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# In Support of Home-Grown Teachers: An Examination of Factors that Supported the Success of Pre-Service Teachers in a Bilingual Education Program from 2012-2017

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## Abstract

In this research, a university professor examined the university path and ultimate career trajectory of eleven Bilingual Education pre-service teachers in a South Texas university, which serves an underrepresented population. The study followed the set of the eleven participants who began their academic journey to become Bilingual certified teachers, earned their degrees, and then pursued professional careers in the same geographic area. The results of this five-year study revealed the barriers Bilingual Education pre-service teachers face and showed that their commitment to remain in the profession supports the movement towards home-grown teachers.

**Keywords:** Bilingual, Dual, Pre-Service, Teachers

## Introduction

Beginning in 2012, a group of preservice teachers embarked on an academic journey together in pursuit of Texas certification in the area of Bilingual Education. The eleven Latinas, all natives of the South Texas region, attended a local, Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with hopes of giving back to their local community. Between 2012 and 2017, the participants were enrolled in a cohort of rigorous Bilingual Education courses and field experiences. The cohort consisted of an 18-month sequential set of courses which delivered two courses with faculty instruction completely in Spanish. The same two courses also included 64 hours per course of time spent in a public school campus classroom. Critical to the success of the cohort was the consistent mentorship of an experienced faculty member and campus mentor. As of January 2019, all members of the original cohort have remained in the teaching profession; therefore, regardless of additional factors or variables, the retention rate remains high. Despite facing adversities and multiple challenges, each of the participants has continued to work as a public school teacher; the majority of them have remained in the same geographic area and with the same school district.

## Purpose of the Study

In 2012, the eleven participants began the academic journey to become Bilingual state-certified teachers in Texas. The students enrolled in a pre-service program at a university in South Texas which provides an educator preparation program to an underserved population and is designated as a Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI).

For the next five years, the researcher tracked the progress of the members of the cohort as they completed the university courses and state certification exams. The purpose of the study was to determine whether these graduates who had sought state certification in Bilingual Education would remain employed as public classroom teachers. The review of the literature indicates that a high attrition rate exists in the education profession (Reyes and Alexander, 2017). Attrition has been a prevalent topic on both the state and national levels and continues to be closely monitored by education agencies. However, relatively few studies have investigated the barriers Bilingual Education (BE) teachers face to become certified and who are “home-grown” in their local communities. Home-grown teachers intend to serve the population where they grew up and to teach Bilingual children. As a result, this study provides unique and valuable insight into the subject. Furthermore, the snapshot of these eleven young women who persevered despite personal tragedies and amidst changes to the Bilingual Education certification requirements highlights their strength and personal value system in regard to their commitment to the education profession, as well as their community of Bilingual students and English Language Learners (ELLs).

## Review of Literature

### Bilingual Education

The demand for BE certified teachers has increased as the rise in the number of ELLs persists in our public-school systems in the United States. Accordingly, ELLs represent the fastest-growing population of students in the United States (Bardack, 2010). Consequently, a corresponding need exists for universities to provide effective educator preparation programs to produce bilingual teachers for future classrooms. Thus, universities and school districts must address these concerns in order to provide adequate services for ELLs and BE populations. For the purposes of this study, the term Dual Language (DL) refers to instruction with the goal of implementing instruction in two languages. The term DL and BE will be used interchangeably. More specifically, the two terms, DL and BE refer to those programs where instruction occurs in two languages where the goal is biliteracy

Although BE programs were developed as different waves of immigrants entered the United States, these programs usually and for the most part, consisted of Early Exit BE programs. Early Exit Programs and Late Exit Programs still maintain the goal of transitioning students towards using English most of the time and eventually eliminating their native language. However, over the last twenty years, the widespread implementation of BE programs that foster, promote and maintain the use of two languages has only seen a rise over the last twenty years. The presence of BE programs has not always meant, at least in the United States, that students receive formal academic instruction in two languages with the desired outcome of having students have equal communication and academic language skills in two languages throughout elementary school

Bilingual Education is an innovative form of schooling in the United States in which ELLs receive instruction in both their native language and in English. In the Bilingual Education classroom, ELLs strive to acquire English-speaking skills while also working and developing their native language (Krashen, 1997). The objective of the Bilingual Education philosophy is to respect both cultures and ensure that the learners acquire proficiency in two languages. The implementation of BE programs has been adopted in other countries such as Singapore and, as a matter of fact, is integral to their overall success as an educational system that is consistently ranked high in the global PISA scores (Geneser & Wu, 2015).

Successful BE programs stand as very beneficial to our society because these programs enable ELLs to develop their literacy skills in two languages. As Krashen (1997) highlights in *What is Bilingual Education?* ELL students are able to successfully develop both content knowledge and literacy, which are the two most important components of learning a new language. Through DL programs, students gain essential knowledge from subject

matter taught in their native language and also become more fluent in English as they concurrently develop the proficiencies needed to master reading material in two languages. The central aim of BE educators is to foster each student's development in a second language via the preservation of a student's native language and culture (Krashen, 1997). The scope of this research is limited to programs in South Texas and in the United States.

### **Shortage of DL Certified Teachers**

A shortage of DL teachers has persisted for the past three decades throughout the entire United States, not just in states that have a large immigrant population. Historically, teaching vacancies in BE programs in school districts go on due to a dearth of qualified teachers (Mitchell, 2018).

The unqualified teachers who fill open positions are a cause for concern because they often lack knowledge related to the methodology and pedagogy related to teaching DL. Often times, they also do not possess the linguistic proficiency of the students' native languages. Moreover, these same teachers remain unprepared to teach ELLs, unlike a teacher who holds BE certification. (Gandara, et al., 2003). Unfortunately, Gandara et al. (2003) have stated that, when compared with other students in the general population, ELLs are more likely to be taught by teachers who have emergency credentials. Emergency credentials, in Texas, consist of allowing an individual to enter the classroom without holding the state-required credentials for state board certification. Research shows that ELLs taught by teachers without proper BE certification do not make as much progress, as those who are taught by certified BE teachers (Gandara et al., 2003; Kane, Rockoff & Staiger, 2008).

The dire shortage of qualified BE in the United States remains a challenging predicament for the entire educational system. However, in order to make sense of the shortage of practitioners, the stakeholders in the educational system must become familiar with the essential components of a successful DL program. Another issue to take into consideration is the sobering fact that the majority of DL teachers are also part of a "cultural minority" whose enrollment in education programs has dramatically dwindled in recent years (Reyes and Alexander, 2017).

### **Bilingual Teacher Retention and Why It Should Matter**

Teacher retention is an important field of education research that focuses on what factors affect whether teachers stay in schools, move to different schools, or leave the profession (Betancourt, 2018). For the purpose of this study we are stepping back and looking at factors like student characteristics, demographics, faculty mentoring and support, financial assistance, high-quality induction and mentorship programs available once BE teachers are placed in a public school in a student's Teacher Preparation Program (TPP) and its implications to the overall teacher retention rate in a local district in South Texas that serves low-income students that are English Language Learners (ELLs).

The importance of this research lies in the potential impact it can have on the 100,000 + classrooms that every year across the United States are staffed by a teacher that is not fully qualified and/or certified because districts continuously face an ongoing teacher shortage (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas, 2016). While many would be quick to point the finger at recruitment issues the problem lies much deeper and is poorly understood. Addressing teacher retention is critical for both the College of Education and the local school districts that it serves through its pipeline. The cost of not retaining these teachers impacts student learning and student achievement while also significantly straining a districts' budget (Hanushek, Rivkin & Shiman, 2016).

The pipeline of potential teachers is shrinking and this is even more so for specialization areas such as Bilingual, Math and Science. With the diminishing number of potential applicants to Teacher Preparation Programs (TPPs), the characteristics of those applicants are also changing; BE teachers face financial barriers to higher education and likely insufficient individualized faculty advising. In addition, changes in certification requirements (TPP can only prepare candidates to meet certification requirements but do not award the certificates), many find that they can complete a program but are unable to meet the certification requirements (face tougher and pricier exams)

(Cowan, Goldhaber, Hayes, & Theobald 2016; Ronfeldt, M., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J., 2013; Sorensen & Ladd 2018).

Many TPPs have long ago recognized the need to increase the racial and linguistic diversity of its teacher candidate pool by removing barriers to entering the teaching profession. These barriers include learning to navigate the higher education system. When these teacher candidates are able to make it through a TPP and become certified then they are confronted with heavy workloads, lack of instructional materials (hours spent translating content and exams, supporting students from poverty, providing adequate emotional support and the increased demands for dual-language education (a complex and specialized field). Research has suggested that for bilingual teachers to be successful in the classroom they need to have knowledge of the students, the content, the language, and effective practices. They also must understand and have experienced second language learning and have positive attitudes toward the language and bilingual learners. This can be addressed through mentoring which helps teachers feel less isolated, find support and learn instructional strategies to be better able to address the linguistic and content needs of their students. Mentorship can also help with the socio-cultural as well as pedagogical concerns and issues teachers face in their daily work (Will, 2017; (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

Teacher Preparation Programs play a pivotal role in moving preparation of bilingual teachers to the forefront of the professional and institutional agendas in higher education in partnership with their local school districts. Either institution cannot act alone in solving the low retention rates of bilingual teachers. There is a need for multi-level support systems to be in place to monitor and mentor bilingual teachers throughout and beyond their certification process (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Sutchter, Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

### **Factors Related to Attrition of Dual Language Teachers**

Though DL education is very important, especially with the continuing increase of students who need assistance in learning English, the primary challenge that stays in many districts is the retention of BE teachers. Sadly, the BE teacher attrition rate tends to be higher than in other areas of teacher certification (Weisman & Hanson, 2002). The dilemma can be attributed to a variety of factors, yet some of them are unique to the specific field of DL education (Lara-Alecio, et al., 2004). The various contributing factors include elements such as the extreme workload in the bilingual education teacher preparation programs, the unreasonable number of tests required for BE certification, the discouraging lack of proper curriculum materials, and the demoralizing lack of consistent support from the community and school administrators (Weisman & Hanson, 2002).

Furthermore, Weisman and Hanson (2002) found that many BE teachers felt as though they worked in a hostile school climate, in which they experience unwarranted scrutiny, insufficient academic support, and an unreasonable workload (Lara-Alecio et al., 2004). Various studies (*e.g.*, Weisman & Hanson, 2002) have also noted that DL teachers must spend more time preparing for lessons in comparison with their colleagues in comparable positions on the same campus.

Dual language teachers also indicate that a lack of a proper DL curriculum is a discouraging factor in their disillusionment. Because DL teachers use a mixture of native-language instruction and English, they need texts that are written in students' native languages. However, according to Weisman and Hanson (2002), many schools do not provide these kinds of primary language texts.

Several possible solutions for retaining BE teachers in urban and rural districts have been proposed such as soliciting collaboration between teachers and administrators, providing retention incentives for returning teachers, enhancing the appropriate specialized teaching materials, and offering incentive programs for teachers to pursue advanced degrees and/or certifications for the in-demand areas (Hammer et al., 2005; Mitchell, 2018).

Retaining BE teachers must necessarily begin with increasing teacher recruitment. Local school districts can also take a look at the local universities and colleges to promote recruitment of pre-service BE teachers from the local

community. School districts could provide prospective BE teachers opportunities to work while obtaining their teaching certifications and also offer a variety of support mechanisms to fulfill their professional goals. Furthermore, mentors play a key role in the success of novice teachers, so pairing early career teachers with experienced educators who are strong role models will increase the chances of retaining qualified dual language teachers (Mitchell, 2018).

### **Description of the Participants**

All eleven participants are female and are Mexican-American (a citizen or resident of the United States who is of Mexican birth or descent). All of the participants were undergraduate students at the same South Texas university. All of the participants were living in the same county where the South Texas university was found. All participants were transfers to the South Texas university given that, at the time, the university was not a four-year university yet.

All eleven participants were placed in classrooms with DL certified teachers in local public school districts for the field residency (FR) portion of their program, which occurs over two long semesters. The FR One semester consists of a placement that lasts approximately thirteen weeks with the pre-service teacher completing close to 64 hours of classroom time. During this semester, the pre-service teacher presents two partial lessons to students in a small group setting in Spanish only. During the second semester, FR two, the pre-service teacher completes an additional thirteen weeks with the same classroom teacher and with the same mentor/supervisor. During FR two, the pre-service teacher presents two whole group lessons in Spanish. Finally, during the last and third semester, student teaching (ST), the pre-service teachers remain on the same campus and with the same teacher and mentor/supervisor. At this time, they actively transition into the role of student-teacher (ST), essentially taking over all of the duties for the class. The pre-service teachers continue to teach subjects in the language assigned to the subject, whether it be in Spanish or English, depending on the DL program assigned to the campus, grade level and classroom.

The aforementioned professor of record served as the teacher and overseer (supervisor) of three consecutive courses. She taught both the courses focused on the subject matter, like Math, Social Studies, Language Arts, the FB and Science the ST courses in Spanish. All of the participants took these courses together and at the same time as a cohort. The eleven participants all began the pre-service program together in 2012 and simultaneously graduated from the university in 2014.

### **Methods and Procedures**

This study used a mixed-methods approach that included both quantitative and qualitative data. The eleven participants participated in an approved Institutional Review Board (IRB) research study that included two surveys. All of the participants of the study were female, Hispanic, and declared as BE majors in 2012. Furthermore, they were all enrolled at the same university in South Texas during the concurrent time frame as the study.

Initially, the researcher collected data through a survey from participants during their first semester, which was in 2012. Additionally, the participants were surveyed five years later, in 2017. The open-ended questions were analyzed using a narrative and descriptive approach. No coding was used for quantitative data.

Participants completed a survey monkey set of questions. Participants responded to open-ended questions. The data was not coded given that there were only eleven participants. The open-ended questions and the quantitative data was organized and examined using Survey Monkey charts.

## **BE Teacher State Certification Results**

The following details highlight important results about the desired outcomes from a BE Pre-service program that aims to produce teachers who are “home-grown” and who intend to teach in the geographic region of their provenance. Of the eleven participants who sought BE certification, the following results were found:

- Although all of the participants became certified teachers, less than half of the participants were able to obtain BE certification.
- The study revealed that while all of the participants initially declared BE as their major and initially sought BE certification, not all of the candidates attempted the Bilingual Target Language Proficiency Test (BTLPT) Spanish. The BTLPT is a Spanish language proficiency test. This test is separate from the content exam, which at the time was called the Bilingual Generalist exam. The Bilingual Generalist exam consists of BE theory and laws in addition to content related to all subjects.
- One participant made the decision not to challenge the BTLPT state exam at all.

According to the preservice teachers, part of the reason for these dismal results, was due to the fact that, in 2012, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) had not yet generated a practice exam or sufficient practice materials for the BTLPT; preservice teachers could not take any type of practice exam to prepare for the BTLPT. The participants reported that the dire lack of preparation materials, which could have included listening/audio files, speaking prompts or released tests, created a real uncertainty for any candidate intending to challenge the BTLPT in 2012.

In an effort to address the scarcity of preparation materials, the researcher collaborated with colleagues in the BE program at the university to create a practice test that would provide an adequate measure of preparation for the preservice teachers. The creators of the practice test named it the Spanish Language Proficiency (SLP) test. Next, they administered it to all of the participants of this study with the intent to give them feedback about their Spanish language proficiency. No student was excluded from continuing as a result of taking the SLP assessment.

After taking the new practice test (SLP), the majority of the participants who took the state exam attempted the BTLPT once and less than one-third of the participants attempted the same exam twice. Less than half of those participants did not successfully pass the BTLPT state exam, which is required to become a BE certified teacher in Texas. They were the same participants who reported in 2014 that the role of debilitating emotions and anxiety, felt when testing in Spanish, often played a large role in their overall performance on the Spanish language exam (Esparza-Young, Allen & McDonald, 2015).

The participants reported cost as a primary issue for not retaking the BTLPT state exam. They were afraid of paying for an additional registration fee and still not being able to pass. One participant retook the exam two more times, yet she still did not pass. Additionally, she paid for a rescore, which yielded the same result of a non-passing score. The same participant reported that although she recalled speaking fluently during the exam, her oral expression score was a zero. Despite encountering persistent barriers, this same participant later earned recognition as Teacher of the Year at her school district as a non-BE certified teacher. The fact that she did not pass the BTLPT did not prevent her from being an effective teacher who served ELLs and Spanish speaking students.

## **Generalist and Bilingual Generalist State Certification Exams**

Between the years 2012-2014, TEA eliminated the Bilingual Generalist State Certification Exam. Prior to these years, all of the candidates seeking Bilingual certification took the Bilingual Generalist Exam, which has since been divided into two exams, the Generalist Exam and the Bilingual Supplemental. The Generalist exam focuses on subject matter knowledge, and the Bilingual Supplemental focuses on theories and laws related to BE. Although TEA presents it as a practical option, the addition of another exam has resulted in added expenses for the BE Certification pre-service teachers and candidates who must also take the BTLPT and the Professional and Pedagogy Responsibilities (PPR) exam.

### Non-Bilingual Generalist Certification Results

After the participants took our SLP, the practice exam we created to provide feedback for candidates on their language proficiency, some of the candidates elected not to challenge the BTLPT exam or BE certification. The primary reason given by the participants was the imminent desire to secure a teaching position by completing all of the requirements to be certified teachers. Given that not all of the participants were able to pass the BTLPT state exam, several participants elected to switch degree plans during the final semester of their enrollment at the university and pursue an English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement instead. This endorsement allows teachers to work with ELLs, but the endorsement does not require Spanish language proficiency or BE state certification.

In Texas, the requirements for acquiring the ESL endorsement has consistently changed over several decades. At the time of this study, the ESL endorsement was obtainable, if students completed three specific courses related to BE and ESL. The ESL endorsement has continue to change for different grade levels. At the time, students who were BE majors could also obtain an ESL endorsement because the BE degree plan included the three required ESL endorsement courses. Non-BE majors were required, at the time of this study, to take a minimum of three courses which then qualified these students to seek the ESL endorsement. Requirements for an ESL endorsement vary from state to state in the United States.

Any participant who was able to pass the BTLPT exam did not additionally seek the ESL endorsement within the time frame of this study. Only those participants who did not pass or did not take the BTLPT exam took the ESL endorsement certification exam.

The table below includes information about certification for the participants.

Table 1

<b>Participant</b>	<b>BTLPT passed</b>	<b>ESL passed</b>	<b>Generalist</b>	<b>Local Public School Employment</b>	<b>#of times to take the BTLPT exam</b>	<b>Working with ELLs or DL students</b>
<i>P1</i>		x		x	2	x
<i>P2</i>	x			x	1	x
<i>P3</i>		x		x	0	x
<i>P4</i>		x		Relocated	0	x
<i>P5</i>	x			x	1	x
<i>P6</i>		x		x	0	x
<i>P7</i>	x			x	1	x
<i>P8</i>	x			Local Charter School	1	x



<i>P9</i>	x			Lives locally and is a stay at home mom	1	
<i>P10</i>	x			x	1	x
<i>P11</i>			x	x	1	

### ESL Endorsement

About one third of the participants were able to obtain the ESL endorsement. Of the total participants, who sought BE certification, less than half of the participants were able to pass all required state exams to obtain BE state certification. At the time that the participants were seeking BE certification, the State of Texas still offered candidates the opportunity to take either the Bilingual Generalist state exam or the Generalist exam and the Bilingual Supplemental exam separately. As of this year (2019), TEA has modified their requirements and now limits the possibilities for all teacher candidates.

### BE Majors in the Classroom

The quantitative data produced the following responses. The next set of questions focused on participant retention in the profession and whether or not they met their goal and were able to acquire employment in BE classrooms in public schools. The majority of the participants reported that they were working in a public school setting, including one charter school in the same geographic area. One participant responded that she was not teaching in order to stay at home to raise her children. When we asked how long each participant planned to remain in their current teaching position, we received the following responses:

- Only two stated they would stay on indefinitely.
- Less than half stated they would stay on the job more than two years.
- Only one stated she would stay on the job one to two years.
- Less than one-third indicated they were unsure.

### The BTLPT-Spanish Exam

The BTLPT-Spanish state certification exam specifically calls for knowledge of academic vocabulary necessary to teach at an elementary grade level. The Spanish language used for these exams is comparable to the Spanish needed to be successful at a university in any country where Spanish is spoken. This Spanish language proficiency extends beyond basic conversational Spanish which would be part of a basic communication course. Given that over half of the participants were unable to successfully pass the BTLPT-Spanish exam and become BE certified, the researcher concluded that the state exam poses a barrier for the growing demand of producing BE certified teachers. The next questions focus on the challenges the participants faced during their pre-service program experience (Garcia, 2002).

When we asked, “Which Spanish language proficiency skill did you need the most support with?” Most of the participants selected Writing over Speaking, Listening and Reading. The following section focuses on what preparation materials were deemed most valuable and useful by the participants as they prepared for DL certification.

### Preparation Resources for BE Certification

Participants were asked to select from a list of responses, which consisted of resources and options that are typically offered to BE majors in a pre-service program. Among the resources selected, about two-thirds stated

they wanted “more time in Spanish-dominant classrooms” and about half of the participants listed “more reviews for the tests” as the second highest response selected. One primary reason why the participants stated they needed more time in a Spanish-dominant classroom is because the term BE does not always imply or ensure that the instruction will be Spanish dominant. This meant that regardless of the previous exposure to Spanish, the participants would not have had any prior exposure to pedagogical Spanish related to BE, except in the BE degree program courses. More access to explicit modeling of subject matter curriculum in Spanish from campus mentors at the elementary level would have meant more language opportunities for the participants, in the areas of lesson planning, instruction and engagement with students.

At that time, in 2014, (TEA) had not yet developed a practice test with the Education Testing Agency (ETS) for the BTLPT-Spanish for DL majors. As of 2015, no audio files were available to candidates to review in preparation for the BTLPT exam. However, helpful audio files did become available later in 2017. As of 2018, there are still no written practice tests for BE majors to take that would allow self-scoring or online self-assessment on either the Education Testing Services (ETS) or TEA websites.

### **Overcoming Adversity**

Despite facing obstacles, seemingly created by the corresponding state agency and the testing organization, all of the participants became state-certified teachers. Additionally, all of the participants reported that they stayed in touch with other members of the cohort. The cohort model provided an environment that was conducive to effective communication, emotional support, and peer mentoring.

The majority of the candidates have remained in the geographic area where they grew up and are still teaching in a public school setting. Only one candidate reported moving out of the state due to relocation by her spouse; however, she also noted that she intended to return to the same area in the near future. This high retention lends credibility to the argument for “home-grown” programs that was recently touted by Angela Valenzuela (Valenzuela, 2016, p. 1) As districts aspire to develop their BE teacher pipeline, many have begun to express interest and others to invest money into their own “Grow Your Own Teacher” programs. These programs consist of partnerships between districts and teacher preparation programs; the purpose is to proactively recruit local teacher candidates to become part of the profession and teach in their own community (Boyd et al., 2016).

### **Resilience and Leadership**

Because these participants demonstrated a consistent drive to complete the BE university program, graduate, and then serve in their own communities, it is worth taking a look at what outcomes resulted from their impressive commitment and dedication. In the following list are some of the accolades and recognitions as reported by the participants:

- Two participants have been recipients of grants.
- One participant was recognized as a Teacher of the Year.
- One participant was selected to serve as the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) chair.
- One participant was recognized by the local newspaper as the ESL teacher of the year for working with newcomers.

### **Interpretation of Results**

Although this study represents only a snapshot of a small pool of candidates who participated in one BE teacher program, we feel strongly that the results provide valuable insight into the challenges higher education institutions face when students want to complete the requirements needed to become certified as BE teachers. One of the potential factors that may provide an explanation for the high overall certification rate in our cohort could be their strong camaraderie. In this experience, the participants started together, finished together, and have stayed in touch with each other over a period of five years.

Overall, we are gratified by the results of this study. However, we would list the negative aspects of this study as the insurmountable hurdles that were created by the state and testing agency, such as a lack of appropriate and tangible preparation materials. As a result, these constraints impeded the successful completion of the program for our BE majors. We did not overly emphasize other factors such as the cost of exams and the absence of available Spanish dominant classrooms during the time of this study.

Research about the growth of DL programs including the relevance of subject matter instruction in Spanish continues. Thus, the greater availability of classrooms where subject matter instruction occurs in Spanish will also provide more opportunities for preservice teachers to observe, participate and engage in better preparation for the essential state certification exams that are required to become a BE certified teacher in Texas.

The same challenges hold true if there is a reduced number of classrooms available where little to no instruction occurs in Spanish. All BE majors need strong preparation to challenge state exams. Truly, it is a challenge for university preparation programs to prepare novice teachers for BE classrooms.

Other intangible factors to consider would be the ability for some of the participants to weather personal challenges that potentially translated into perseverance and overall resilience. These experiences merit further study and are also worthy of mentioning in order to contextualize the impressive success of these participants. Over a period of five years, the participants experienced many difficult circumstances. For example, one participant was devastated by the tragic loss of a sister during her second semester in the preservice program, which led her to forego her goal of seeking teacher certification and graduation for a year. Despite experiencing the additional tragedy of losing her second sister only one year later, she still persevered towards her ambition of becoming a teacher. Ultimately, she obtained teacher certification and was recognized as a Teacher of the Year, and received a district grant.

Another participant began her academic journey despite experiencing the painful loss of her father at the age of 13. She reported that this personal loss was so powerful at that time in her life that she had been held back for a year in middle school. Then, when her mother lost her vision, the student became her primary caretaker. Despite these tremendous personal hurdles, she overcame them and successfully graduated. She lamented having experienced language loss and reported feeling like she had run out of time to adequately prepare for the BTLPT-Spanish exam. However, she obtained gained ESL endorsement and went on to succeed as an LPAC chair.

Despite not obtaining the official BE certification, all of the participants are serving English Language Learners, whether as DL immersion teachers or as ELL teachers in a public school setting. The only exception is the lone participant who is currently raising her children as a stay at home mother. Although our data is somewhat limited due to the small size of the participant pool, we believe that the results indicate a strong commitment by BE teachers to remain in the profession, to serve BE and ELL students, and to serve as leaders in their corresponding school communities.

## **Conclusion**

During the next census reporting in 2020, the results will likely show a continued trend towards a growing and changing and diverse student population. As pre-service programs at universities move forward, it is important to take a moment and listen to what BE teacher educators and educational researchers are reporting about their findings from the relevant studies in educator preparation programs. It is imperative that policymakers examine the components of a successful preparation program such as ours and make every attempt to replicate it in other locations. In order to meet the demands of culturally diverse learners and dual language learners, policy makers and administrators must strive to provide for the development of more resources, to support Spanish dominant classrooms and to recognize the efforts of BE educators. Our hard-working BE pre-service candidates should be a top priority for all of the stakeholders in the educational community.

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