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How Prepared do Educators of Multilingual Learners with Disabilities Feel? Results from a
Multi-State Survey

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Abstract

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Multilingual Learners (MLs) are the fastest growing group of students in the United States. Although much research has been conducted on the overidentification of MLs as students with disabilities, little research has been conducted on how the unique educational needs of MLs with disabilities are being met by educators. In this thesis, I report the results of my research survey of 261 K-12 ESL teachers, world language/bilingual teachers, and administrators of MLs with disabilities. Results indicate that both teachers and administrators feel their schools and districts are not adequately meeting the needs of MLs with disabilities and that both groups feel unprepared to teach MLs who are Blind, Deaf, or Hard of Hearing. Prior experience working with MLs with disabilities and professional development on the education of these learners are factors that affect teachers' confidence educating these unique learners.

Introduction

The population of students who are identified as Multilingual Learners (MLs) in the American school system has grown exponentially throughout the twenty-first century (Kangas, 2016; Tran, 2014; Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010). Population estimates vary, but one estimate projects that by 2025, 25% of K-12 students in the US will be English language learners (Kangas, 2014). Multilingual students and their families have unique linguistic and cultural assets, as well as educational needs within school systems that uphold English dominance. These students are legally protected by civil rights legislation formed by the monumental US Supreme Court case, *Lau V. Nichols* in 1974 (Moran, 2005).

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that 14.3% of multilingual English learners also have a disability. This estimate suggests that 700,000 MLs with disabilities are being educated in K-12 schools throughout the US (NCES, 2021). As this population of students continues to grow, students who are intersectionally minoritized based on race, language, and disability are often overlooked and left behind socially and academically (Migliarini & Stinson, 2020; Kangas, 2014). Research and policies regarding these unique learners have not kept up with the growth in the population of MLs with disabilities in US public schools.

Terms and Definitions

Educators and policymakers in the US have centered the English language as the de facto modus operandi for K-16 schooling. To be successful in American education and society, understanding and communicating in the English language is currently considered necessary. For these reasons, educators in the US have used the term English Language Learner (ELL) or English Learner (EL) to identify students who are not yet proficient in the English language. By

labeling students with these terms, districts are able to create programs that improve students' English language skills and receive federal funding to achieve these goals.

Some in the field of teaching English have chosen to use the term Bilingual Learners (BLs) to refer to students who are learning their native languages while also acquiring English. Some prefer to use the term Emergent Bilingual (EB) to refer to young learners, ages 0-8 years old, who are in the beginning stages of bilingualism. Still others prefer to use the term Dual Language Learners (DLLs) to refer to students in this age range who are simultaneously bilingual learners - growing in both their native languages and English.

I choose to use the term Multilingual Learners (MLs) throughout this thesis. I choose this term as it is the most inclusive term to refer to the linguistically diverse language learners that are educated in the United States school systems. Many students speak several languages in addition to English; therefore, this term respects their vast linguistic repertoire. For the sake of this study, I use MLs to refer to learners whose native languages are not English and are learning English in US schools.

My rationale for the use of this term focuses on the recently changing perspectives in US education. As American education begins to embrace multiculturalism and multilingualism in education through such programs as Dual Language Immersion programs, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) programs, the Seal of Biliteracy for high school graduates, and world language classes as the norm, students in the US are becoming increasingly linguistically diverse. Even native English speakers born in the US are becoming bilingual or multilingual through the Global Seal of Biliteracy (Heineke et al, 2018). Multicultural and multilingual education is no longer just for students who are nonnative English speakers, but is an educational model that is being implemented throughout US school systems.

The term Multilingual Learner (ML) decenters English as the norm and moves away from the deficit model terminology that we see in terms such as limited English proficiency (LEP). ML also honors the many learners who are not just bilingual but multilingual, often speaking three or more languages. Honoring the linguistic genius and cultural knowledge that comes with multilingual capabilities challenges the power structure of the English dominant education systems of US education.

Some in the field choose to use Language Minority (LM) to refer to linguistically diverse students, but this again perpetuates the notion of English is the norm. US Census data indicates that about 22% of people in the US speak a language other than English at home (2019). For children under the age of 18, the Kids Count Data Center (2018) reports this number is closer to one in five. Depending on the geographic location in the US, speakers of languages other than English are not in the minority; in fact, there are many communities in the US where English speakers are the minority. Thus, labeling these linguistically diverse communities as a linguistic minority negates their cultural and linguistic identity within their communities. As more and more students in the US are multilingual, this idea of language minority is antithetical to the current population of students in the US.

Although this term is broad and could include native English speakers who become bilingual through educational programs focused on linguistic diversity, for the sake of this thesis, MLs will solely be used to refer to learners whose native languages are not English.

Education for Multilingual Learners with Disabilities

_____ Although bilingual education and English language instruction has been legally mandated by the federal government since 1974, and education for children with disabilities has been legally defined since Congress enacted the Individual with Disabilities Education Act in 1975,

little guidance has been given regarding the education of MLs with disabilities. This often results in educators being forced to interpret laws for the appropriate education of these students on their own (Migliarini & Stinson, 2020; Kangas, 2014).

Local, State, and Federal Policy on Inclusive Education

The United States is often heralded as a frontrunner in providing inclusive instruction for multilingual learners and students with disabilities (Heyer, 2015) due to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. However, critics argue that self-contained classrooms (classrooms of only students with disabilities), special education classes (small-group or one-on-one instruction with a special education teacher), and specialized schools for students with disabilities (schools for the Deaf) do not fully meet this idea of “inclusion” as students with disabilities are often separated from their nondisabled peers (Migliarini & Stinson, 2020).

The language of IDEA and inclusive education requires that students with disabilities receive instruction in the least restrictive environment. This often means spending as much time as possible in shared learning spaces with their nondisabled peers. Often this includes attending culturally enriching and health focused classes like music, art, and PE, recess, and lunch with peers. However, some schools choose to create special cohort classes for their students with disabilities including adaptive PE or music classes to better meet the needs of students with disabilities. For example, a PE teacher may use specific equipment with their students with disabilities and therefore justify bringing these items out only during the adaptive PE class for students with disabilities.

As the number of multilingual learners in the United States continues to rise, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and researchers are working to ensure this diverse group of

students receive appropriate instructional services and succeed academically. Recently published data on the population of MLs with disabilities by the Office of English Language Acquisition indicates that 48% of MLs with a disability served in K-12 public schools had a specific learning disability. In fact, data indicates that MLs were significantly more likely to be served for specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, or intellectual disabilities than their peers (NCES, 2021).

US federal and state laws that offer protections to disabled students and students with limited English proficiency (LEP) intersect. LEP is the term used by the federal government and other institutions to identify students who are still acquiring English. Students with disabilities and students who are classified as LEP have access to similar accommodations and academic supports, such as one-on-one and/or small group intensive instruction. For federally and state mandated standardized assessments, both MLs and students with disabilities must complete these tests. The accommodations for both groups include unlimited time, separate, small-group space, questions read aloud, and/or additional accommodations if specified in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

However, little assessment guidance is provided for students who are in both LEP programs and special education. This legal gray area regarding appropriate services and accommodations that students who are classified as both English language learners and labeled as students with disabilities are entitled to often confuse and frustrate teachers, administrators, and other educational practitioners including speech language pathologists and occupational therapists (Migliarini & Stinson, 2020; Kangas, 2018; Kangas, 2014; Paneque & Barbetta, 2006). The lack of clarity in the laws mandating support for students receiving special education and language services often results in ML teachers and special education teachers providing differing

academic support based on their individual understanding of these students' needs (Kangas et al., 2018). The little guidance from policymakers and time constraints from finite academic minutes often lead teachers and administrators to choose one academic support service over the other (Kangas, 2018; Kangas, 2014). This results in ML students with disabilities receiving special education or English language services, but rarely both (Kangas, 2014).

This confusing legal guidance at the school, district, state, and federal level creates complicated situations for teachers and administrators of MLs with disabilities who wish to meet the needs of these learners but also follow educational law and policy. ML teachers are legally required to educate MLs, but often lack the training and legal guidance needed to provide best instruction specifically for MLs with disabilities (Kangas, 2018; Kangas, 2014). While ML teachers go through extensive training in cultural competency, cultural perspectives on disability are often left out of the conversation. Similarly for school psychologists, administrators, speech therapists, and other school staff, differing cultural perspectives of disability may lead to misdiagnosis or misunderstanding of a child's disability. This often results in educators and administrators using their own cultural understanding of disability with students and families. This cultural disconnect may create cultural and academic issues for the students, their families, the teachers, and the school administration.

Current Research on Teacher Preparedness

Many studies exist examining general education teachers' feelings of preparedness for teaching nondisabled MLs in mainstream, general education classrooms (Wissink & Starks, 2019; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Faez, 2012; Coady et al., 2011; Durgonglu et al., 2010; O'Neal et al., 2008). Few research studies have been published on special education teachers' feelings of preparedness and self-efficacy for teaching MLs with disabilities (Montoya, 2018;

Paneque & Barbeta, 2006). However, even fewer studies have examined ML teachers' feeling of preparedness to teach MLs with or without disabilities (Tran, 2015).

Research on Nondisabled MLs

The results from a case study of five English teachers at a private, Christian school in Haiti examining the preparedness of teachers of MLs learning English in an EFL context revealed that the teachers in the study felt that their teacher preparation programs needed to provide teacher candidates with more time working with MLs in practicum and student teaching settings (Wissink & Starks, 2019). The teachers in this study all possessed bachelor degrees in education with endorsements in ESL/ELL/ENL and still felt unprepared for teaching reading to MLs.

Hansen-Thomson and colleagues (2016) surveyed 159 elementary and secondary teachers throughout the state of Texas. In this study, teachers in small, rural districts participated in a survey regarding their competence in teaching ESL based on the ESL certification competencies in the State of Texas. Respondents answered with Likert scale responses on their own competency regarding these topics. Additionally, qualitative data was collected from respondents regarding challenges they had faced teaching MLs. Results of these open-ended questions showed that teachers mostly found students' lack of academic vocabulary development difficult, communication issues with students hindered their learning, their perceptions of the lack of parent involvement and communication with teachers was difficult, and the lack of time to prepare for classes and to teach students prevented teachers from being able to help students succeed. These findings suggest that although teachers have had undergraduate coursework in ESL/ELL/ENL pedagogy, they still find challenges in the day-to-day education of MLs.

In rural South Carolina, researchers looked at teachers' feelings of preparedness to teach MLs in the mainstream classroom (O'Neal et. al, 2008). Twenty-four teachers were interviewed in focus groups to understand their feelings of preparedness and self-efficacy for teaching MLs. Results indicated that only 14% of participants took courses in language acquisition instruction in their teacher preparation programs, and 75% of the participants did not feel prepared to teach linguistically diverse learners. However, all participants responded that they felt responsible for educating MLs and indicated that they would like to receive professional development on instructional strategies for MLs.

Faez's (2012) study on the preparedness of international born and Canadian-born teachers of MLs in Canada included 25 preservice teachers enrolled in an intensive one-year bachelor's degree in teaching. The study employed a questionnaire that examined teachers' self-perceived level of empathy for MLs, preparedness to teach MLs, and their feelings of the level of their own responsibility to help MLs develop English skills in mainstream classrooms. The study compared international education teacher candidates (IETCs) with Canadian-born teacher candidates (CBTCs). Researchers found that IETCs indicated they were more prepared to teach MLs, but more CBTCs felt it was their responsibility to help MLs develop English skills in the mainstream classroom.

Another study that examined the feelings of self-efficacy, attitudes, preparedness, and knowledge of preservice teachers was conducted by Durgunoğlu and Hughes (2010). In this study, 62 preservice teachers who had completed coursework for a bachelor's degree in education were surveyed during their student teaching experience. Students were given a survey with Likert scale responses ranging from strongly disagree (1) to neutral (3) to strongly agree (5). Results concluded that students felt neutral about their preparedness ($M=3.08$) and self-efficacy

($M=3.23$). While these results may seem to suggest that students were prepared for teaching MLs in the classroom, the authors remarked that as teacher educators, they felt these results were negative reflections of the teacher preparation program. Researchers followed up with observations in the classroom of the student teachers and interviewed four of the participants. The observations were coded with three main themes emerging from the data: neglect of the needs of MLs, reliance on peer support, and lack of mentoring from the cooperating teacher. These themes revealed that these student teachers often neglected the needs of the MLs in their classes and those needs were often left to the peers of MLs to meet. The researchers concluded that teachers that feel unprepared to meet the needs of MLs in the classroom struggle to engage these learners in content instruction.

Coady and colleagues (2011) surveyed 85 graduates from a TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) teacher preparation program regarding their preparation and effectiveness in teaching MLs. Similar to the findings in Wissink and Starks' (2019) study, Coady and colleagues found that field experience directly working with MLs during pre-service teacher training programs was what teachers found most beneficial to their own feelings of preparation and effectiveness. Similar to the results found by Faez (2012), this study indicated that teachers who spoke a language other than English felt more prepared to teach MLs. The results from both studies indicate that teachers' own linguistic diversity is valuable for feeling prepared to teach MLs.

Research Examining MLs with Disabilities

Research that has been conducted focusing on teachers of MLs with disabilities has focused on the preparedness and self-efficacy of special education teachers. In Paneque and Barbetta's (2008) study of 202 elementary special education teachers, participants' self-efficacy

as self-reported was mixed. Researchers designed their survey using the Florida Department of Education's Performance Standards for Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages to determine questions examining teacher competencies. Respondents chose answers from a 9-point Likert scale option. Teachers rated themselves high on efficacy in teaching students social skills and improving their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). However, teachers rated their efficacy of utilizing school and community resources for MLs with disabilities quite low. They also rated themselves low in self-efficacy in supporting MLs' native language development.

The work of Kangas (2014) centered on MLs with disabilities who are entitled to both special education and English language services, but are often denied one service in favor of the other due to scheduling conflicts and misinterpretations of the laws surrounding dually served students. In her ethnographic study of an elementary school serving mostly MLs with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), she identified six focal educators to participate in the study. Two of the participants were paraprofessionals who worked directly with MLs with disabilities. Through her case study, she collected data including artifacts, observations, and interviews. Her findings concluded that special education services were in contention with English language services. The data indicated that two of the students in her study were not seen as multilingual learners; in essence, the school personnel erased their linguistic identity and labeled them solely as students with special needs.

In Kangas' (2018) qualitative comparative case study, she looked at two elementary schools who serve MLs with disabilities. Both schools were equal in size and identified as Title 1 schools. One of these schools was the same school as her previous research study in 2014. Ten focal teachers and ten focal students were included in this study. Observations, artifacts, and interviews were collected and analyzed by the researcher. From the data, Kangas concluded that

ML students with disabilities were not receiving both special education and English services in direct noncompliance with federal and state laws and guidelines. Teachers and administrators at these focal schools did not believe that the laws allowed for students to receive dual services.

Building on these studies, Kangas (2018) argues that the educational civil rights of MLs with disabilities are often being denied. In this article, she provides educators and stakeholders specific strategies to ensure MLs with disabilities are appropriately and adequately receiving both special education and English language services in US schools.

Stinson (2018) described her own experience as a special education teacher educating MLs with disabilities. Throughout her article, she described issues with co-teaching and scheduling the unique services MLs with disabilities are entitled to. This work is built on further in her qualitative study in collaboration with Migliarini in upstate New York (Migliarini & Stinson, 2020). This study analyzed New York's state laws on inclusion for MLs with disabilities and how these inclusion laws manifested in the classroom. Migliarini and Stinson conducted interviews with 10 teachers who worked closely with MLs with disabilities. Results from this study indicated that the implementation of state laws on inclusion are often left to teachers' and administrators' own interpretations.

At this time, little research has been conducted on ML teachers' and administrators' experience teaching MLs with disabilities, their personal feelings of preparedness, experience taking courses in pedagogy for MLs with disabilities, or how well they feel their schools and districts meet the needs of MLs with disabilities. This gap in the research affects not only researchers' understanding of ML teacher preparation but also in effective school systems for MLs with disabilities. Without this crucial research, we are unable to know how the needs of MLs with disabilities' needs are being met, and what teachers, administrators, policymakers, and

college preparation programs can do to improve successful and equitable educational outcomes for these learners.

Rationale of this Study and Design

The lack of legal guidance at the school, district, state, and federal level creates complicated situations for teachers and administrators of multilingual learners with disabilities. Teachers of MLs are legally required to meet the academic needs of MLs, but often lack the training needed to provide appropriate specifically for exceptional MLs. This study examines data regarding ML teachers' and district administrators' feelings of preparedness in providing adequate instruction and meeting exceptional MLs' needs, their perceptions of their school or districts' ability to meet those needs, and their educational experience and background in pursuit of understanding these unique learners.

The results of this study will help inform educators in practice, school administrators, policymakers, and professional teacher preparation programs about the needs of educators in the field to provide equitable education for multilingual learners with disabilities. This study may impact how stakeholders approach professional development and teacher preparation for educators who may work with linguistically diverse learners with disabilities.

The Study

The goal of this research is to examine survey data regarding the feelings of preparedness of ML teachers, world language/bilingual teachers, and administrators in providing adequate instruction and meeting exceptional MLs' needs, their experience education MLs with disabilities, and their perception of their school or district's ability to meet the needs of these exceptional learners. The study examined the perspectives of 261 educators of MLs. The data gathered from this study may give stakeholders a better understanding of the ways teachers,

administrators and districts are meeting the needs of MLs with disabilities, while also examining the additional resources needed of the teachers to achieve these instructional goals.

Research Questions

The data presented here is solely based on the following research questions:

1. How prepared do educators in the US feel to meet the needs of multilingual students with disabilities?
2. Do teachers and administrators have different feelings about their school or school districts' ability to meet the needs of multilingual learners with disabilities?
3. How might the size of the school district or geographic area affect the way teachers and administrators feel regarding their preparedness for meeting the needs of multilingual students with disabilities?
4. Does professional development affect how prepared educators feel to teach MLs with disabilities?
5. Does experience educating an ML with a disability affect how prepared educators feel to teach an ML with a disability?

With these guiding research questions in mind, I formulated survey questions that helped me better understand the feelings of educators in multilingual academic environments. I purposely created a mix of questions including Likert scale, yes/no, and open ended questions to give participants the opportunity to answer in ways that they felt most comfortable. The survey consisted of twenty questions with multiple choice, Likert scale questions, yes/no questions, and open ended questions. The remaining ten questions were demographic questions about the participants and their schools and school districts.

Methods

Participants

Survey respondents ($n=261$) were contacted via emails and consented to participate through an online survey. Respondents were K-12 administrators such as principals, deans, and teacher coaches ($n = 37$), K-12 English learner teachers ($n = 131$), K-12 world language teachers ($n = 52$), K-12 bilingual/dual language teachers ($n = 25$), and other ($n = 16$). I specifically chose these groups of educators as they are often the cultural and linguistics specialists within their school systems and often know their students on a very personal level from working in smaller groups or classes. The option for “other” was specifically included for those who work with MLs in schools but may have a different role within the school system. Respondents either worked directly with MLs throughout the day or had MLs in their schools.

Methodology

The survey was created and conducted using Qualtrics software. Survey questions included yes/no questions, Likert scale questions, multiple choice questions, open-ended questions for participants to provide more information, and demographic questions regarding the schools participants work in and their own racial and ethnic identification. A copy of the survey is available in the Appendix.

Using online Qualtrics data software, a survey was developed and sent to teachers in bilingual programs, ESL/ELL/ENL programs, world language programs, and principals and superintendents of these school districts by direct email and through district administration. Participants completed the survey questionnaire on their own using any device that could connect to the internet such as a mobile phone or computer. The first 100 participants were awarded a \$5 gift card to Target or Starbucks. The \$500 in funding for this research study was

awarded from the Washington Association for the Education of Speakers of Other Languages (WAESOL) Project Funding Grant program.

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualtrics software saved each respondent's information. Responses that were incomplete were excluded from the data collection. Responses that didn't pass the validation questions were also excluded from the data collection. In total, 261 participants completed the study, with some participants' responses incomplete. Qualtrics software conducted statistical analyses. Additional statistical analysis was conducted using ANOVA by SPSS.

Results

RQ1 How prepared do educators in the US feel to meet the needs of multilingual students with disabilities?

I performed statistical analysis of responses from 256 participants regarding their preparedness to teach MLs with ten various disability types. For this question, participants with incomplete data were excluded from the analysis (1 who was not currently teaching, 1 world language teacher, and 3 ELL teachers). Educators rated their preparedness to teach students with each of ten types of disability: a multilingual learner with blindness, Deafness or hearing impairment, an ML who was nonverbal, an ML with a physical disability that affected their ability to write or type, an ML who is on the Autism spectrum (ASD), an ML with an intellectual disability (ID), an ML with a behavior disability (BD) and an ML with a mobility disability (MD) that requires the use of a wheelchair to get around. Responses were on a Likert scale of 1-5 with very unprepared (1), somewhat unprepared (2), neutral (3), somewhat prepared (4), and very prepared (5). Participants included in this analysis were both administrators and teachers in K-12 schools.

An ANOVA was performed using SPSS statistical software. Data analysis confirmed a main effect of type of disability, $F(9, 1834) = 202.12, p < .001, ES = .44$ (all F values reflect Greenhouse-Geiser corrections). Post-hoc analyses (Tukey's LSD) revealed statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between educators' feelings of preparedness to teach an ML with blindness ($M = 1.59, SD = 1.00$) and educators' feelings of preparedness to teach an ML with a behavior disability ($M = 3.53, SD = 1.18$), an ML with a learning disability ($M = 3.62, SD = 1.4$), and an ML with a mobility disability requiring a wheelchair ($M = 3.99, SD = 1.3$).

Additionally, there was a statistically significant difference (Tukey's LSD, $p < .05$) between educators' feelings of preparedness to teach an ML who is Deaf/hearing impaired ($M = 1.85, SD = 1.4$) and educators' feelings of preparedness to teach an ML who has a mobility disability that requires the use of a wheelchair ($M = 3.99, SD = 1.3$). These results are represented in Figure 1.

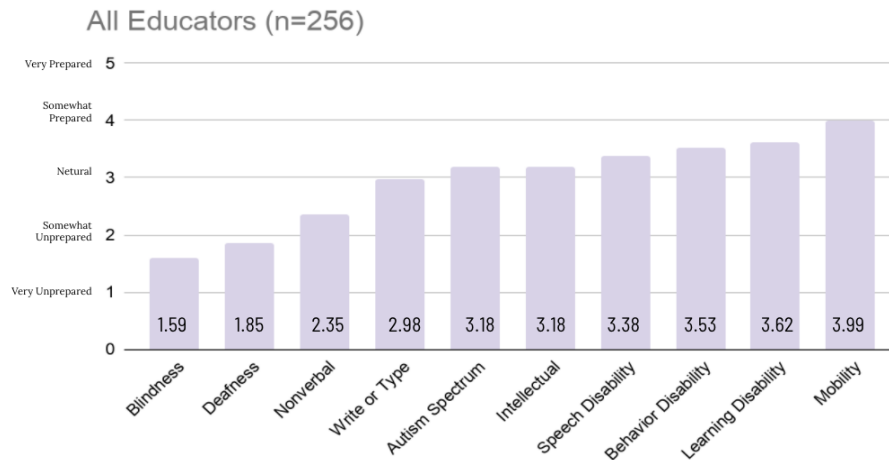


Figure 1 How prepared educators feel to teach MLs with disabilities

RQ2 Do teachers and administrators have different feelings about their school or school districts' ability to meet the needs of multilingual learners with disabilities?

Research Question 2 examined whether there were any differences in participants' responses based on their position as teachers ($n=203$) or administrators ($n=37$). An ANOVA revealed no significant main effect between teachers and administrators on their mean ratings across the various types of disabilities, $F(3,199)=2.28$, $p>.05$, with teachers (combined across EL, Bilingual, Dual Language and World Language settings) reporting a mean rating of 2.94 ($SD=.80$) and administrators reporting a mean of 3.15 ($SD=.87$). The main effect of disability type remained significant, $F(7,1717)=108.04$, $p<.001$, and there was no significant interaction, $F(7,1717)=1.03$, $p>.40$, suggesting the same general trend in ratings of disability types across both teachers and administrators.

RQ3 How might the size of the school district or geographic area affect the way teachers and administrators feel regarding their preparedness for meeting the needs of multilingual students with disabilities?

Research question 3 examined whether there were any significant differences in participants' responses based on their location in an urban, suburban or rural school district. An ANOVA on the three groups showed that there were no statistical differences observed among participants' location and their feelings of preparedness to educate MLs with disabilities, $F(2,252)=0.23$, $p=.80$. Educators in rural schools ($n=37$) reported an average rating across the disability types of 2.94 ($SD=0.80$), educators in suburban schools ($n=130$) reported a mean of 2.94 ($SD=0.87$), and educators in urban schools ($n=86$) reported a mean of 3.01 ($SD=.77$). Similarly, there were no significant differences among participants' answers to the question, "Do you feel your school or school district meets the needs of MLs with disabilities?" based on their

location in an urban, suburban, or rural school or school district, $F(2,252)=0.27, p>.70$).

Responses included definitely not (1), probably not (2), probably yes (3), and definitely yes (4).

Educators in rural schools reported a mean rating of 2.51 ($SD=0.80$), educators in suburban schools reported a mean of =2.45 ($SD=0.86$), and educators in urban schools reported a mean of =2.40, ($SD=0.87$).

RQ4 - Does professional development affect how prepared educators feel to teach MLs with disabilities?

Research question 4 examined the effects of professional development on teachers' feelings of preparedness to educate MLs with disabilities. For this analysis, I only looked at participants who self-identified as teachers ($n=203$) and had complete data. An ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference related to professional development $F(1, 200) = 34.69 p < .001, ES=.15$, with teachers who had professional development (PD) or prior coursework in the education of MLs with disabilities reporting higher levels of preparedness ($M=3.32$ and $SD=.67$) than those who had no prior PD or coursework ($M=2.69, SD=.80$). The main effect of disability type remained significant ($F(7,1431) = 146.73 p<.001$) and the interaction was not significant ($F(7,1431)=1.96, p>.05$), again indicating, as presented in Figure 2, that there were no significant differences between groups across the ratings of the various disability types.

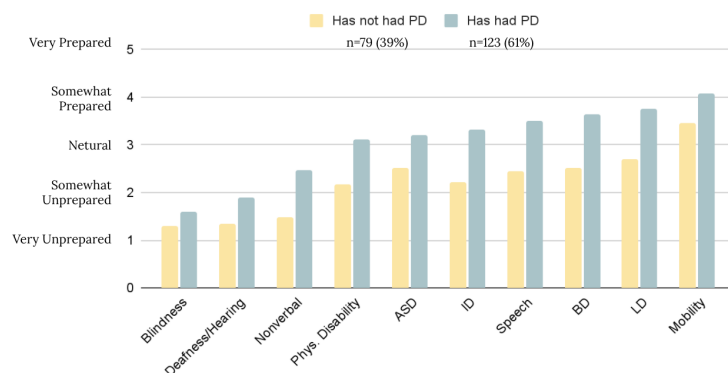


Figure 2 Educators who previously had PD and those who had no PD

RQ5 - Does experience educating an ML with a disability affect how prepared educators feel to teach an ML with a disability?

Research question 5 looked at teachers' prior experiences working with MLs to see if experience had an effect on their feelings of preparedness to educate MLs with disabilities. For this analysis, I only looked at participants who self-identified as teachers ($n=203$). The main effect of experience was significant, $F(1, 201)=31.66$, $p > .001$, $ES=.14$, with teachers who had experience with students with disabilities reporting higher feeling of preparedness ($M=3.06$, $SD=.76$) compared to teachers with no experience ($M=2.21$, $SD=.85$). The main effect of disability type remained significant, $F(7,1448)=66.02$, $p < .05$, $ES=.25$, and the interaction was also significant, $F(7,1448)=2.52$, $p < .05$, $ES=.01$. Despite the significance of the interaction, the effect size was very small (.01) and as Figure 3 suggests, the between-group trends in ratings of the various disability types did not differ in ways that are large or easily interpreted.

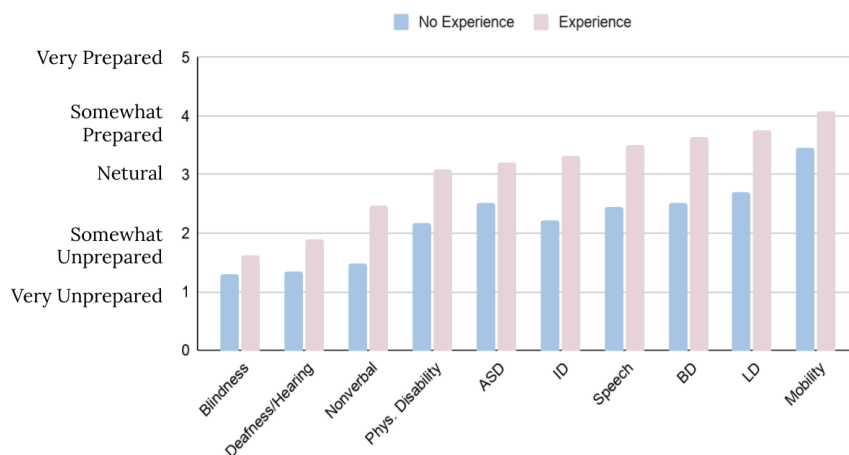


Figure 3 Educators with prior experience educating MLs with disabilities and educators who had no prior experience

Discussion

The data from this study indicated overall educators felt underprepared to educate multilingual students with disabilities, particularly those students with disabilities that affected their ability to communicate in English. Participants with prior experience teaching MLs with disabilities or who had prior training in the education for MLs with disabilities felt more prepared than their colleagues. Educators felt least prepared to teach MLs with blindness and Deafness/hearing impairment. Participants felt most prepared to teach MLs with disabilities that did not affect their ability to communicate.

Prior research has concluded that educators who feel unprepared to meet the needs of MLs struggle to engage these learners in the classroom (Durgunoğlu & Hughes, 2010). The results of this study may suggest that the participants in this study may also struggle to engage MLs with disabilities in their classrooms.

The educators in this study reflect the participants in several other studies examining the efficacy and preparedness of teachers of multilingual learners as teachers whose positions focus on the language development of multilingual English learners (Migliarini & Stinson, 2020; Kangas, et al., 2018; Kangas, 2018, 2014; Wissink & Starks, 2019; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Faez, 2012; Coady et al., 2011; Durgonglu et al., 2010; O'Neal et al., 2008). These educators have distinct training in applied linguistics, typical language acquisition, and language teaching pedagogy for typically developing children. I specifically included this group of teachers in this study to gain a better understanding of how prepared they feel to educate atypical multilingual learners in their language development classrooms.

In this study 39% of respondents (n=79) indicated that they had prior professional development in the education of MLs with disabilities and a majority (61%, n=123) indicated

that they had no prior professional development. Those who had no experience working with MLs with disabilities previously rated their preparedness to work with these students lower. This data reflects the lack of professional development regarding education for nondisabled MLs in O'Neal et al.'s (2008) study, whereby only 14% of respondents had prior professional development and 75% of the educators in the study felt unprepared to educate nondisabled MLs. The improvement of teacher training regarding

The data seems to indicate that language educators feel least prepared to educate MLs with disabilities that affect their ability to communicate. The educators' feelings of preparedness to teach MLs with disabilities in the four modalities of language - listening, speaking, reading and writing, were consistently rated lower than those disabilities that did not affect students' ability to communicate.

I theorize that educators felt least prepared to educate MLs who are Blind ($M=1.59$) as a result of the reliance of visual cues and visual aids in language classrooms. As many educators of MLs do not speak the vastly diverse languages of their multilingual students, they rely on the use of visuals to teach new vocabulary and grammar. These visual aids are a way to bypass the language barrier when working with multilingual students as these aids generally do not require the need to translate. It is possible that language educators' reliance on the use of visual aids, modeling, and other visual strategies in teaching language may become an issue when teaching a child who is visually impaired.

Educators rated their feelings of preparedness for Deaf/hearing impaired students very low ($M=1.85$). The auditory and verbal aspects of language that teachers use and teach in the classroom are heavily relied upon to teach multilingual learners. Typically developing, nondisabled language learners tend to be able to understand auditory language before they are

able to verbally communicate. It is my theory that educators felt very unprepared to teach learners who are Deaf/hearing impaired and MLs who are nonverbal because of the unique listening and speaking modalities of language.

Educators rated their feelings of preparedness much higher for students with behavior disabilities ($M=3.53$), learning disabilities ($M=3.62$) and mobility disabilities ($M=3.99$). The trend of these ratings suggests that language educators feel more prepared to educate students whose disabilities do not interfere with their ability to communicate. However, the means of these ratings hover around 3 (neutral) and 4 (somewhat prepared) indicating that educators still do not feel particularly confident teaching these disabled MLs. As these language teachers are educators of linguistic communication, this finding is unsurprising yet noteworthy.

The finding that educators felt least prepared to educate MLs with blindness and Deafness/hearing impairment compared to MLs with behavior disabilities, learning disabilities, and mobility disabilities could also be due to the prevalence of these disabilities in the K-12 school system. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2021) reports that learning disabilities (4.6% of K-12 public school students) are the most prevalent disabilities for which students receive special education services, followed by speech disabilities (2.7%), chronic health issues (2%), Autism Spectrum Disorders (1.4%), and what the NCES phrases as emotional disturbance (0.7%). Students with blindness (0.1%) and students with Deafness/hearing impairment (0.1%) are less prevalent in the K-12 school population.

The higher incidence of learning disabilities and speech disabilities in K-12 schools may account for this study's participants' higher ratings of preparedness to teach students with these disabilities. Educators rated disabilities that are often considered lower incidence disabilities such as Deafness and Blindness much lower than other disabilities. The higher comparative

ratings of preparedness by these educators for disabilities such as Behavior Disabilities, Learning Disabilities and Speech Disabilities can be taken as a positive reflection of the preparation of these educators to educate students with higher incidence disabilities.

Experience

The data indicated that educators who have had prior experience educating MLs with disabilities felt more prepared to educate MLs with varying disability types. This suggests that inclusive education instructional models could benefit teachers and students. School districts should create more inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities so that educators have more experience working with these learners.

Additionally, co-teaching models of instruction could benefit teachers who feel underprepared to teach MLs with disabilities. School systems could implement a cooperative teacher model in which a more experienced teacher with prior experience working with MLs with disabilities co-teaches and/or mentors a teacher with less experience to build their confidence and understanding regarding instructional strategies for MLs with disabilities.

Another strategy schools could implement to give underprepared teachers more experience working with MLs with disabilities includes observations and/or visitations of other classrooms where MLs with disabilities are present. Schools could give teachers several hours per academic year to visit another school or school district where MLs with disabilities are learning. During these observations, underprepared teachers could observe instructional strategies and interact with students to gain more experience and therefore improve in their preparation.

This finding reflects the findings of Coady and colleagues (2011) in which TESOL teachers indicated that experience working in schools with MLs during pre-service teacher

training was most beneficial to their preparation in the field. In order to better prepare teachers to educate disabled MLs, teacher preparation programs should consider conducting pre-service teacher field experiences that center on inclusive classrooms to expose teacher candidates to atypically developing multilingual learners.

Professional Development

From this survey, data indicated that educators who had taken prior courses or professional development specifically for the education of MLs with disabilities felt more prepared to work with these unique students. This signifies a need for schools and districts to provide more professional development for in-service teachers who may work with MLs with disabilities in the future.

In this study, 39% of respondents (n=79) indicated that they had prior professional development in the education of MLs with disabilities and a majority (61%, n=123) indicated that they had no prior professional development. This suggests that teacher preparation programs and school districts may not be providing enough professional development opportunities for educators and preservice teachers. This calls for additional professional development opportunities on the unique educational needs of MLs with disabilities.

Although I did not specifically ask educators if they would like to receive professional development for MLs with disabilities, 31% (n=17) of those that answered open ended questions regarding their perception of the effectiveness of the prior professional development for MLs with disabilities that they had taken reported positive attitudes towards these opportunities. O'Neal et al.'s (2008) study on in-service general education classroom teachers indicated that most educators would like to receive professional development on teaching strategies for nondisabled MLs.

As disabilities are often diagnosed during the school years, it is possible that educators are working with undiagnosed MLs with disabilities daily in their classrooms. This data suggests that school districts, administrators, and teacher preparation programs could offer more professional development and coursework specific to the educational needs and pedagogy for MLs with disabilities as a way to prepare teachers for educating MLs with disabilities.

The professional development programs may also lead to educators becoming more aware of the potential signs of a student with disability. This awareness could lead to educators conducting more data collection and instigating referrals to special education services for possible diagnosis of disabilities. The diagnosis of disabilities is necessary for students to receive academic support and ultimately better academic outcomes.

Professional development opportunities for educators on the needs of MLs with disabilities could be a single session, a series of sessions, webinars, or service learning sessions that combine experiential learning with informational sessions. School buildings or school districts could offer these seminars to their language educators or their entire staff if they have a large population of MLs in their school.

Educators' Backgrounds

_____ There was no difference among educators' positions (teachers and administrators) in the feelings of preparedness to teach MLs with various disabilities types. Additionally, location made no difference in educators' feelings of preparedness to educate MLs with disabilities. This is an interesting finding that may suggest that language teacher preparation programs throughout the US may not provide adequate training regarding the unique needs of multilingual students with disabilities. The educators' overall low ratings of preparedness to teach MLs with disabilities is a concerning finding. Regardless of level of education, location, school district size

or position, teachers consistently rated their preparedness to teach MLs with disabilities quite low.

The results of studies by Faez (2012) and Coady et al. (2011) indicated that teachers who spoke languages in addition to English felt more prepared to teach multilingual students. However, my study did not reveal that there was any statistical difference between groups of educators based on their professions. World language educators rated their preparedness similarly to that of their colleagues. In fact, bilingual teachers often rated their preparation to teach MLs with disabilities consistently lower than their colleagues.

School Districts' Ability to Meet the Needs of MLs

While there were no statistically significant differences among groups in their feelings regarding the effectiveness of their school districts to meet the needs of MLs with disabilities ($M=2.4$, 1=definitely not, 2=probably not, 3=probably yes, 4=definitely yes), participants tended to indicate that their schools were not meeting the needs of MLs with disabilities. This finding echoes the findings of Kangas (2018) and Migliarini & Stinson (2020) whereby schools are not often serving MLs with disabilities both English language services and special education services. While this study did not go into detail on the issue of dually served students' access to both services, it is notable that participants felt their schools were not fully meeting the needs of their multilingual students with disabilities.

Limitations

Respondents were from twenty-one states with the majority of respondents from the Midwest (Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois and Nebraska) and the Pacific Northwest (Washington state). The data collected by this survey therefore can not be generalized to school systems in the Southwestern, Southeastern, or Northeastern United States. Similarly, respondents were

US-based educators in public or private K-12 schools, leaving out information regarding the status of English education for MLs with disabilities in other English majority countries.

Additionally, demographic questions did not ask respondents of their own disability. This was an overlooked but necessary question to add to the survey. However, once I began dissemination of the survey and noticed the lack of this unique and important participant demographic information, I was unable to add it to the survey questionnaire.

Another limitation of this study was that there was no question examining teachers' years of experience as teachers. This could have given more insight into their different feelings of preparedness to work with MLs with disabilities.

The participants consisted of K-12 administrators such as principals, deans, and teacher coaches ($n = 37$), K-12 English learner teachers ($n = 131$), K-12 world language teachers ($n = 52$), K-12 bilingual/dual language teachers ($n = 25$), and other ($n = 16$). The small group sizes of the administrators and bilingual/dual language teachers was an additional limitation in this study.

Future Research

As this study solely looked at K-12 educators, future research could examine the feelings of preparedness and efficacy in meeting the needs of early childhood MLs with disabilities in preschool. Additionally, longitudinal research examining the educational experiences of MLs with disabilities and their families regarding their feelings of academic success and adequate instruction could be conducted to better understand how these learners progress through the US school system. Furthermore, demographic data of future research on teachers' feelings of preparedness to meet the needs of MLs should include demographic questions that indicate participants' own disability status.

Additional research could examine the effectiveness of professional development or inclusive education experiences for teachers on their feelings of preparedness to teach MLs with disabilities. This future research could examine professional development or experiential learning for teachers with MLs with disabilities as an intervention to improve teachers' feelings of preparedness and efficacy.

Conclusion

_____The data collected from these educators indicates that educators feel least prepared to teach MLs who are blind, Deaf/hearing impaired, and nonverbal. Participants felt most prepared to teach students with behavior disabilities, learning disabilities, and mobility disabilities that require the use of a wheelchair.

The field of English language education and acquisition has long overlooked disabled learners. Research has neglected analyzing the needs of these students and the teachers who serve them. Due to the lack of information regarding MLs with disabilities and their education, I examined teachers' feelings of preparedness to educate MLs with disabilities. This research may help teachers, administrators, teacher preparation programs, policy makers, and families better understand how the needs of these unique learners are being met and what more needs to be done to ensure equitable academic outcomes for these students. The findings from this study continue to inform policy surrounding the education of English language learners with disabilities.

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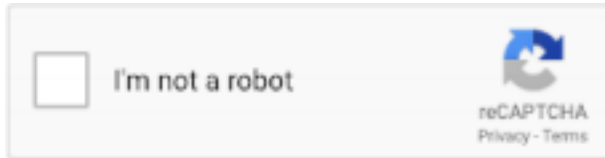
Appendix

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

Block 11

Please complete the Captcha.



Consent

General Information

I am asking you to participate in a research study titled “Teachers' Feelings of Preparedness and Efficacy Regarding Educating DLLs/ELLs with Disabilities.” I will describe this study to you and answer any of your questions. This study is being led by Jackie Otting at the University of Washington College of Education. The Faculty Advisor for this study is Deborah McCutchen, Phd, Associate Dean of Research at the UW College of Education.

Contact information

The main researcher conducting this study is Jackie Otting at the University of Washington College of Education. If you have any questions, please contact Jackie Otting at otting@uw.edu.

Results of the Study

If you would like to receive information regarding the results of this study, please contact Jackie Otting at otting@uw.edu.

What the study is about

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of how educators feel

regarding educating DLLs/ELs with disabilities.

What Will be Asked of You

This survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. I will ask you to answer questions in English regarding your feelings of preparedness for educating DLLs/ELs with disabilities, your prior experiences with teaching DLLs/ELs with disabilities, and unidentifiable demographic questions about you and your school district.

Possible Risks

There are no anticipated risks from participating in this research. Your participation in this survey presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet.

Benefits

There are no anticipated benefits from participating in this research.

Compensation for participation

100 participants will be awarded a \$5 digital gift card to Starbucks or Target.

The first 100 participants to complete the survey and indicate their preference of gift card will receive compensation through the email address they provide.

Privacy

All participants' responses will be randomized with their personal information kept separate from their responses. None of the questions will ask for any personally identifiable information.

Taking part is voluntary

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Participants may refuse to participate or discontinue at any time. Participants may skip any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering with no penalty to them regarding compensation.

Participants can go forward and backward within the survey to revisit questions.

Do you consent to being in this survey study?

Yes

No

Validation

Are you currently an educator in a school or school district in the United States of America (USA)?

Yes

No

What is your position?

K-12 English Learner (EL/ESL/ENL) Teacher

K-12 Dual Language Learner (DLL) Teacher

K-12 Bilingual Teacher (teaching both English and a world language)

Administrator of a K-12 public or private school or school district that serves

DLLs/ELLs K-12 World Language Teacher

Other

Block 10

Do you teach DLLs/ELLs during the school day?

Yes

No

What percentage of students that you teach each day are classified as Dual Language Learners (DLLs) and/or English Language Learners (ELLs)?

0%-10%

10%-20%

20%-30%

30%-40%

40%-50%

50%-60%

60%-70%

70%-80%

80%-90%

90%-100%

Q1 - Grid 1

How prepared do you feel to teach a Dual Language Learner or English Language Learner (DLL/ELL) with the following disabilities?

Very Unprepared

Somewhat Unprepared

Neutral

Somewhat Prepared

Very Prepared

A DLL/ELL student who is blind

A DLL/ELL student who is Deaf or hard of hearing

A DLL/ELL student who is nonverbal or uses alternative communication such as picture boards to communicate

A DLL/ELL student who has an intellectual disability

A DLL/ELL student who has a learning disability

Q2 - Grid 2

Very Unprepared

Somewhat Unprepared

Neutral

Somewhat Prepared

Very Prepared

How prepared do you feel to teach a DLL/ELL with the following disabilities?

A DLL/ELL student with a physical disability that impacts their ability to write or use a computer

A DLL/ELL student with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

A DLL/ELL student with a speech disability

A DLL/ELL student with a physical disability who requires a wheelchair

A DLL/ELL student with a behavior disorder

Very Unprepared

Somewhat Unprepared

Neutral

Somewhat Prepared

Q3 - If, then 1

Have you ever taught a DLL/ELL with a disability?

Yes

No

What has been your experience teaching a DLL/ELL with a disability?

Q4 If, then 2

Have you ever taken any courses or participated in professional development regarding the education of DLLs/ELLs with disabilities?

Yes

No

What has been your experience taking courses or participating in professional development regarding the education of DLLs/ELLs with disabilities?

Q5 - District

Do you feel that your school or school district meets the needs of DLLs/ELLs with disabilities? Feel free to add to your response.

Definitely yes

Probably yes

Probably not

Definitely not

School Demographics

Would you consider your school or school district to be ...

Rural

Suburban

Urban

What is the approximate size of your school or school district?

Less than 2,000 students

2,000-5,000 students

5,000-10,000 students

10,000-20,000 students

20,000+ students

What percentage of your school population are DLLs/ELLs?

Less than 10%

10%-20%

20%-30%

30%-40%

40%-50%

Greater than 50%

Unsure

Which US state or territory is your school or school district located in?

Personal Demographics

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary / third gender

Prefer not to say

What is your age?

18-30

31-40

41-50

51-60

60+

What is your race/ethnicity

African American/Black

Asian

Caucasian

Latinx/Hispanic

Native American/Indigenous

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Do you possess a state certified teaching license?

Yes

No

What are the subject areas of your state issued teaching license or endorsements?

What is your highest level of completed education?

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Doctorate (PhD, Ed.D)

Gift card

Would you like to receive a \$5 digital gift card from either Target or Starbucks?

Yes

No