

**Supporting Multilingual Learners Through Professional Development in Elementary
Schools**

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Abstract

This study explores the significance of professional development (PD) in equipping in-service teachers to effectively support and teach multilingual learners (MLs) in elementary schools. Specifically, it examines PD design for mainstream classroom teachers serving MLs in elementary grades, identifying four key themes: [1] Professional Development in teaching approaches, [2] Professional Development in raising ideological and cultural awareness, and [3] Professional Development in multilingual pedagogies.

Keywords: multilingual learners, elementary, professional development, mainstream teachers, Literature review

Supporting Multilingual Learners Through Professional Development in Elementary Schools

This is an examination of the research on how to support multilingual learners (MLs) through professional development (PD) in elementary schools. It examines the role of PD in supporting MLs, focusing on three key areas: the impact of PD on teaching approaches, the importance of raising ideological and cultural awareness, and the role of multilingual pedagogies, particularly translanguaging, in enhancing instructional practices.

Context

As the population of Multilingual English Learners (MLs) continues to grow in elementary schools across the United States, educators are faced with the challenge of providing high-quality, equitable instruction that meets the diverse linguistic and academic needs of these students. In Washington state alone, the number of MLs has surpassed 130,000, reflecting national trends that highlight the increasing linguistic diversity in classrooms (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2025). To support MLs, school districts implement various instructional models, such as English Language Development (ELD), Dual Language programs, and Sheltered Instruction, each designed to promote bilingualism, biliteracy, and academic achievement. Federal policies like Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) emphasize the importance of supporting MLs through targeted instruction, access to high-quality curriculum, and professional development for educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2025).

Despite these efforts, significant gaps remain in teacher preparedness and professional development for supporting MLs effectively. Many educators, including those in Dual Language and special education programs, report feeling underprepared to address the linguistic and

cultural complexities of ML instruction. Additionally, the identification and support processes for MLs are often inconsistent, leading to disparities in the services students receive. Research suggested that PD plays a crucial role in equipping teachers with the knowledge and strategies that can positively change in teacher practices, beliefs through classroom observations, and threaded discussions (Choi & Morrison, 2014; Tran, 2014; Vargas et al., 2023; Zhang & Pelttari, 2014). However, many existing PD programs lack a comprehensive focus on multilingual instructional strategies, cultural responsiveness, and asset-based approaches to language learning (Babinski et al., 2018; Colombo, 2007; Higgins & Ponte, 2017; Holdway & Hitchcock, 2018; Parkhouse et al., 2019; Tong et al., 2017).

This literature review situates itself within the broader conversation on multilingual education by examining the role of professional development in supporting MLs in elementary schools. It explores current research on instructional best practices and teacher training programs, that influence ML education. By analyzing these factors, this review aims to identify key areas for improvement and provide recommendations for strengthening professional development initiatives to enhance the academic success of multilingual learners.

Importance

As a multilingual teacher in my second year of teaching, this issue is deeply significant to me. Having taught Dual Language (DL) Kindergarten last year and special education this year, I have realized that my teacher preparation did not fully equip me to create an inclusive classroom that meets the diverse needs of my students. While seeking professional development opportunities, I noticed a lack of training specifically focused on supporting MLs, despite them making up a significant portion of the student population in my school district.

While teaching in the DL Kindergarten program, I frequently heard teachers express challenges in instructing students in a language they lacked foundational knowledge in. The first few months of school were particularly difficult for both teachers and students, as they navigated not only the expectations and structure of the school but also significant language barriers. For example, some students spoke only Spanish in English classes or vice versa, creating communication challenges that hindered effective learning.

This year, in my special education classroom, 90% of my students speak a different language at home but are not identified as MLs in the district's data. This means they do not receive the language support they are entitled to. To address this, my administrators and I collaborated with families at the start of the school year to ensure proper identification. We updated students' Individualized Education Program (IEP) and arranged for them to participate in the WIDA Screener, an assessment used to measure English language proficiency. These experiences have highlighted the critical need for improved teacher preparation and systemic support for multilingual learners. This research project is important to me because it will help me gather evidence on effective professional development strategies for supporting MLs, with the hope of sharing the findings with my district to raise awareness of the need and benefits of providing targeted professional development for teachers.

For my students, this problem is essential to their educational success and equity. Many of my multilingual students face additional challenges in accessing the curriculum due to language barriers. Without effective instructional strategies tailored to their needs, they risk falling behind academically. Through targeted professional development, teachers can gain the skills necessary to implement evidence-based practices, such as translanguaging and

interactional scaffolding, which can significantly enhance students' language acquisition and overall academic achievement. Additionally, for my special education students who are also multilingual, improved instructional strategies can bridge the gap between their language and learning needs. By advocating for more effective professional development, I hope to contribute to creating a more inclusive learning environment where all students, regardless of their language background, have the support they need to thrive.

At the community level, addressing this problem is vital for promoting educational equity and fostering stronger school-family partnerships. Multilingual families often face barriers in accessing school resources due to language differences, which can limit their engagement in their children's education. When teachers receive targeted professional development, they become better equipped to communicate with and support these families.

Furthermore, by raising awareness of the needs of MLs through this research, I hope to advocate for systemic changes in my district. Improved professional development opportunities can enhance teachers' cultural competence, foster more inclusive classroom practices, and ultimately lead to better outcomes for multilingual students. This, in turn, benefits the broader community by promoting diversity, inclusion, and equity in education.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to improve my understanding of effective professional development models for supporting multilingual learners (MLs) in elementary schools. Through this research, I aim to identify evidence-based instructional strategies, such as reading comprehension for English language learners (ELLs), interactional scaffolding, collaborative learning, and translanguaging, and explore how they impact MLs' academic achievement and

language development. Additionally, I intend to examine the challenges teachers face in implementing these practices and how professional development can address these barriers. My goal is to use this knowledge to enhance my own teaching practices, advocate for more targeted professional development in my school district and ultimately improve educational outcomes for MLs.

Focal Questions

This literature review explores the role of professional development in supporting multilingual learners (MLs) in elementary schools. The key questions guiding this review include:

1. According to the research, how does professional development (PD) influence teaching approaches for multilingual learners (MLs), and which strategies have proven most effective?
2. According to the research, how does PD contribute to raising teachers' ideological and cultural awareness to better support MLs?
3. According to the research, how do multilingual pedagogies, particularly translanguaging, improve academic outcomes for MLs, and what challenges limit their implementation?
4. According to the research, what gaps exist in current teacher preparation programs regarding multilingual education, and how can PD help address these gaps?

Through this exploration, the review seeks to demonstrate how well-designed PD programs can empower teachers to create equitable and inclusive learning environments for MLs, while also identifying gaps in literature and areas for future research. By addressing these questions,

this review contributes to the ongoing dialogue on how to best support MLs and ensure their academic and linguistic success.

Literature Review

This literature review presents research on how to support multilingual learners (MLs) through professional development (PD). It specifically examines the design of PD programs for mainstream classroom teachers serving MLs, focusing on strategies that enhance instructional effectiveness and promote culturally responsive teaching. It examines three key areas of PD: the impact of professional development on teaching approaches, raising ideological and cultural awareness, and Professional Development in multilingual pedagogies.

Professional Development in Teaching Approaches

The first theme centers on teaching approaches, with research consistently demonstrating the pivotal role of PD programs in shaping effective instructional practices for MLs. These initiatives foster instructional change, promote reflective practice, and encourage the adoption of content-specific, linguistically responsive strategies.

To begin, several studies have explored the overall effectiveness of PD programs in fostering linguistically responsive instructional practices. Choi and Morrison (2014) investigated a five-year hybrid PD program in Oregon aimed at helping experienced teachers adapt instruction for language minority and immigrant students. Combining classroom observations and online threaded discussions, the mixed-methods study tracked 33 in-service teachers using the ELL Lesson Observation Guide and grounded theory analysis. The PD, aligned with the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), emphasized differentiation, language acquisition, and sociocultural awareness. Findings revealed that sustained, multi-layered PD

effectively nurtured reflective practice, collaboration, and instructional improvement, underscoring the ongoing nature of teacher development rather than focusing solely on pre- and post-intervention outcomes.

Similarly, Guler (2020) examined how two online ELL education courses influenced mainstream teachers' perceptions of ELLs. Initially positive yet uncertain, teachers' confidence and understanding of effective instructional strategies improved with formal training. The study recommends incorporating ELL education and second language acquisition (SLA) coursework into mainstream teacher preparation and prioritizing PD models like SIOP and the ESOL-Teacher Project.

Hutchinson and Hadjioannou (2011) assessed the MODEL PD program, a hybrid initiative designed to enhance teachers' knowledge of SLA and ESL strategies. The mixed-method case study involved 20 in-service and 5 pre-service teachers in Pennsylvania, using surveys, observations, reflections, and online discussions. Results showed substantial growth in participants' instructional practices, supporting the value of sustained PD opportunities for better meeting the needs of ELLs.

Alongside in-person and hybrid formats, virtual PD programs have also demonstrated positive outcomes. Lynch et al. (2021) evaluated *Project MOOPIL*, a virtual PD program for teachers of English learners across Texas, using a quasi-experimental pre- and post-test design with 359 teachers from 341 schools. The program produced statistically significant knowledge gains across areas including second language acquisition, cultural responsiveness, classroom environment, and family engagement. These results affirm the effectiveness of virtual PD in expanding educator capacity and recommend scaling such programs for broader access.

Heineke et al. (2019) explored the *Language Matters* project, a multi-year PD initiative in Chicago Public Schools. The study documented significant growth in linguistically responsive practices at classroom, school, and district levels, such as integrating students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and using language objectives and scaffolds. The authors advocate for teacher-driven development, leadership opportunities, and the institutionalization of these practices through ongoing learning communities.

A related line of inquiry concerns the relationship between the length of PD programs and their effectiveness. McIntyre et al. (2010) conducted an 18-month PD study in an urban Midwest district, examining the impact of SIOP training on teacher practices and student reading outcomes. Twenty-three teachers participated in workshops, coaching, and self-reflection activities. While teachers who received over 50 hours of PD demonstrated notable improvements in instructional areas like Building Background and Review, student gains in reading, though present, were modest due to sample limitations and implementation variability. The study highlights the challenges of achieving consistent high-fidelity implementation in shorter PD timelines.

In contrast, Pritchard (2012) assessed a six-year, districtwide PD program involving 331 teachers aimed at enhancing language acquisition practices for ELs. With 150 instructional hours over three years, including workshops, micro-teaching, and reflective journaling, the program led to increased teacher expertise in bilingual and SLA instruction. Teachers earned CLAD certification and demonstrated expanded teaching strategies and mindset shifts. The study emphasizes the effectiveness of long-term, districtwide PD in promoting meaningful instructional change and consistency.

In addition to exploring the duration of PD programs, research has also examined the content focus of PD initiatives, particularly those designed to enhance literacy instruction for multilingual learners. Shelton et al. (2010) conducted a systematic review of 19 studies involving 1,038 teachers and 9,370 students, examining PD programs for EL literacy instruction. These programs typically featured workshops, coaching, classroom observations, and sometimes online coursework. The review found that PD improved teachers' fidelity in implementing literacy strategies like vocabulary instruction and scaffolding. However, while most studies reported positive instructional changes, only 12 of the 19 documented student outcomes, limiting conclusions about direct impacts on EL achievement.

Building on the importance of content-integrated PD, several studies have evaluated programs embedding language development within academic subject areas. Shea et al. (2018) examined a three-year initiative integrating student-talk strategies into science and mathematics instruction in a high-minority, low-SES district. The program, which combined instructional workshops and school-based learning communities, led to significant gains for ELs in both English Language Arts and Mathematics, highlighting the potential of content-integrated language strategies. Similarly, Santau et al. (2010) investigated a science-based PD program for 70 elementary teachers, finding that while teachers reported frequent use of inquiry-based instruction and moderate to high confidence in content knowledge, the study recommended enhancing PD with multimodal resources and sustained classroom-based support.

Complementing these academic content-focused approaches, Brouillette and Hinga (2015) evaluated an arts-based PD program integrating visual arts, theater, and dance into oral language instruction for ELs. Conducted in 15 urban elementary schools, the program resulted in

significant improvements in students' listening and speaking skills, particularly in oral language production, reinforcing the value of creative, multimodal instructional strategies for multilingual learners.

As this review indicates, while the research affirms the positive impact of PD on instructional practice, it also identifies several areas of debate and unresolved challenges. One persistent issue is the sustainability of PD effects on instructional practice. While studies like Choi and Morrison (2014) emphasize gradual, multi-year teacher transformation, others, such as McIntyre et al. (2010), illustrate the difficulty of achieving consistent, high-quality implementation in shorter PD interventions. This raises concerns about the long-term durability of instructional improvements.

Additionally, the variability in PD impact on student achievement remains a challenge. While several studies (e.g., McIntyre et al., 2010; Shea et al., 2018) report positive student outcomes, Shelton et al.'s (2010) review highlights inconsistent reporting of student achievement data. Only 12 of the 19 reviewed studies included student outcomes, limiting the ability to draw firm conclusions about PD's direct influence on multilingual learners' academic performance. Questions also persist regarding the scalability and generalizability of PD programs. Many studies feature localized, content-specific initiatives, such as arts-based PD or science-integrated programs, raising concerns about whether these outcomes would hold in different contexts, with diverse student populations, or across broader educational systems.

Lastly, the alignment of PD with systemic reforms remains uncertain. While PD effectively enhances teacher practices, it may fall short without complementary changes in curriculum, assessment, leadership, and resource allocation. Future research should investigate

how PD interacts with systemic factors like administrative support and instructional frameworks to produce sustainable improvements in ML education.

Professional Development in Raising Ideological and Cultural Awareness

The second theme focuses on supporting MLs by providing PD that raises ideological and cultural awareness among in-service teachers. Research highlights the critical role of PD in enhancing in-service teachers' ideological and cultural awareness, particularly in MLs. Multiple studies demonstrate how PD fosters teachers' cultural competence, strengthens instructional strategies, and improves their preparedness to engage with MLs and their families.

To begin with, McKoy et al. (2017) conducted a study examining the impact of a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) workshop on 18 experienced music teachers at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). The five-day in-service training aimed to strengthen teachers' mentorship skills, assessment methods, and culturally responsive instructional practices. Findings revealed a significant increase in participants' familiarity with CRT, indicating a broader understanding of cultural influences on student learning. However, while teachers' cultural awareness improved, there was no substantial change in the frequency with which they applied CRT strategies in their classrooms, raising questions about the sustainability of PD effects on instructional practices.

A related line of inquiry is presented by He and Bagwell (2025) investigated the effectiveness of a university-based online PD program designed to enhance K-12 in-service teachers' ability to support MLs. The program, funded by a National Professional Development grant, offered two tracks: English as a Second Language (ESL) licensure and ESL licensure with a Dual Language (DL) concentration. Teachers participated in coursework aligned with TESOL

standards, covering applied linguistics, instructional methods, and cultural, legal, and historical issues relevant to multilingual education. The program incorporated practical, hands-on experiences, including practicum placements, tutoring projects, and language sample analysis, allowing teachers to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. Findings demonstrated significant improvements in teachers' preparedness, particularly in language development, cultural competence, and instructional planning. Participants reported increased confidence in implementing translanguaging and social justice strategies, which they applied to support MLs in their classrooms. Teachers also valued peer collaboration, which fostered professional confidence and created a sense of community.

Alongside these university-based workshop formats, Colombo's (2007) study on the PAL Program further reinforces the impact of PD on teachers' cultural awareness. The program targeted PK-3 teachers working with Latino students and families, employing bilingual parent coordinators to facilitate workshops, home visits, and Family Literacy Nights (FLNs). The PD courses, delivered through 16 interactive workshops, focused on cultural competence, ESL practices, and second-language literacy strategies. Teachers participated in simulations, multicultural storytelling, and reflective discussions, promoting empathy and deeper cultural understanding. The study revealed that the majority of the 27 participating teachers reported increased cultural awareness, with 25 out of 27 finding the workshops effective. Teachers specifically highlighted the value of experiencing disequilibrium such as feeling disoriented during multilingual activities—which enhanced their empathy toward culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. The program also fostered stronger school-community partnerships by promoting bilingualism and first-language literacy.

In addition to exploring immediate outcomes, these studies raise important concerns about the long-term sustainability of PD effects. For example, McKoy et al. (2017) documented improvements in teachers' familiarity with CRT concepts, but minimal change in classroom application. This discrepancy underscores an ongoing debate about whether PD-induced increases in cultural awareness reliably translate into lasting changes in instructional practice — and whether ongoing coaching or follow-up support is necessary to sustain culturally responsive practices.

Further complicating this conversation is the issue of scalability. The reviewed studies largely involve small, context-specific samples, such as music or early childhood educators, limiting the generalizability of their findings. It remains unclear whether comparable outcomes would emerge in larger, more demographically varied school systems with differing levels of resources and administrative support.

Finally, while short-term teacher gains are evident, the long-term impact of these PD programs without continuous reinforcement remains an open question. Although the studies demonstrate immediate improvements in teacher preparedness and cultural competence, it is uncertain whether these changes persist over time. Future research should examine the effects of follow-up coaching, mentorship, or refresher sessions in maintaining and deepening teachers' cultural responsiveness and instructional effectiveness.

Professional Development in Multilingual Pedagogies

The third theme emerging from this literature review centers on the role of PD programs in equipping educators with multilingual pedagogical practices and examining how these initiatives contribute to measurable academic gains for MLs. As the population of MLs in U.S.

schools continues to grow, there is increasing recognition that traditional, monolingual instructional models inadequately support the linguistic and academic needs of these students. PD programs that foreground multilingual pedagogies, including translanguaging and native-language integration, have shown promise in reshaping teacher attitudes, diversifying instructional practices, and improving student outcomes. This section reviews key studies that investigate the impact of PD programs on teachers' capacity to implement multilingual strategies and evaluates the challenges and opportunities associated with sustaining these practices within the constraints of existing educational systems.

To begin this inquiry, Wawire and Barnes-Story (2023) investigated the role of translanguaging in multilingual classrooms, focusing on teachers' and students' reasons for using it, effective implementation strategies, and the challenges faced in practice. Their findings suggested that translanguaging pedagogies promote student-centered learning, enhance linguistic competence, and foster bilingual identities. Teachers used these strategies to differentiate instruction, scaffold learning, and increase student engagement, while MLs leveraged translanguaging to deepen comprehension, sustain participation, and affirm their multilingual identities.

Importantly, effective translanguaging pedagogy requires intentional language use, consistent modeling, and structured lesson design. Yet barriers such as monolingual ideologies, resistance from colleagues, and insufficient PD opportunities often hinder its implementation. Wawire and Barnes-Story (2023) emphasized the need for comprehensive teacher training programs, multilingual instructional resources, and supportive policies to fully integrate translanguaging in schools. By strengthening biliteracy development and forging meaningful

home-school language connections, translanguaging pedagogies contribute to improved academic outcomes for MLs. However, systemic constraints, including monolingual instruction policies and standardized assessments, continue to disadvantage multilingual students, pointing to the need for coordinated efforts across professional development, policy reform, and school leadership.

Building on this foundation, Holdway and Hitchcock (2018) examined professional learning for multilingual instruction in a content-specific context: mathematics. Their study involved in-service K-12 teachers in Hawai'i participating in the RC-Math professional development program, a 15-week online course designed to support MLs in math classrooms. The program introduced teachers to literacy, linguistic, metacognitive, and technology strategies for improving reading comprehension in math instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs). Findings indicated that teachers became increasingly aware of the harmful effects of English-only policies and began viewing linguistic diversity as an asset rather than a barrier. They adopted strategies integrating students' home languages into math lessons, challenging monolingual instructional norms. Notably, this study distinguished itself by adopting a broader sociopolitical stance, advocating for language diversity not merely as an instructional tool but as a principle of educational equity.

Further expanding this conversation, Higgins and Ponte (2017) further explored the influence of teachers' personal experiences with language diversity on their openness to multilingual pedagogies. The study involved in-service teachers working with MLs in K-5 mainstream classrooms. It examined the impact of a year-long PD program that included two university-level courses on second language learning and multicultural education. Teachers

participated in online reflections, presentations, and collaborative projects focused on promoting multilingualism in the classroom. Data collection included classroom observations, interviews, and teacher reflections. The study found that teachers with personal experiences in multilingual settings were more willing to adopt multilingual pedagogies, while monolingual teachers were less likely to implement such strategies. The findings emphasized the need for PD programs to incorporate experiential learning, requiring teachers to actively apply multilingual approaches in their classrooms. Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of ongoing collaboration through affinity-based teacher groups to sustain multilingual practices. This research stands out by emphasizing the emotional and identity-driven factors influencing teacher openness to multilingual pedagogies, contrasting with studies that focus solely on instructional strategies.

Finally, adding another perspective to this theme, Kibler and Roman (2013) investigated how an online professional development program influenced nonbilingual K–12 teachers' views on the role of students' native languages in U.S. classrooms. The study took place in an urban district in Northern California and involved eight in-service teachers who completed Stanford's Online CLAD Certificate Program between 2007 and 2009. Data collection included archived online coursework, three post-program interviews, and two classroom observations per teacher, using piloted, semi structured interview and observation protocols. The intervention applied a design-based implementation research (DBIR) framework to support elementary teachers in incorporating translanguaging practices into their classrooms. Findings revealed that teachers' views on native-language use are shaped by a complex interaction of personal beliefs, school contexts, and broader societal influences. While professional development can introduce or reinforce new perspectives—as illustrated by participants like Carmen and Janice—changes in

school environments often exert a stronger influence on teachers' instructional practices. The study also highlighted that nonbilingual teachers can value and support native-language use, but they require institutional backing to meaningfully implement it. Based on these insights, the authors recommend enhancing professional development programs for teachers of English language learners (ELLs) by including strategies for integrating students' native languages and ensuring supportive school policies and environments.

While the reviewed studies collectively demonstrate the benefits of multilingual pedagogies, several areas of disagreement and unanswered questions remain. Although research highlights the positive impact of translanguaging on MLs' learning outcomes, questions persist regarding the scalability of these practices. While small-scale interventions show promising results, it is unclear whether large-scale implementation in diverse educational settings would yield similar outcomes. Additionally, the extent to which translanguaging can be effectively integrated into standardized curricula and assessments without conflicting with monolingual policies remains unresolved. The studies revealed a gap in teacher preparedness for implementing translanguaging. While PD programs such as RC-Math and the Malihini Project demonstrated improvements in teacher practices, many educators still express resistance due to deeply ingrained monolingual ideologies.

There is limited research on how to overcome this resistance at a systemic level or how to effectively challenge entrenched beliefs about monolingual instruction. Although some studies reported improved academic achievement in MLs following translanguaging-based PD, questions remain about the long-term impact. Few studies have conducted longitudinal assessments to determine whether the positive effects of multilingual pedagogies persist over

time. More research is needed to assess the durability of these instructional changes and their influence on students' future academic trajectories. Despite evidence supporting multilingual pedagogies, systemic barriers such as monolingual assessments, rigid language policies, and limited funding for bilingual resources hinder widespread adoption. The lack of alignment between PD programs and broader education policies raises questions about the sustainability of translanguaging practices. Research is needed to explore how policies can be adapted to promote equity for MLs through language-inclusive instruction.

Conclusion

This literature review explored the role of PD in supporting MLs by focusing on three key areas: the impact of PD on teaching approaches, the importance of raising ideological and cultural awareness, and the role of multilingual pedagogies. The review revealed that well-designed PD programs enhance teachers' instructional practices, cultural competence, and ability to support MLs, as demonstrated by studies such as Choi and Morrison (2014) and Shea et al. (2018). Research on culturally responsive teaching (e.g., McKoy et al., 2017; Colombo, 2007) highlighted the role of PD in fostering cultural awareness and empathy, while studies on multilingual pedagogies (e.g., Wawire and Barnes-Story, 2023; Holdway and Hitchcock, 2018) emphasized its potential to promote biliteracy, academic achievement, and linguistic identity among MLs. While there is broad agreement on the positive impact of PD on teacher practices and ML outcomes, disagreements persist regarding the sustainability, scalability, and consistency of these programs. Some studies advocated for long-term, gradual PD, while others note challenges in implementing shorter programs effectively. Additionally, evidence of improved student outcomes persists inconsistent, raising questions about the direct impact of PD on MLs'

academic success. Unanswered questions include how to ensure the long-term sustainability of PD effects, scale programs across diverse contexts, align PD with systemic changes like policy reforms, and challenge monolingual ideologies to create inclusive learning environments. Future research should address these gaps through longitudinal studies, large-scale implementations, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The purpose of this review was to examine how PD can empower teachers to better support MLs through improved instructional practices, cultural responsiveness, and multilingual pedagogies. While the review provides valuable insights, it also underscores the need for further research and systemic changes to fully realize the potential of PD in creating equitable and inclusive learning environments for MLs. Addressing these gaps will help ensure that all MLs have the support and resources they need to thrive academically and linguistically. In the next section, I will apply these findings to my particular research site in the Puget Sound District.

Action Plan

In this paper, I have reviewed the literature on PD supporting MLs in elementary schools. As we have seen from the literature review, the research highlighted the critical role that PD plays in equipping teachers to better support MLs through improved instructional practices, greater cultural responsiveness, and the use of multilingual pedagogies.

To move from the literature into practice, I will use my current school district as the research site for this project. I work in a diverse, urban school district where many of our students are MLs. While the district has expressed a commitment to supporting language diversity, PD opportunities focused specifically on multilingual learners remain limited, often delivered through isolated workshops without sustained follow-up or alignment with districtwide

goals. This makes my district an important setting to explore how PD practices for MLs are currently being implemented and where opportunities for growth exist. Based on the findings from the literature review, this project will assess existing PD efforts at my research site and propose targeted recommendations for strengthening teacher support for multilingual learners.

The plan will be organized around three central themes drawn from the literature: (1) professional development in teaching approaches, (2) professional development in raising ideological and cultural awareness, and (3) professional development in multilingual pedagogies. In the following sections, I will use Action Plan Tables to outline what the literature recommends in these areas, compare those recommendations to current practices in my district, and identify actionable next steps for improvement.

PD in Teaching Approaches

The first area of focus in this action plan is professional development in teaching approaches for multilingual learners. In this context, *teaching approaches* refer to the specific instructional strategies, classroom practices, and curriculum adaptations that teachers use to support the language development and academic success of multilingual learners. This includes literacy instruction strategies, culturally responsive teaching, and differentiated language support across content areas. Rather than continuing to rely on generalized PD sessions, this plan emphasizes the need for targeted, skill-based professional development that directly addresses the instructional challenges teachers face when working with ML students. The table below outlines what the research recommends in this area, examines what the Puget Sound District (PSD) is currently doing, and proposes concrete recommendations for improvement. The

following table outlines what research recommends in this area, what the PSD is currently doing, and what steps can be taken to improve teaching approaches through PD.

Table 1

PD in Teaching Approaches

What research says:	What PSD is doing:	What I recommend:
<p>PD programs that focus on literacy skills can significantly improve instructional practices and student outcomes for MLE students (Hutchinson & Hadjioannou, 2011; Shelton et al., 2023).</p>	<p>PSD currently offers professional development in curriculum development for MLE teachers once a year, specifically for secondary dual language teachers. However, there is no professional development focused on specific academic skills to support multilingual or bilingual students.</p>	<p>The district should offer professional development focused on literacy skills for MLE teachers. This is crucial for addressing the unique academic needs of MLEs and ensuring that teachers have the tools to improve student outcomes. The district should allocate funding to support sustained professional development in literacy skills for MLE students.</p>
<p>PD for multilingual learners should emphasize the importance of collaborative learning communities for teachers. By creating spaces where teachers can share their experiences, challenges, and strategies, this approach fosters ongoing professional growth and peer support. Such collaboration helps teachers refine their practices, exchange effective techniques, and stay informed about best practices for supporting MLs. Ultimately, these learning communities can significantly enhance teachers' teaching practices, leading to more effective</p>	<p>PSD currently offers two PD sessions that indirectly support MLs; however, teacher communities within the Dual-language program are not available to all teachers.</p>	<p>Teachers require targeted PD that emphasizes collaborative learning communities. These communities provide teachers with an invaluable space to exchange successful strategies and ideas for teaching MLs. Districts should prioritize and promote collaborative PD for all educators working with multilingual learners. A collaborative PD model creates a sustainable framework for continuous improvement, where teachers support one another in implementing new strategies.</p>

support for MLs in the classroom (Brouillette et al., 2015; Choi & Morrison, 2014; Guler, 2020; Heineke et al., 2019; Shea et al., 2018).		
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Raising Ideological and Cultural Awareness

The second focus area in this action plan is raising ideological and cultural awareness among educators through professional development. These two forms of awareness are critical because they shape how teachers view their students, interpret language and identity, and design learning experiences.

By ideological awareness, I mean a teacher's understanding of the deeper beliefs, assumptions, and systems of power that influence how language, culture, and learning are valued in schools. For example, many U.S. classrooms still operate under monolingual ideologies: the belief that English should be prioritized, and other languages are a barrier rather than a resource. These unspoken beliefs often shape policies and teaching practices in ways that disadvantage MLs. PD can help educators recognize these ideologies and begin to shift toward more equitable, asset-based approaches.

Cultural awareness, on the other hand, refers to a teacher's ability to recognize, respect, and respond to the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students. This includes understanding students' home languages, traditions, values, and ways of learning. When teachers are culturally aware, they are more likely to create inclusive classrooms that reflect and honor students' identities, a key factor in building trust and engagement for MLs. Professional development can support this by helping educators learn how to incorporate students' cultures into curriculum design, communication strategies, and classroom norms.

The following table outlines what research recommends in this area, what the PSD is currently doing, and what steps can be taken to build stronger ideological and cultural awareness through PD.

Table 2

Raising Ideological and Cultural Awareness

What research says:	What PSD is doing:	What I recommend:
<p>PD focused on MLs significantly increases teachers' cultural awareness and understanding of how language and culture impact learning, communication, and classroom engagement (Colombo, 2007; He & Bagwell, 2025; McKoy et al., 2017).</p>	<p>PSD currently offers two PD sessions that indirectly support MLs: one focused on general diversity training and another on general literacy strategies. However, neither session directly addresses the unique needs of multilingual learners or provides in-depth training on how language and culture influence student engagement and academic success.</p>	<p>The district should offer PD that directly addresses the intersection of language and culture in the classroom. This PD focuses on understanding how MLs' backgrounds impact their learning, communication, and engagement. Teachers need to be equipped with specific strategies for creating inclusive, supportive learning environments that cater to the unique needs of MLs.</p>
<p>PD on CRT helps educators reflect on their own cultural biases, improve interactions with culturally diverse students, and foster an inclusive learning environment (McKoy et al., 2017; Parkhouse et al., 2019).</p>	<p>PSD currently offers only two PD sessions aimed at supporting MLs. Neither session specifically focuses on CRT or how language and culture intersect in education. This lack of CRT-focused PD leaves teachers without the necessary tools to address the unique cultural dynamics of their classrooms.</p>	<p>Teachers need PD focused on CRT to reflect on their own cultural lenses and implicit biases. CRT PD will equip educators with the skills to adapt their teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of MLs, fostering more inclusive and effective learning environments. The district should prioritize offering CRT-focused PD to ensure that teachers are well-prepared to support a culturally diverse student body.</p>

Professional Development in Multilingual Pedagogies

The third consideration for school districts is their role and responsibility in providing meaningful PD in multilingual pedagogies. For this section, we will use current research on translanguaging and first-language integration as the foundation for understanding what school districts and teachers should contribute to a model that supports MLs. Studies such as those by Wawire and Barnes-Story (2023), Holdway and Hitchcock (2018), and Higgins and Ponte (2017) emphasize the importance of hands-on, sustained PD that equips educators with practical tools, multilingual resources, and strategies to integrate students' home languages into instruction. These approaches focus not only on pedagogy but also on shifting teachers' beliefs and dismantling monolingual ideologies that may limit MLs' success. The table below presents research findings, outlines what the PSD is currently doing and offers recommendations that align with best practices for equitable multilingual instruction. These recommendations highlight the need for districts to provide robust, experiential PD opportunities that empower teachers and elevate student learning across languages. The following table outlines what research recommends in this area, what the PSD is currently doing, and what steps can be taken to support MLs through PD in multilingual pedagogies.

Table 3

PD in Multilingual Pedagogies

What research says:	What PSD is doing:	What I recommend:
Research indicated that PD should provide hands-on practice with translanguaging and the use of students' first	Currently, PSD does not offer any PD that includes hands-on practice with translanguaging or the use of	To address this gap, PSD should offer PD that includes hands-on practice with translanguaging and first-

<p>languages. Studies showed that such practices can significantly enhance MLs engagement and academic success by leveraging their linguistic resources in the classroom (Holdway & Hitchcock, 2018; Higgins & Ponte, 2017; Wawire & Barnes-Story, 2023).</p>	<p>first languages. While there are some initiatives that touch on multilingual support, they do not integrate these key strategies into teacher training. Without this specific focus, educators may struggle to fully leverage students' linguistic strengths, missing opportunities to improve classroom engagement and learning outcomes for MLs.</p>	<p>language use. Providing teachers with structured training in these approaches will promote inclusive teaching practices and ensure equitable access to learning for multilingual learners.</p>
<p>Research highlighted that teachers should be equipped with multilingual resources and supported in developing strategies that integrate students' home languages into instruction. When teachers use students' home languages as assets in the classroom, they create inclusive, culturally responsive environments that improve engagement and learning outcomes for multilingual learners (MLs) (Holdway & Hitchcock, 2018; Higgins & Ponte, 2017; Wawire & Barnes-Story, 2023).</p>	<p>Currently, PSD offers two classes for teachers focused on supporting multilingual learners: one on active learning strategies for MLs, and the other on collaboration for MLs with exceptionalities. While these classes provide some support for MLs, they do not fully address the need for practical, hands-on strategies that integrate students' home languages into everyday instruction. Without targeted PD on how to incorporate home languages effectively, teachers may struggle to create fully inclusive learning environments.</p>	<p>PSD should prioritize PD that equips teachers with multilingual resources and strategies for integrating students' home languages into instruction. This PD should go beyond one-time workshops, offering sustained, hands-on learning experiences, such as practice with translanguaging, allowing teachers to apply these strategies in real classroom settings. Additionally, PSD should invest in culturally and linguistically responsive instructional materials, foster collaboration among educators, and partner with local communities to ensure PD reflects the lived experiences of multilingual learners.</p>

Conclusion

As research on professional development (PD) in multilingual pedagogies continues to evolve, it is clear that districts like South Puget Sound are still in the early stages of

implementing PD programs that truly support multilingual learners (MLs). By synthesizing the key themes from the literature, we can identify areas where PD can be improved to better equip teachers with the resources and strategies needed to support MLs effectively. As research has shown, PD must go beyond traditional workshops and include hands-on practice with translanguaging and first-language integration. The benefits of implementing such PD programs, as outlined in the action tables, could significantly enhance teaching effectiveness and student outcomes for MLs. In the following section, I will discuss the implications of these findings for my own teaching context, addressing the answers to key questions, the impact of current practices, potential limitations, and recommendations for future PD initiatives.

Discussion

This literature review has explored current research on how to support multilingual learners (MLs) through professional development (PD) and examined how PD approaches for supporting MLs are currently implemented in my school district. As I researched and reflected on existing practices and possibilities, I was struck by the wide variety of PD models available not only in advancing instructional knowledge and practices but also in shaping teacher ideologies about supporting MLs. This discussion interprets the findings from my literature review, connects them to my professional context, and considers their implications for teachers, students, schools and districts. It will also outline the limitations of my research and suggest directions for future inquiry.

Discussion of Findings

This literature review was guided by four key questions concerning how PD supports MLs. These questions explored (1) how PD influences teaching approaches for MLs and which

strategies have proven most effective, (2) how PD raises teachers' ideological and cultural awareness, (3) how multilingual pedagogies particularly translanguaging impact academic outcomes and what challenges limit their use, and (4) what gaps exist in teacher preparation programs regarding multilingual education, and how PD can help address them. In this section, I revisit these questions, synthesize findings from the literature, reflect on how they align (or don't) with current practices in my district, and consider possible reasons for discrepancies. Finally, I offer initial thoughts about collaborative assessment as a future area of inquiry.

PD Influences on Teaching and Strategies

My first question, listed in the rationale, was how PD influences teaching approaches for MLs and which strategies have proven most effective?

The literature strongly agrees that PD significantly shapes instructional practices for MLs when it is sustained, content-integrated, reflective, and systemically supported. Studies by Choi and Morrison (2014), Hutchinson and Hadjioannou (2011), and Lynch et al. (2021) demonstrated that multi-layered, ongoing PD fosters not just the adoption of new strategies but also deeper teacher collaboration, reflective practice, and ideological shifts around language, culture, and equity. Importantly, these studies emphasized that PD models aligned with structured frameworks—like the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) or the Language Matters project (Heineke et al., 2019)—provided teachers with consistent tools and language for planning, differentiating, and supporting MLs effectively.

PD models pairing content and language objectives, such as those by Shea et al. (2018) and Brouillette and Hinga (2015), proved especially effective, offering practical ways to simultaneously address both academic and linguistic development for MLs within content areas

like math, science, and the arts. These integrated approaches demonstrated measurable gains not only in teacher practice but, in some cases, in student outcomes as well, particularly when PD involved ongoing, collaborative learning communities. Moreover, virtual PD initiatives like Project MOOPIL (Lynch et al., 2021) showed promise in scaling access to linguistically responsive strategies across diverse school contexts, suggesting that flexibility in delivery format can complement traditional, in-person learning.

In contrast, my district primarily relies on one-time workshops, compliance-driven sessions, or optional PD offerings typically disconnected from grade-level or content-specific instructional planning. While the research overwhelmingly highlights the effectiveness of sustained, embedded, and content-integrated PD models, these approaches remain uncommon locally. There is no districtwide initiative adopting structured multilingual frameworks like SIOP, RC-Math, or comparable evidence-based models, leaving teachers without organized, consistent support for implementing multilingual strategies in a systematic way.

When comparing research-based recommendations with district practices, several differences emerge. The literature emphasized not only the value of long-term, collaborative, and content-integrated PD, but also points to the limitations of short, isolated interventions (McIntyre et al., 2010). The absence of systemwide frameworks and the district's competing priorities around standardized assessments and instructional pacing guides limit opportunities for embedding multilingual pedagogy into daily instructional routines. Furthermore, the literature raised concerns about the sustainability and scalability of PD efforts when not aligned with broader systemic reforms in leadership, curriculum, and resource allocation (Heineke et al., 2019). These gaps in my district's current PD model suggest a critical need for leadership

advocacy, structural alignment, and sustained investment to build a consistent, high-impact multilingual education framework that mirrors research-based best practices.

Ideological & Cultural Awareness

My second question was how does PD raise teachers' ideological and cultural awareness?

Research consistently indicated that PD can effectively shift teachers' beliefs about MLs, particularly when it includes experiential, reflective, and discussion-based learning opportunities. Studies such as Colombo's (2007) PAL Program and He and Bagwell's (2025) university-based PD model demonstrated the value of hands-on, culturally responsive activities like tutoring multilingual students, analyzing language samples, and participating in multilingual simulations. These programs not only increased teachers' cultural competence but also fostered empathy and a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical dimensions of language and identity. Teachers valued opportunities for peer collaboration and reflective dialogue, which supported social justice-oriented teaching practices and challenged deficit views of multilingualism.

However, while these studies showed immediate gains in cultural awareness, they also raised important concerns about the sustainability of these changes. McKoy et al. (2017), for example, found that while music teachers reported increased familiarity with culturally responsive teaching (CRT) concepts after a five-day workshop, these ideological shifts did not consistently translate into lasting classroom practice. This highlighted a broader issue in the literature: short-term PD without ongoing coaching, follow-up, or peer-supported inquiry often results in temporary awareness rather than meaningful, systemic change. Both McKoy et al. (2017) and He and Bagwell (2025) underscored the importance of sustained, embedded PD

structures that connect cultural awareness to classroom realities and provide space for continuous reflection and critical conversation.

In my district, however, PD rarely includes structured opportunities for personal reflection, experiential learning, or critical conversations about language ideologies. Most professional learning focuses on instructional compliance, technical skills, or updates on district procedures, rather than addressing underlying beliefs about language, race, culture, or identity. Discussions about power, language politics, and educational equity are often avoided in formal PD settings, contributing to surface-level ideological awareness without deeper, transformative learning. This absence leaves teachers unprepared to interrogate their own assumptions or to advocate for linguistically and culturally sustaining pedagogies in their classrooms.

The disconnect between research and district practice is clear and concerning. While the literature strongly supports sustained, reflective PD aimed at reshaping teachers' language ideologies and cultural responsiveness, my district's offerings remain procedural and compliance driven. Without intentional opportunities for critical dialogue, reflection on race and language, and collaborative inquiry into multilingual pedagogies, the potential for meaningful, lasting ideological shifts is limited. Bridging this gap will require courageous instructional leadership and the intentional design of PD sessions that center justice-oriented conversations, practical multilingual strategies, and partnerships with multilingual communities.

Translanguaging and Academic Outcomes

My third question was how does multilingual pedagogies, particularly translanguaging, impact academic outcomes, and what challenges limit their use?

The literature consistently underscored that multilingual pedagogies not only enhance academic performance but also play a crucial role in affirming students' multilingual identities and fostering inclusive classroom communities. Wawire and Barnes-Story (2023) found that translanguaging strategies promote student-centered learning by allowing MLs to use their full linguistic repertoires to deepen comprehension, sustain engagement, and navigate complex content. Teachers in their study used translanguaging to scaffold instruction, differentiate lessons, and build stronger home-school language connections, resulting in improved academic outcomes and strengthened bilingual identities.

Similarly, Holdway and Hitchcock (2018) demonstrated that when content-specific professional development, such as the RC-Math program, equipped teachers with strategies for integrating students' home languages into math instruction, it not only improved students' access to academic content but also shifted teachers' language ideologies. Teachers began viewing linguistic diversity as an educational asset rather than a barrier, adopting translanguaging strategies to challenge harmful English-only instructional norms. This work importantly linked translanguaging pedagogy to broader educational equity goals, positioning language-inclusive instruction as a matter of justice rather than merely a teaching technique.

However, these benefits are often constrained by persistent implementation barriers. Kibler and Roman (2013) identified that deeply rooted monolingual policies, accountability pressures tied to standardized English proficiency benchmarks, and a shortage of multilingual educators severely limit the adoption of translanguaging practices. Even when teachers' beliefs began to shift through PD, without institutional backing and supportive school policies, many struggled to implement these approaches consistently. Their study also highlighted that school

contexts and systemic norms often exert more influence over teachers' practices than PD alone, revealing the complex interplay between personal beliefs, professional learning, and institutional constraints.

In my district, these challenges are unmistakably present. Despite a steadily growing multilingual student population, translanguaging is rarely addressed in professional development or formally supported in classroom practice. Instructional materials, assessment systems, and PD opportunities remain predominantly monolingual, and there are few multilingual educators or mentors to model or sustain these practices. Accountability structures prioritize English language proficiency outcomes over holistic multilingual development, perpetuating a narrow, deficit-based view of students' home languages.

There's a clear and significant gap between the recommendations in the research and the realities of district practice. While evidence demonstrates the academic, emotional, and identity-affirming benefits of translanguaging, district structures continue to prioritize monolingual instruction. The implementation challenges in my district closely mirror those described in the literature—policy constraints, high-stakes assessment pressures, limited staffing, and deeply embedded monolingual ideologies collectively reinforce systemic obstacles that hinder the adoption of multilingual pedagogies. Addressing these issues will require coordinated efforts in policy advocacy, instructional leadership, and community partnerships to not only make translanguaging practices visible and viable but also to reposition them as essential for promoting educational equity and academic success for multilingual learners.

Gaps Between Teacher Prep and Multilingual Education

My last question was what gaps exist in teacher preparation programs regarding multilingual education, and how PD can help address them?

The literature consistently reported that many teacher preparation programs provide limited, surface-level exposure to multilingual pedagogies, offering few opportunities for preservice teachers to deeply engage with multilingual communities or to develop advocacy skills necessary for supporting multilingual learners (MLs). Scholars like Higgins and Ponte (2017) and Colombo (2007) argued for embedding experiential learning, multilingual community engagement, and advocacy-oriented coursework into preservice training. These authors highlighted how most traditional teacher preparation programs often frame multilingual learners through a deficit lens or position language diversity as an instructional challenge, rather than an asset to be leveraged.

Recognizing these limitations, several studies pointed to in-service professional development (PD) as a critical mechanism for filling these gaps. For example, programs like RC-Math (Shea et al., 2018) and the PAL Program (Colombo, 2007) exemplify how reflective, sustained, and practical in-service PD can enhance teachers' capacity to work effectively with MLs. Colombo's study demonstrated that culturally responsive, hands-on PD—such as family literacy nights, multilingual simulations, and home visits—promoted empathy and a deeper understanding of students' cultural and linguistic realities. Similarly, He and Bagwell's (2025) university-based PD model provided ESL certification pathways that integrated translanguaging strategies, social justice teaching, and practicum experiences, leading to notable gains in teachers' cultural competence, instructional planning, and confidence in working with MLs.

Despite these promising models, my district remains disconnected from these research-based recommendations. While my district cannot directly influence the design of teacher preparation programs, in-service PD remains largely optional, sporadic, and disconnected from broader instructional priorities. Professional learning related to multilingual education is not a required or ongoing component of most teachers' professional growth plans. Additionally, leadership capacity and infrastructure dedicated to advocating for multilingual education within district PD planning are limited. PD sessions that do address multilingual issues tend to focus on procedural updates or compliance mandates rather than on sustained, reflective inquiry into multilingual pedagogy, advocacy, or ideology.

The research highlighted the essential role of in-service PD in addressing the persistent gaps left by preservice teacher education. Yet, in my district, PD offerings lack the sustained, reflective, and advocacy-oriented components recommended by the literature. This disconnect is likely influenced by competing professional learning demands, a shortage of multilingual education specialists, and the marginalization of multilingualism within both national and state policy frameworks, as noted in studies like Kibler and Roman (2013). Additionally, accountability pressures centered on standardized assessments and English-only benchmarks further constrain opportunities for robust multilingual education initiatives.

Addressing these gaps will require a significant shift in district priorities, the allocation of sustained funding, and leadership advocacy for multilingual education. Building in-service PD structures that prioritize multilingual pedagogies, cultural competence, and advocacy—not just technical instructional skills—could help counter the limitations of preservice preparation and move the district toward more equitable and inclusive educational practices for MLs. Such an

effort would also need to include partnerships with local universities, multilingual communities, and state education agencies to build a coherent, sustained pipeline of professional learning opportunities for both novice and veteran teachers.

Implications for Future Teachers, Schools, and Education Systems

The time for incremental change in supporting multilingual learners (MLs) has passed. Research offers clear, proven solutions, and it is imperative that schools, districts, and policymakers act decisively to implement them. At the classroom level, teacher preparation programs must require comprehensive training in multilingual pedagogy, culturally responsive practices, and language development strategies. Sustained, reflective, and experiential professional development opportunities such as RC-Math (Holdway & Hitchcock, 2018) and the PAL Program (Colombo, 2007) must become the standard, not the exception. Educators deserve the tools to deliver linguistically inclusive, identity-affirming instruction, and schools must dismantle monolingual instructional norms by fully embracing multilingual pedagogies like translanguaging, which research confirms strengthen both academic and social-emotional outcomes (Wawire & Barnes-Story, 2023).

At the departmental level, it is no longer acceptable for curriculum, instructional materials, and assessments to reflect monolingual, one-size-fits-all approaches. Departments must urgently redesign curricula to integrate multilingual perspectives and embed students' home languages into all content areas. Embedding native language use in disciplines such as math, science, and social studies has been shown to enhance comprehension, engagement, and content accessibility (Holdway & Hitchcock, 2018). Departments must also establish mandatory structures for cross-curricular collaboration to support academic language development in

meaningful, context-specific ways and break down instructional silos that harm multilingual learners.

Within schools, systems for supporting MLs must be overhauled to center collaboration and community engagement. ML specialists, classroom teachers, and families must have structured, ongoing opportunities for shared planning, data-driven decision-making, and coordinated family partnerships. School leaders must be held accountable for fostering environments where identity-affirming practices like translanguaging and bilingual community partnerships are prioritized as essential components of an equitable education (Wawire & Barnes-Story, 2023). No school should be permitted to marginalize these practices under the pressures of standardized testing or English-only ideologies.

At the district level, it is critical to implement coherent, mandatory, advocacy-oriented professional development and policy frameworks for multilingual education. PD must be made accessible to all educators, not just EL specialists, and its sustained integration should be a districtwide expectation. Districts must allocate resources for bilingual instructional aids, family liaisons, and dual-language program expansion, recognizing these investments as non-negotiable necessities for achieving educational equity (Higgins & Ponte, 2017; Colombo, 2007).

State-level action is equally urgent. States must expand and enforce ESL and bilingual certification requirements while eliminating financial and logistical barriers that deter educators from pursuing this training. Accountability systems must be redesigned to reflect the diverse, multidimensional educational trajectories of multilingual learners, not merely their English proficiency gains. Equitable, sustained funding and bold policy commitments must be prioritized

to address disparities between districts and support innovative, culturally sustaining instructional models (Kibler & Roman, 2013).

At the national level, multilingual education must no longer be marginalized in equity and reform conversations. Federal leadership must invest in dual-language program expansion, multilingual teacher recruitment pipelines, and identity-affirming pedagogies that reflect the realities of our linguistically diverse student population. As Holdway and Hitchcock (2018) argue, achieving true educational equity demands a sociopolitical commitment to valuing linguistic diversity as a right, not temporary accommodation.

As an educator and advocate, I call for immediate, coordinated, and sustained action at every level of the education system. The literature leaves no room for complacency: long-term advocacy, mandatory professional development, and culturally sustaining, community-informed school practices are essential and overdue. Multilingualism must be positioned as a vital strength to cultivate, and systems that continue to treat it as a barrier must be dismantled without delay.

From a policy perspective, the time for incremental change has passed. State and district leaders must require ongoing, targeted PD in multilingual pedagogy, anti-bias education, and culturally sustaining practices for every educator. Classrooms are rapidly diversifying, and educational equity demands that all teachers possess the knowledge, cultural humility, and tools to support multilingual learners. Higgins and Ponte's (2017) call for advocacy-driven, systemwide professional learning must be realized — not in isolated programs but through mandates and funding priorities that normalize multilingual, asset-based instruction as a hallmark of quality education.

Implications for Future Research

As I deepen my work in multilingual education, it is no longer enough to hope for expanded research in areas such as translanguaging, code-switching, multilingual pedagogy, and the cognitive processes of multilingual learners. These must become immediate, prioritized areas of scholarly inquiry. The potential of these topics to revolutionize instructional practices, curriculum design, and educational philosophy in linguistically diverse classrooms is undeniable. While the field has begun to acknowledge their importance, the existing research base remains insufficient, particularly regarding long-term, classroom-based studies that examine the sustained academic, cognitive, and socio-emotional impacts of these pedagogical approaches. This is a gap that the research community must address with urgency.

The gradual shift away from deficit-based perspectives of multilingual learners is a positive development, but it is far from complete. For decades, educational systems labeled students primarily by their proximity to English proficiency, disregarding the rich cultural, linguistic, and intellectual capital they contributed. Current scholarship, such as Wawire and Barnes-Story (2023) and Holdway and Hitchcock (2018), makes it clear: multilingual students thrive when their home languages and cultural identities are integrated into instruction, not erased. Translanguaging and multilingual pedagogies do not simply improve language acquisition; they promote biliteracy, cognitive flexibility, and emotional well-being while affirming identity. The evidence is clear, and it demands immediate action. Future research must examine how sustained, classroom-embedded multilingual pedagogies influence long-term academic outcomes, identity formation, and social belonging for multilingual learners across diverse educational settings.

However, as Kibler and Roman (2013) assert, persistent barriers remain: restrictive language policies; rigid accountability frameworks; and a severe shortage of multilingual, pedagogically equipped educators. These obstacles must be dismantled. Future research and policy must move beyond identifying problems and toward documenting and scaling solutions. It is imperative that states, districts, and teacher preparation programs rapidly expand efforts to recruit, train, and retain multilingual educators and mandate sustained, culturally sustaining professional development for all teachers, not just ESL specialists.

I call for a decisive pivot in multilingual education toward fully implementing translanguaging pedagogies in everyday practice. Schools must no longer treat these strategies as optional or experimental. The positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes associated with translanguaging (Wawire & Barnes-Story, 2023; Holdway & Hitchcock, 2018) should make it a foundational, non-negotiable element of teacher training and district PD frameworks. The field must also invest in advancing brain-based research on multilingualism, a promising but underexplored area. Understanding how multilingualism strengthens cognitive flexibility, metalinguistic awareness, and memory retention has the potential to upend outdated myths about language interference and redefine how we design language and content instruction.

Future research should intentionally expand the geographic scope of multilingual education studies to include underrepresented states and districts, in order to build a more equitable, comprehensive understanding of multilingual learner policies, practices, and outcomes nationwide. While states such as Oregon, Texas, New York, and Hawaii appear to place significant emphasis on multilingual learner policy and research, I was unable to locate research or policy analyses specific to my own state context. Given that education policies, demographic

patterns, and district structures vary widely across the country, this omission restricts the generalizability of the research.

Critically, these changes will uplift not only multilingual learners but all students. Just as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has demonstrated the benefits of inclusive design for entire classrooms, cultural and linguistically responsive practices cultivate dynamic, accessible, and affirming spaces for every child, particularly those historically marginalized by rigid, monolingual schooling structures.

Looking ahead, educational communities must do more than adopt evidence-based practices. They must actively build school cultures where multilingualism is celebrated, where students' languages and identities are embedded into curriculum, school events, and community partnerships. The research, the evidence, and the demographic realities are clear: multilingualism is not a challenge to manage; it is a strength to center. I intend to be part of the movement that demands, builds, and sustains educational systems where every multilingual learner is seen, valued, and empowered to thrive.

Limitations

Several parameters shaped the scope, focus, and conclusions of this study, each contributing to both the strengths and limitations of my research. The majority of the literature reviewed was published between 2010 and 2025, with a noticeable concentration in the past decade. This reflects the growing scholarly and policy-driven attention to multilingual education, culturally responsive pedagogy, and translanguaging practices in response to shifting demographic realities in U.S. schools. However, this contemporary emphasis also meant that foundational, earlier research in bilingual education, sociolinguistics, and language acquisition

was less represented. As a result, this study may have missed valuable historical insights into the evolution of multilingual education policy, public discourse, and instructional practices that would have provided a deeper contextual backdrop for current debates.

All research articles, policy documents, and position papers were accessed through online academic databases such as JSTOR, ERIC, and Google Scholar, as well as digital library collections. While this method ensured access to peer-reviewed, reliable, and current scholarships, it inevitably excluded unpublished research, practitioner-led studies, and community-generated knowledge that often offer rich, practice-based perspectives on multilingual education. The use of search terms such as *translanguaging*, *multilingual learners*, *multilingual pedagogy*, *culturally responsive teaching*, *code-switching*, *ELL support strategies*, *anti-bias education*, *inclusive classrooms*, *bilingual education policy*, and *professional development for multilingual education* helped focus the scope of the literature review around contemporary best practices and critical issues. However, this approach also narrowed the field, potentially omitting adjacent topics like language policy history, language ideology studies, and early multicultural education frameworks that could have provided valuable theoretical grounding.

This review intentionally centered on multilingual learners in K–5 and primary school settings, recognizing this grade band as a critical period for language development and academic identity formation. Focusing on this stage allowed for a more in-depth exploration of language development and multilingual pedagogy within elementary classrooms. However, this emphasis also meant excluding valuable research on other age groups, such as early childhood (prenatal and preschool), secondary, and university-level multilingual learners. These populations

experience distinct developmental, academic, and social-emotional needs, and incorporating their perspectives would have offered a broader, cross-age understanding of multilingual education's evolving trends, challenges, and opportunities.

Lastly, the ongoing effects of COVID-19 and the widespread disruptions it caused to K–12 schooling, professional development, and research structures presented another notable constraint. The pandemic shifted instructional delivery models, limited in-person professional development opportunities, and disrupted long-term research projects on multilingual education. As a result, some of the most current studies available are either preliminary in nature or limited in scale, reflecting the challenges of conducting multilingual pedagogical research in a post-pandemic educational landscape. This may have influenced the availability of large-scale, empirical studies documenting translanguaging and multilingual practices in in-person classroom settings, as well as slowing the publication of comprehensive program evaluations and policy analyses.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study offer a valuable foundation for improving support for MLs. They affirm the urgent need for further research in this critical area of education research that intentionally incorporates diverse methodologies, includes historically underrepresented regions and student populations; and integrates practitioner, family, and student voices. Future studies should also seek to examine the long-term academic, social, and identity outcomes of multilingual pedagogies; explore cross-age applications from early childhood through secondary education; and investigate the intersections of language learning with race, culture, and disability. Expanding the field in these ways will strengthen the evidence

base needed to advocate for more equitable, inclusive, and linguistically sustaining educational systems.

Conclusion

This literature review makes one thing unmistakably clear: schools and districts can no longer afford to treat multilingual education as an optional add-on. The steady growth of ML populations demands immediate, system-wide change. While promising frameworks like SIOP, SLA models, and culturally sustaining pedagogy exist, their inconsistent, fragmented implementation perpetuates inequities for MLs.

Given this growing multilingual learner population in U.S. schools, I have tried in this review to analyze existing research, identify best practices, and outline implications for educators, district leaders, and researchers.

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