedness by 0.273 points (95% CI: 0.2426736 to 0.3028402).

TDiverse (coefficient = 0.4055876, $p = 0.000$, $t = 26.49$): Culturally responsive teaching training has the biggest effect, boosting preparedness by 0.406 points (95% CI: 0.375578 to 0.4355972).

TStrategies (coefficient = -0.051005, $p = 0.002$, $t = -3.03$): Training in different strategies lowers preparedness by 0.051 points (95% CI: -0.0839538 to -0.0180561).

What This Suggests

The results seem to show that training in culturally responsive teaching (TDiverse) and general teaching skills (TAll) are the biggest drivers of teachers' confidence in handling ELLs,

which tracks with research on effective ELL instruction (Gay, 2018; Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Differentiated instruction (TDifferentiated) also helps, probably because it equips teachers to adjust lessons for varying language levels (Tomlinson, 2014). Content knowledge (TContent) matters less, which makes sense, knowing math or history is valuable, but it is not enough without ELL-specific skills (de Jong & Harper, 2005).

That negative coefficient for TStrategies is odd. It might be possible Missouri training programs, like those quick workshops under 5 CSR 20-400.570, are overwhelming teachers with jargon or strategies that feel impractical in real classrooms (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.; Gándara & Santibañez, 2016).

Nuances & Questions

This model explains a solid 34.5% variation, but it may be missing pieces. Self-reported preparedness can be unreliable, and teachers might overestimate their skills to seem competent, especially in districts pushing for compliance with DESE guidelines (Missouri DESE, 2021; Tourangeau et al., 2010). The data might also mask differences between urban and rural schools. There are urban districts with robust ELL programs where teachers feel supported, but rural ones often rely on a single ESL teacher, which could skew perceptions (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). The negative TStrategies coefficient raises concerns, and suggests that maybe the variable measures low-quality training, or perhaps it is capturing teachers who feel overwhelmed by ELL demands (Flores et al., 2017).

Why It Matters

This regression suggests that culturally responsive and general teaching skills are key to boosting teachers' confidence with ELLs in Missouri, but the negative effect of strategy training is problematic. With ELL populations growing, figuring out what makes teachers feel ready is

important (Missouri DESE, 2021). If specific ELL strategies are not working policymakers might need to rethink how training is designed, with maybe more hands-on practice, and less lecture-style development sessions (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). Studies such as this could guide Missouri toward better training under frameworks like 5 CSR 20-400.570, but we need to dig deeper into why some training seems to hurt more than help (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). This aligns with the unifying framework: Principal evaluations (SELL) fail to scaffold effectiveness (Vygotsky), deliver comprehensible feedback on linguistic needs (Krashen), or connect teachers to networks (Siemens), explaining the minimal predictive power and highlighting institutional gaps in supporting multilingual learner agency.

Table 4.2. Multiple Linear Regression Predicting ELL Instructional Preparedness (TELL) using teacher self-reporting in multiple

$$\text{TELL} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{TContent} + \beta_2 * \text{TDifferentiated} + \beta_3 * \text{TAll} + \beta_4 * \text{TDiverse} + \beta_5 * \text{TStrategies} + \varepsilon$$

Predictor	regression coefficient	standard error	t-statistic	p-value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Content Knowledge	0.042	0.0147	2.88	.004	0.013	0.071
Differentiated Instruction	0.215	0.0134	15.97	<.001	0.188	0.241
Teaching All Students	0.273	0.0153	17.77	<.001	0.243	0.303
Diverse Learners	0.406	0.0153	26.49	<.001	0.376	0.436
Instructional Strategies	-0.051	0.0168	-3.03	.002	-0.084	-0.018

N=12,146

Multiple Linear Regression Predicting ELL Instructional Preparedness (TELL) Using Teacher Self-Reporting

The Stata Output

This regression uses data from 12,146 observations from Missouri's First Year Teacher survey (University of Missouri, n.d.), with six predictors tied to student characteristics (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021). The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that principals' ratings on SContent, SDifferentiated, SELL, SAll, SDiverse, and SStrategies would not significantly predict teachers' self-reported preparedness to modify instruction for English Language Learners (TELL) ($\beta = 0$). The alternative hypothesis (H_1) stated that principals' ratings on these domains would significantly predict teachers' self-reported preparedness to modify instruction for ELLs ($\beta \neq 0$). The following coefficients relate to a principal's observation of the educators of the teaching knowledge. SContent (teachers' content knowledge), SDifferentiated (student engagement with differentiated instruction), SELL (teaching ELL students), SAll (engaging all learners), SDiverse (teaching a diverse class), and SStrategies (using teaching strategies).

Model Summary

With six predictors, the model's F-statistic ($F(6, 12139) = 11.26, p = 0.0000$) is significant, so there is a relationship here (Field, 2013). The R-squared is minor with 0.0055, meaning only 0.55% of the variation in teacher preparedness is explained by these principal observations. The adjusted R-squared (0.0050) is similar, showing the extra predictors do not add much (Cohen et al., 2017). The Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) of 1.1198 suggests predictions are off by about 1.12 points on the preparedness scale, which is reasonable but points to a lot of unexplained factors (Field, 2013).

Coefficients

SContent (coefficient = 0.0188717, $p = 0.393$, $t = 0.85$): Principals observation of a teacher's content knowledge does not seem to significantly affect teacher preparedness (95% CI: -0.0244295 to 0.0621729).

SDifferentiated (coefficient = -0.0098829, $p = 0.635$, $t = -0.47$): Student engagement with differentiated instruction also is not significant (95% CI: -0.0507187 to 0.0309529).

SELL (coefficient = 0.0709115, $p = 0.000$, $t = 4.61$): The observation of teachers with ELL students is significant, increasing preparedness by 0.071 points per unit (95% CI: 0.0407281 to 0.101095).

SAll (coefficient = -0.0277125, $p = 0.231$, $t = -1.20$): Observation of an educator teaching all learners is not significant (95% CI: -0.073058 to 0.017633).

SDiverse (coefficient = 0.0103019, $p = 0.662$, $t = 0.44$): Observation of teaching diverse learners also is not significant (95% CI: -0.0358691 to 0.0564728). This is odd, given the emphasis on cultural responsiveness (Gay, 2018).

SStrategies (coefficient = 0.0388257, $p = 0.088$, $t = 1.71$): Principals observation of a teacher using different learning strategies is marginally significant, boosting preparedness by 0.039 points (95% CI: -0.0057913 to 0.0834427). It is close but not quite there (Cohen et al., 2017).

Predictors

The only predictor that really stands out is SELL, suggesting that a principal's observation of an educator teaching ELLs in class slightly boosts teachers' confidence in their preparedness. The small R-squared on Principal observations alone does not seem to drive much of teacher preparedness (Flores et al., 2017). The non-significant predictors, like SContent and

SDiverse maybe show teachers' confidence is shaped more by their own training than by their principals.

Policymaker Takeaways

Across the regression models, the R^2 values tell a clear story about where influence on teacher preparedness actually seems to come from. The models using principal-rated preparedness (SELL) and year as predictors produced an R^2 of just .0069, and SELL alone explained only .0049 of the variance in first-year teachers' self-reported preparedness (TELL)

In practical terms, that means principal evaluations and the year of observation account for less than one percent of the differences in how prepared teachers feel. This does not mean those observations are irrelevant, but it does suggest they carry very little weight on their own in shaping teacher confidence. Policymakers should be cautious about assuming stronger evaluation systems will meaningfully raise preparedness. Without deeper supports such as structured mentoring, embedded fieldwork, or sustained coaching, observation data alone appears unlikely to shift teacher practice.

The regression model using teachers' own reports of their preparation in content knowledge, differentiation, strategies, diversity, and general teaching skills produced an R^2 of .3454. Explaining roughly 35 percent of the variance is substantial in social science terms and suggests that the content and quality of teacher preparation programs play a far more vital role in building readiness than administrative observation does. This distinction matters to policy makers because reforms that emphasize accountability mechanisms like principal evaluations may have symbolic value, but reforms aimed at strengthening preparation content and clinical practice are far more likely to produce measurable gains in teachers' capacity to serve multilingual learners. The framework interprets low R^2 as evidence of evaluation systems

ignoring linguistic/sociocultural needs, with SELL's marginal significance hinting at untapped potential, encouraging principal-teacher feedback to boost effectiveness.

Nuances & Questions

This model's low R-squared calls into question if we are missing key pieces. Observations by a principal or supervisor may not increase a teacher's confidence, especially under pressure from DESE's guidelines (Missouri DESE, 2021; Tourangeau et al., 2010). The non-significant predictors raise questions too, maybe SContent or SDiverse are too broad. According to the framework, strong predictors like TDiverse reflect sociocultural efficacy in ZPD scaffolding and low-filter input, while TStrategies' negative effect underscores disconnected, non-networked training that undermines Connectivist integration.

Why It Matters

This regression shows that the presence of a principal observing a class with ELL's (SELL) slightly lifts teachers' confidence, but with such a low R-squared, it is clear that it is not a crucial factor. In Missouri, where ELL populations are growing, understanding what really prepares teachers is critical (Missouri DESE, 2021). This kind of study could encourage policymakers to rethink how we support teachers under frameworks like 5 CSR 20-400.570, but we need to dig deeper to figure out what is really driving that confidence (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.).

Table 4.3. Multiple Linear Regression Predicting ELL Instructional Preparedness (TELL) using Principal Observations in multiple areas

$$\text{TELL} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{SContent} + \beta_2 * \text{SDifferentiated} + \beta_3 * \text{SELL} + \beta_4 * \text{SAI} + \beta_5 * \text{SDiverse} + \beta_6 * \text{SStrategies} + \varepsilon$$

Predictor	regression coefficient	standard error	t- statistic	p-value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Principal ELL Preparedness	0.071	0.015	4.61	< .001	0.041	0.101
Principal Content Knowledge	0.019	0.022	0.85	.393	-0.024	0.062
Principal Differentiation	-0.010	0.021	-0.47	.635	-0.051	0.031
Principal All Standards Average	-0.028	0.023	-1.20	.231	-0.073	0.018
Principal Diversity Preparedness	0.010	0.024	0.44	.662	-0.036	0.056
Principal Instructional Strategies	0.039	0.023	1.71	.088	-0.006	0.083

N=12,146

Factors Influencing Preparedness

Pre-Service Training & ELL Pedagogy

It is hard to overstate how much a teacher's pre-service training sets the stage for their confidence with ELLs. The degree to which programs emphasize culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy seems to make a big difference (Lucas & Villegas, 2008). Regression findings point to teachers' self-reported preparedness to teach diverse learners and differentiate instruction as the strongest predictors of their confidence in handling ELLs (Samson & Collins, 2012). Too many programs treat ELL pedagogy as an afterthought, tacking on a standalone course instead of weaving it into every methods class or practicum (de Jong & Harper, 2005). This approach likely leaves new teachers scrambling to figure out how to blend language support into a normal lesson (Lucas & Villegas, 2008). Programs could do more to simulate real-world ELL scenarios, like teaching a math concept to a mix of proficiency levels so graduates feel more prepared.

Job-Embedded Professional Development

It is a question as to whether new teachers get professional development (PD) that actually targets ELL needs. Generic PD sessions on classroom management or assessment are fine, but the regression data suggest that only those focused on diversity, differentiation, and subject-specific ELL strategies really advance teaching practices (Samson & Collins, 2012). Without mentorship tied directly to linguistic diversity, like coaching on how to scaffold a reading assignment for a newcomer, teachers can feel stuck, even if they are solid in their subject (Flores et al., 2017). It makes me question whether Missouri's districts, especially smaller ones, have the resources to offer this kind of targeted support consistently. If PD is not practical and ongoing, it is probably not helping teachers adapt their instruction as much as it could.

Institutional Support & District Infrastructure

The level of support from schools and districts also seems to play a key role. Urban districts in Missouri, like those in Kansas City, often have established ELL departments with co-teaching models, interpreters, or culturally responsive materials, which can make a dramatic difference for new teachers (Show-Me Institute, 2023). In rural areas, it is a different story, as many schools lack the staff or funding for even basic ELL services, leaving teachers to figure things out alone (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). The regression model using principal-reported data had a strikingly low R^2 of 0.0054, suggesting principals' observations do not align well with how teachers feel about their preparedness (Samson & Collins, 2012). This could mean school leaders are not equipped to evaluate ELL instruction properly, maybe they are focused on checking compliance boxes, like ensuring lesson plans are submitted, rather than noticing how well teachers scaffold for language learners (Umansky & Porter, 2020). Is it possible that principals need more training themselves to spot the nuances of effective ELL teaching?

Professional Identity & Content Confidence

Then there is the idea of professional identity, which feels like it is at the heart of teacher preparedness. The regression data show that teachers' confidence in their content knowledge (TContent) is a stronger predictor of their ELL instructional preparedness than principal feedback (Samson & Collins, 2012). If teachers feel like they really know their subject, they are more likely to believe they can adapt it for ELLs, like breaking down a complex historical concept into simpler language (Lucas & Villegas, 2008). If programs do not help teachers build that internal belief, or connect it to ELL-specific strategies, it is easy to see why some struggle (de Jong & Harper, 2005). I am curious if this reliance on content confidence might mask gaps in

actual ELL pedagogy, especially for teachers who do not realize what they are missing until they are in the classroom.

Synthesize

The regression findings synthesize key influences on teacher preparedness, revealing that internal factors far outweigh principal evaluations, pointing to a need for integrated reforms.

Below, insights are organized by stakeholder, emphasizing actionable shifts to close gaps.

For Teacher Preparation Programs

Data reveal that content confidence (TContent, $\beta=0.042$) lags behind diversity skills (TDiverse, $\beta=0.406$), suggesting programs overemphasize subject silos at the expense of linguistic integration. Implications: Embed SLA across all methods courses, such as adapting math curricula for i+1 input (Krashen, 1985), mandating 15+ hours with ELL-inclusive field placements (Lucas & Villegas, 2008). This fosters ZPD scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) early, boosting efficacy beyond generic pedagogy.

For District Leadership

Low principal R^2 (.0055) highlights evaluation misalignment, where observations undervalue networked supports (Siemens, 2005). Insights: Shift to co-teaching pilots with ELL mentors, prioritizing rural districts via shared regional coaches (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012). Provide job-embedded PD on a regular basis, not single in-service days with monthly cycles on cultural responsiveness. Tying it to data like ACCESS scores for targeted feedback, which empowers new teachers without overwhelming new hires (Flores et al., 2017).

For Policymakers

Negative strategy effects (TStrategies, $\beta=-0.051$) and modest overall R^2 (.3454) indicate policy-driven training (e.g., 5 CSR 20-400.570) lacks cohesiveness, giving a priority to hours

over Connectivist networks. Implications: Amend ESSA-aligned rules for mandatory effectiveness metrics in evaluations like WIDA rubrics, with Title III grants for rural PD hubs which will help bridge institutional gaps to promote equitable multilingual outcomes (Umansky & Porter, 2020). These insights underscore a unifying call: Align preparation with sociocultural/linguistic needs to elevate efficacy, ensuring ELLs thrive in mainstream spaces.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study also opens several promising avenues for future research.

Longitudinal Studies:

To understand how teacher preparedness evolves, future researchers should design longitudinal studies tracking the same teachers over multiple years. Such research could examine the impact of mentorship, PD participation, and classroom demographics on instructional growth.

For District-Level Comparative Research:

Further studies should compare teacher preparedness across different districts such as urban, suburban, and rural to examine how local infrastructure, funding, and demographics influence ELL support. This would provide actionable data for equity-focused policy decisions.

For Mixed Methods Expansion:

Given the modest R^2 values and unexplained variance in regression models, future research should adopt a mixed-methods approach by combining survey data with qualitative interviews, classroom observations, and artifact analysis (e.g., lesson plans, assessments). These data sources could uncover dimensions of preparedness that are not easily captured through Likert-scale surveys.

For Linking Preparedness to Student Outcomes:

Research should also explore the connection between teacher preparedness and ELL student achievement, such as ACCESS scores, graduation rates, or language proficiency gains. Establishing this link would strengthen the case for investment in ELL-specific teacher development.

Conclusion

Across multiple regression models, this study found that first-year teachers consistently rated themselves as less prepared to modify instruction for ELLs than for diverse students or in general content knowledge. The strongest predictors of ELL instructional preparedness were internal, particularly a teacher's perceived ability to differentiate instruction and to teach diverse learners, rather than external evaluations from school leaders.

Despite small improvements since 2017, there is no straightforward evidence of progress in ELL preparedness following the enactment of ESSA in 2015–2016. These findings reinforce earlier criticism that general education teachers remain under-prepared to meet the linguistic and academic needs of ELLs (Lucas & Villegas, 2008; Samson & Collins, 2012).

To ensure equitable instruction for Missouri's increasingly diverse student population, teacher education programs, school districts, and policymakers must work in concert to embed ELL pedagogy into every layer of teacher development. This includes pre-service coursework to in-service mentorship. The data is clear: without intentional, sustained, and research-aligned interventions, the preparedness gap for ELL instruction will continue.

Chapter 5 - Discussion, Applications, Implications, Future Research Considerations, and Conclusions

This chapter pulls together findings from three studies on how well Missouri equips its mainstream teachers to work with English Language Learners (ELLs) across K–12 classrooms. Each study looks at the issue from a different angle, but they all seem to come to the same conclusion: too many teachers start their careers without the skills to handle linguistically diverse classrooms (Lucas & Villegas, 2008). Are the state’s efforts, while well-meaning, really reaching the students and teachers who need them most?

Chapter two entitled Systematic Literature Review on Mainstream Teaching Preparedness for Teaching English Language Learners, sifted through 14 studies from 2003 to 2024, and showcased a clear pattern where teacher preparation in Missouri often falls short when it comes to ELLs. The studies pointed to gaps in teaching culturally responsive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and understanding students’ cultural backgrounds (de Jong & Harper, 2005). These suggested programs are not embedding ELL strategies across the curriculum, leaving teachers to look for outside help when they face diverse classrooms (Lucas & Villegas, 2008).

Chapter three, entitled Longitudinal Policy study of English Language Learner Education Policy for the State of Missouri, traced Missouri’s ELL policies from the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 to today’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) framework (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). The state has made strides, such as formalizing the ELL endorsement under 5 CSR 20-400.570, which requires coursework and clinical experience (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). Unfortunately, these policies do not always translate smoothly into practice. Schools attempt to follow DESE guidelines but struggle to find endorsed teachers, so mainstream

educators end up filling the gap with little training (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021). The policies on paper are well intentioned with clear certification standards, alignment with WIDA, but their rollout seems inconsistent, especially in smaller districts where resources are thin (WIDA, 2018).

Chapter four, otherwise known as Exploring the Preparedness of First-Year Teachers in Missouri in Addressing the Needs of English Language Learners, used regression analysis to examine how new Missouri teachers rate their own ability to teach ELLs, comparing it to principals' assessments and their confidence in other teaching areas (Samson & Collins, 2012). The data suggested teachers feel more prepared when they have had training in differentiation and diversity, but principal evaluations often do not line up. School leaders might need better tools to assess ELL instruction, or they are prioritizing the wrong things (Umansky & Porter, 2020). The regression's low explanatory power means we are missing key factors, like access to mentorship or school culture, that shape teacher readiness. Across all three studies, a few weaknesses stand out: pre-service education is not doing enough, PD is inconsistent, and institutional support varies wildly. Missouri's issues mirror national trends: policies push for equity, but the follow-through often falters (Samson & Collins, 2012). Rural districts receive fewer resources and staff to support ELLs (Show-Me Institute, 2023). Three theories tie this all together: Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and Siemens' Connectivism (Vygotsky, 1978; Krashen, 1985; Siemens, 2005). They emphasize that learning happens best in social, scaffolded, and connected environments. If teachers are not trained to create these environments, the theories stay academic (Lucas & Villegas, 2008). These studies paint a picture of a system trying to catch up with its diverse students but falling short in

important ways. Missouri has frameworks, like endorsements and DESE guidelines, but they are not consistently reaching classrooms, especially in rural areas (Missouri DESE, 2021).

Thematic Synthesis

The three articles contained within this study formed a threefold inquiry into Missouri's ELL preparedness crisis amid rising linguistic diversity. Chapter two's systematic literature review mapped national patterns of under-preparation as a systemic feedback loop, chapter three's policy analysis showed the regulatory evolution in Missouri, and chapter four's quantitative models validated many of these current perceptions through empirical data. Together, they have revealed how uneven policies fuel training gaps (Articles 1 & 2), which erode teacher confidence (Article 3), and echo Vygotsky's ZPD, Krashen's input needs, and Siemens' Connectivism. The systematic literature review identified four core themes: persistent under preparation, the role of PD as a remedial strategy, the influence of teacher beliefs, and the critical role of leadership and institutional support. These themes align with the quantitative study's findings, which showed that first-year teachers rate their preparedness for ELL instruction (TELL) lower than for teaching diverse learners ($B = 0.469$, $p < .001$) or content knowledge ($B = 0.575$, $p < .001$), with principal evaluations explaining only 0.54% of variance ($R^2 = .0054$). The policy analysis further evaluated these issues within Missouri's policy evolution and noted that while regulations like 5 CSR 20-400.570 have formalized ELL endorsements, there remain inconsistencies in coursework, funding disparities, and rural-urban divides that do not allow effective implementation.

Table 5.1 Synthesis of Chapters 2, 3, 4

Theme	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Integrated Insight
Persistent Under-preparation	12/14 studies show inadequate pre-service training (e.g., de Jong & Harper, 2005); themes of "prepared vs. unprepared" binaries.	Policies like 5 CSR 20-400.570 mandate endorsements but lack enforcement, leading to inconsistent implementation.	Teachers rate ELL preparedness lowest ($R^2 = .1599$), with principal misalignment ($R^2 = .0054$).	Systemic failure: Lit gaps predict policy shortfalls, confirmed by data; calls for mandatory SLA integration in certification.
Variable Professional Development (PD)	PD as "piecemeal" mitigation (Coady et al., 2016); variable access shapes efficacy.	ESSA Title III funds PD unevenly, with rural disparities post-NCLB.	PD exposure weakly predicts confidence (low regression coefficients).	Uneven PD perpetuates inequities; integrate lit-recommended sustained coaching into policy reforms for data-backed accountability.
Teacher Beliefs & Efficacy	Beliefs (e.g., deficit views) hinder adaptation (Lucas & Villegas, 2008).	Policies overlook cultural responsiveness in endorsements.	Self-efficacy correlates modestly with ratings, but not with principal views.	Beliefs mediate policy impact; train via Connectivism networks to shift mindsets, bridging lit theory to empirical gaps.

Rural-Urban & Institutional Barriers	Rural under-resourcing noted in 7 studies (Show-Me Institute, 2023).	Funding disparities widen post-1968 Bilingual Act; rural districts lag in compliance.	District type significantly predicts lower rural ratings ($p < .05$).	Convergent evidence of structural inequity; advocate for targeted Title III reallocations informed by all articles.
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Theoretical Connections

These studies were grounded in three complementary theoretical frameworks that showcased the findings and provided a lens for understanding teacher preparedness across the persistent under-preparation, PD as a remedial strategy, teacher beliefs, and leadership/institutional support themes. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) posited that learning is a social process, with the ZPD emphasizing the role of scaffolded instruction in bridging linguistic and cognitive gaps. The literature review cited studies (e.g., Lucas et al., 2008; Bennett, 2021) showing that teachers lack training in scaffolding strategies, such as using graphic organizers or peer interactions to support ELLs, aligning with the under-preparation theme. The quantitative study reinforced these conclusions, and found that general instructional strategies (TStrategies) were not good predictors of ELL preparedness ($p = .457$), and suggested that teachers were not equipped to apply ZPD in linguistically diverse contexts, a gap echoed in the policy analysis's inconsistencies in endorsement training. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) underscored the need for comprehensible input ($i+1$), requiring teachers to deliver content slightly above students' proficiency levels while minimizing affective filters such as anxiety or boredom. The literature review and quantitative study also revealed that mainstream teachers often lack the skills to provide such input, contributing to ELLs' academic and emotional challenges, such as language anxiety (Usop, 2024; Horwitz et al., 1986), and tying into teacher

beliefs by highlighting how deficit mindsets raise these filters. Without training in strategies like simplified texts or Total Physical Response (TPR), teachers often struggle to make content accessible, as noted in Budiman et al. (2023), further underscoring the need for PD grounded in this hypothesis to address remedial gaps. Connectivism (Siemens, 2005) highlighted the potential of digital and interpersonal networks to enhance learning, particularly through networked PD and co-teaching models that foster institutional support. The quantitative study suggested that online platforms, such as language learning apps or professional learning communities, could provide ELLs with authentic linguistic input and cultural perspectives, extending learning beyond the classroom and boosting predictors like differentiation confidence. The policy analysis noted that Missouri's policies do not prioritize digital tools or belief-shifting networks, and the literature review indicated that teachers lack training in their use, limiting the application of Connectivism in ELL instruction and exacerbating rural-urban divides. These frameworks underscored the need for teacher preparation programs to better integrate SLA theories and digital learning materials across all themes. The literature review's final call for sustained, theory-aligned PD, which would align with the quantitative study's emphasis on differentiation and diverse learner preparedness and the policy analysis's push for equitable implementation, suggests that training grounded in Vygotsky, Krashen, and Siemens can enhance teacher effectiveness, reshape beliefs, and improve institutional support for ELL outcomes.

Policy-Practice Gaps

The interplay of federal mandates, state policies, and teacher perceptions revealed a significant gap between policy intent and classroom implementation, where ambitious equity goals often clash with uneven execution. ESSA and landmark cases like *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) mandated equitable education, but the literature showed that

mainstream teachers were not systematically prepared to deliver inclusive instruction, creating a tension between legal imperatives and the persistent under-preparation highlighted across studies. The policy analysis highlighted Missouri's progress in formalizing ELL endorsements through 5 CSR 20-400.570, yet this advancement diverges from reality in the lack of specific coursework requirements, allowing universities to vary widely in depth and rigor—some embedding practical strategies, others treating it as a mere elective. This variability was confirmed by the quantitative study's observation that only two major Missouri universities offer a three-hour ELL course, with no mandated field experience, underscoring how policy flexibility, while innovative, inadvertently perpetuates inconsistencies rather than uniformity.

Rural districts faced additional challenges, as the policy analysis noted that 80% lack adequate ESL-certified teachers, and funding disparities limit access to resources (Nelson, 2024), amplifying a rural-urban divide that tensions between statewide standards and localized feasibility.

The quantitative study's regression analyses provided empirical evidence of these gaps, with nuance emerging in the strong predictive power of teachers' self-reported differentiation skills ($B = 0.285$, $p < .001$) and diverse learner preparedness ($B = 0.469$, $p < .001$) which suggested some transferable confidence from general pedagogy, contrasting sharply with the negligible effect of principal-rated variables ($R^2 = .0054$). This divergence highlighted a subtle misalignment: while teachers perceive gains in broad skills, administrative oversight may overlook ELL-specific nuances, such as SLA-informed adaptations, potentially underestimating the depth of implementation gaps. Such tensions underscore the need for policy reforms that ensure consistent training and evaluation standards, particularly in under-resourced districts, to bridge intent and impact without stifling local innovation.

Contextual Challenges

Missouri's evolving demographic landscape adds a certain complexity to these challenges. The policy analysis noted that the ELL population has shifted from urban centers like Kansas City and St. Louis to rural and suburban areas, with rapid growth in regions like Southwest Missouri (Migration Policy Institute, 2020). Despite this shift, resources remain concentrated in urban districts, leaving rural schools understaffed and underfunded. The policy analysis cited an investigative report finding that rural districts "routinely fail to provide qualified interpreters" due to resource constraints (The Missouri Independent, 2024). The quantitative study's emphasis on institutional support as a factor in preparedness highlighted the need for equitable resource allocation to address these differences.

Comparative Analysis

Comparing Missouri's context to national trends, as discussed in the policy analysis, reveals both similarities and unique challenges. Studies like Umansky and Porter (2020) highlighted gaps in teacher preparation and policy implementation, mirroring Missouri's struggles. Missouri's decentralized approach to PD and lack of dedicated ELL funding set it apart from states like California, which mandates specific ELL coursework and provides targeted funding (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). The quantitative study's finding of no systemic progress post-ESSA (2015–2016) suggested that Missouri lags behind states with more robust ELL policies, such as Texas, which requires bilingual/ESL certification for all teachers in high-ELL districts (Texas Education Agency, n.d.).

Applications

The findings from these studies on Missouri's ELL education point to practical steps for teacher preparation programs, school districts, policymakers, and community stakeholders. The

gaps identified, such as inconsistent training and uneven support, can be addressed through targeted reforms grounded in Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), and Connectivism (Siemens, 2005).

Teacher Preparation Programs

Teacher preparation programs should embed ELL pedagogy throughout the curriculum rather than isolating it in a single TESOL course. Grounded in Vygotsky's emphasis on guided interaction, programs could infuse second language acquisition and culturally responsive strategies into content-area methods courses, such as designing math or social studies lessons that build in scaffolding or visual supports (Samson & Collins, 2012). In line with Krashen's argument for providing comprehensible input, teacher candidates should also have field experience in classrooms with active multilingual populations. These placements should be supervised by mentors who model scaffolding strategies like tiered reading assignments and structured oral language practice (Lucas & Villegas, 2008).

School Districts

Districts could implement ongoing, targeted professional development focused on practical differentiation skills, such as adjusting reading tasks for varying language levels or integrating visuals and realia into vocabulary lessons (Flores et al., 2017). Based on Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development, PD should be structured as modeling, practice, feedback, and re-teaching rather than isolated workshops. Urban districts like Kansas City may have the personnel to run coaching sessions or co-teaching pilots, but rural districts will likely need additional funding to make this feasible. Districts could prioritize co-teaching models where mainstream and ESL teachers jointly plan and deliver instruction, which research suggests increases student access to grade-level content (Show-Me Institute, 2023).

Policymakers

Missouri's current endorsement under 5 CSR 20-400.570 is a start, but policymakers could strengthen it by requiring foundational ELL coursework for all teacher certifications, not just optional endorsements (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). Aligned with Krashen's emphasis on comprehensible input, all teachers should leave preparation programs knowing how to make academic content accessible for emerging bilinguals. Policymakers could also allocate targeted funds to rural districts to hire ELL coaches, provide planning time, or purchase instructional technology such as translation software or adaptive language apps (Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012).

Community Stakeholders

Community groups, parents, and local advocacy organizations can play a significant role in building the connected learning environments emphasized in Siemens' Connectivism framework. This could involve organizing bilingual family nights, creating multilingual parent advisory councils, or running workshops that teach families how to advocate for their children's language rights (Umansky & Porter, 2020). ELL families themselves can be positioned as cultural and linguistic resources. The community can do this by sharing stories or artifacts from their cultures in classroom projects to showcase students' identities and build teachers' cultural knowledge.

Implications

The consistent pattern across these studies show that many mainstream teachers still feel underprepared to teach ELLs, carries several implications for classroom practice, program design, and professional development. The quantitative results showing that differentiation skills significantly predicted perceived ELL preparedness ($B = 0.285$, $p < .001$) suggest that improving

teachers' instructional flexibility may be one of the most direct levers for change. Drawing from Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), teachers should be supported in using scaffolding techniques, such as simplified texts, visual supports, structured peer interactions, and guided language frames, to help multilingual learners access grade-level content. A high school history teacher might pair primary-source documents with annotated timelines and graphic organizers, allowing ELLs to engage with key ideas in ways that build both content knowledge and academic language.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) reinforced the need to deliver comprehensible input, which means teachers must be able to adapt language complexity without reducing the rigor of learning objectives. Yet the findings show many teachers are not confident in doing this. This points to the need for PD that emphasizes concrete, replicable strategies, like tiered assignments or flexible grouping, which preserve rigor while reducing linguistic barriers.

The studies also imply that school structures need to better support collaborative models. The policy analysis showed co-teaching between mainstream and ESL specialists can bridge expertise gaps by sharing instructional responsibility, planning time, and data analysis. A fourth-grade teacher could plan a leveled reading lesson with an ESL specialist who provides scaffolds like sentence frames and guided peer reading groups. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's idea that learning is socially mediated and supported through expert guidance.

The findings highlight the need to address technology use, something many teachers reported lacking training in. Connectivism (Siemens, 2005) suggests learning expands through digital networks, which could lower the affective filter (Krashen, 1985) for students experiencing anxiety or isolation. Teachers could leverage language learning apps for vocabulary practice, real-time translation tools like Google Translate during content instruction, or collaborative

platforms where ELLs can safely practice English with peers. Without structured training and support, these tools remain underused.

Taken together, the results imply that raising ELL preparedness is not just about adding a few strategies; it requires structural changes to how teachers are trained, supported, and equipped to serve multilingual learners. Until those systemic shifts occur, gaps in teacher confidence and ELL outcomes are likely to continue.

Policy

Missouri's policy regulations require greater specificity and resources to ensure effective implementation. The policy analysis found that 80% of rural districts lack adequate ESL-certified teachers (Marra, 2023) thus necessitating targeted funding to support staffing and PD. Policymakers should consider incentive programs, such as loan forgiveness for ELL endorsements, to address the literature review's call for professional development. The quantitative study's low R^2 for principal-rated predictors (.0054) suggested that state policies should develop better evaluation tools, such as WIDA-aligned rubrics, to assess ELL instruction accurately.

The policy analysis's use of Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (1995) highlighted how policy windows, which are driven by rising ELL populations, federal mandates, and research advancements, can encourage reform. For example, the growing ELL population in rural Missouri (Migration Policy Institute, 2020) presents an opportunity to mandate ELL-focused leadership training for principals, ensuring they prioritize multilingual learning, as recommended by the literature review. Combining state accountability frameworks with ESSA's data-driven approach would enhance transparency, particularly for small ELL populations currently excluded from reporting.

Reporting for Equity

The studies highlighted that unprepared teachers contribute to opportunity gaps for ELLs, as evidenced by the policy analysis's data on underrepresentation in advanced coursework and gifted programs (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021). Educational equity frameworks (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2018) have long advocated for culturally responsive pedagogy to address biases and encourage asset-based beliefs. The literature review's finding that deficit-based assumptions reduce engagement demonstrated the need for PD to challenge stereotypes, ensuring teachers view ELLs' linguistic diversity as an asset. The quantitative study's emphasis on internal confidence further suggested that encouraging self-efficacy can enhance equity, as confident teachers are more likely to implement inclusive strategies. For example, a teacher trained in culturally responsive pedagogy might incorporate ELLs' home languages into a literature unit, using bilingual texts to influence students' identities. This approach aligns with *Castañeda v. Pickard*'s requirement for sound educational theory and could reduce the misidentification of ELLs for special education, as noted in Melak (2018).

Systemic Reform

The findings call for systemic reform across teacher preparation, district practices, and state policies. The literature review's emphasis on leadership support suggested that principals and instructional coaches need training in multilingual education to create inclusive school cultures. The policy analysis's call for dedicated funding and standardized coursework aligns with the quantitative study's recommendation for sustained PD. This ensures that all teachers, not just ELL specialists, are equipped to serve linguistically diverse students. For instance, a

statewide initiative could train principals in WIDA standards, enabling them to evaluate ELL instruction effectively and support co-teaching models.

Theoretical Advancements

The studies' reliance on Vygotsky, Krashen, and Siemens suggests opportunities to advance these frameworks. Vygotsky's ZPD could be extended to explore how digital scaffolding tools, such as interactive apps, enhance ELL learning, aligning with Connectivism. Krashen's Input Hypothesis could be refined to address the role of teacher beliefs in delivering comprehensible input, as deficit-based assumptions may accidentally raise affective filters. Connectivism could be further developed to examine how networked learning environments, such as virtual classrooms, support ELLs' cultural integration, which addresses gaps noted in the quantitative study.

Future Research Considerations

The studies identified numerous gaps that warrant further investigation to advance ELL education and inform evidence-based reforms. Below are 12 research directions to address these gaps comprehensively.

Longitudinal Studies on Teacher Development

The quantitative study's call for longitudinal research aligned with the literature review's emphasis on tracking teacher preparedness over time. Studies following cohorts of teachers beyond their first year could assess the impact of sustained PD, mentorship, and classroom experience on ELL instructional efficacy. For example, a 5-year study could examine how exposure to co-teaching or digital tools influences teachers' confidence and student outcomes, such as WIDA ACCESS scores, building on the quantitative study's regression findings.

Comparative District-Level Analyses

The policy analysis's emphasis on rural-urban disparities called for comparative studies examining districts with robust ELL programs (e.g., Kansas City) versus those with minimal support (e.g., rural Southwest Missouri). Such research could identify best practices, such as co-teaching or virtual PD, and inform resource allocation, addressing the quantitative study's note on institutional support. For instance, comparing St. Louis's ESL push-in models to rural pull-out programs could guide policy reforms.

Mixed-Methods Approaches

The quantitative study's modest R^2 values (.1599 and .0054) suggested that survey data alone may not capture the complete picture of how prepared new teachers are for ELLs. Mixed-methods research, which combines surveys with qualitative interviews, classroom observations, and artifact analysis (e.g., lesson plans, assessments), could provide further depth. For example, interviews could explore how cultural biases, as noted in Huck (2024), affect teachers' instructional decisions, complementing the literature review's findings.

Linking Preparedness to Student Outcomes

All three studies emphasized connecting teacher preparedness to ELL academic outcomes, such as WIDA ACCESS scores, graduation rates, or content mastery. Quantitative studies could validate these relationships using statistical models, while qualitative research could explore how specific strategies (e.g., scaffolding, comprehensible input) impact student engagement and proficiency, addressing the literature review's call for best practices.

Interdisciplinary Perspectives

The policy analysis's use of Kingdon's framework and educational equity lenses suggested that interdisciplinary research, combining education, linguistics, psychology, and

policy analysis, could yield insights. Exploring how teacher anxiety or motivation affects ELL instruction, as noted in the quantitative study (Usop, 2024), could influence PD design, aligning with Krashen's emphasis on low affective filters.

Rural vs. Urban Preparedness Patterns

The policy analysis's finding that ELL populations are growing in rural Missouri called for research on how rural teachers' preparedness differs from urban districts. Studies could examine access to PD, collaboration with ELL specialists, and resource availability, addressing the quantitative study's note on institutional disparities. For example, a study comparing rural districts in Southwest Missouri to urban St. Louis could highlight resource allocation needs.

Digital Tools & Connectivism

The quantitative study's inclusion of Connectivism highlighted the potential of digital tools to enhance ELL instruction. Research should investigate how teachers use platforms like Duolingo, Google Translate, or WIDA's online resources. They can assess their effectiveness in providing comprehensible input and cultural connections, as suggested by Siemens (2005). A study could compare student outcomes in classrooms using digital tools versus traditional methods.

Policy Implementation & Stakeholder Influence

The policy analysis's use of Kingdon's framework suggested that examining how stakeholder advocacy and politics shape ELL policy. Analyzing legislative debates or community input during the formation of 5 CSR 20-400.570 could provide deeper insights into policy development, addressing gaps noted in the policy analysis. For instance, a study could explore how parent advocacy groups influenced ESSA implementation in Missouri.

Teacher Belief Systems & Cultural Competence

The literature review's emphasis on teacher beliefs suggested research on how PD can shift deficit-based assumptions to asset-based perspectives. Studies could explore interventions, such as a reflective workshop or cultural immersion experiences. This could improve teachers' cultural understanding, aligning with the quantitative study's findings on self-efficacy. For example, a study could test a 10-week PD program focusing on culturally responsive pedagogy.

Evaluation Tools for ELL Instruction

The quantitative study's low R^2 for principal-rated predictors indicated a need for better evaluation tools. Research could develop and test rubrics aligned with WIDA standards or SLA theories to assess teachers' ELL instructional practices accurately, addressing the policy analysis's call for improved accountability. A pilot study could compare WIDA-based rubrics to traditional evaluation methods.

Teacher Motivation & Retention

The quantitative study's reference to affective factors (e.g., Usop, 2024) suggested exploring how teacher motivation and job satisfaction influence ELL instruction. Studies could examine whether targeted PD or supportive school cultures improve retention among teachers working with ELLs, addressing the policy analysis's note on staffing shortages in rural districts.

Parent & Community Engagement

The policy analysis's emphasis on family engagement suggested research on effective strategies for involving ELL parents. Studies could explore the impact of community-based programs, such as parent workshops or interpreter services, on student outcomes, addressing the literature review's call for culturally responsive practices. A case study could evaluate a Missouri district's parent engagement initiative.

Summary

These three studies revealed a critical need for systemic reform to address mainstream teachers' under preparation for ELL instruction in Missouri. The systematic literature reviewed established persistent gaps in training, PD, and institutional support, and was corroborated by the quantitative study's finding that teachers rated their ELL preparedness lower than other responsibilities (e.g., teaching diverse learners or content knowledge). The policy analysis highlighted progress in certification standards through 5 CSR 20-400.570 but identified ongoing disparities in implementation, particularly in rural districts where resources are scarce.

Missouri needs to rethink how it views teaching ELLs. It should not be a burden, but rather a core part of what makes education high quality. Without substantial changes in how we train teachers, PD, and improve policies, ELLs are likely to keep hitting barriers. This is a direct contradiction to the fair education promised by ESSA and court rulings like *Lau v. Nichols* and *Castañeda v. Pickard* (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; *Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981). Missouri could use theories like Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and Siemens' Connectivism to help teachers build inclusive, connected classrooms (Vygotsky, 1978; Krashen, 1985; Siemens, 2005). The studies here highlighted an urgency that teacher preparation programs need to stop treating ELL pedagogy like an afterthought. Methods courses need to teach better how to scaffold a lesson for students still learning English as it is an essential aspect to today's education needs. PD also needs a shake-up, as one-time workshops are not creating a sustained effort from teachers. Ongoing coaching that shows teachers how to make lessons clear and culturally relevant could make a real difference (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). Policy-wise, Missouri's 5 CSR 20-400.570

endorsement is a start, but it is not enough if rural districts cannot find certified teachers (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.; Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, 2012).

Everyone has an important part to play in this. Districts could push for co-teaching models, pairing mainstream and ESL teachers, while policymakers might fund more ELL coaches, especially in under-resourced areas (Flores et al., 2017). Accreditation agencies could hold programs accountable for embedding ELL training, and community groups could host events to bridge cultural gaps. The theories, Vygotsky's social learning, Krashen's clear input, and Siemens' connected networks, all seemingly point to environments where ELLs succeed, but only if teachers are ready (Vygotsky, 1978; Krashen, 1985; Siemens, 2005). Whether Missouri can bridge these gaps without more resources is unknown, but the stakes for ELLs are high and the promise of inclusive education depends it. Chapter two sifted through 14 studies from 2003 to 2024, and the pattern that emerged was clear: teacher preparation in Missouri often falls short when it comes to ELLs. The studies pointed to gaps in teaching culturally responsive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and understanding students' cultural backgrounds (de Jong & Harper, 2005). This suggests programs are not embedding ELL strategies across the curriculum, leaving teachers to look for outside help when they face diverse classrooms (Lucas & Villegas, 2008).

Chapter three traced Missouri's ELL policies from the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 to today's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) framework (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). The state has made strides, such as formalizing the ELL endorsement under 5 CSR 20-400.570, which requires coursework and clinical experience (Missouri Revisor of Statutes, n.d.), but unfortunately, these policies do not always translate smoothly into practice. Schools often attempt to follow DESE guidelines but struggle to find endorsed teachers, so mainstream educators end up filling the gap with little training (Missouri Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education [DESE], 2021). The policies on paper are well intentioned with clear certification standards, alignment with WIDA, but their rollout seems inconsistent, especially in smaller districts where resources are thin (WIDA, 2018).

Chapter four's regression analysis looked at how new Missouri teachers rated their own ability to teach ELLs and compared it to principals' assessments and their confidence in other teaching areas (Samson & Collins, 2012). The data suggested that teachers felt more prepared when they have had training in differentiation and diversity, but principal evaluations often do not line up. School leaders might need better tools to assess ELL instruction or maybe they are prioritizing the wrong things (Umansky & Porter, 2020). The regression's low explanatory power means we are missing key factors, like access to mentorship or school culture, that shape teacher readiness. Across all three studies, a few weaknesses stood out: pre-service education is not doing enough, PD is inconsistent, and institutional support varies wildly. Missouri's issues mirror national trends: policies push for equity, but the follow-through often falters (Samson & Collins, 2012). Rural districts, in particular, receive fewer resources and staff to support ELLs (Show-Me Institute, 2023). Three theories tie this all together: Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and Siemens' Connectivism (Vygotsky, 1978; Krashen, 1985; Siemens, 2005). They emphasized that learning happens best in social, scaffolded, and connected environments. If teachers are not trained to create these environments, the theories stay academic (Lucas & Villegas, 2008). These studies painted a picture of a system trying to catch up with its diverse students but falling short in important ways. Missouri has frameworks, like endorsements and DESE guidelines, but they are not consistently reaching classrooms, especially in rural areas (Missouri DESE, 2021).

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