"NO ONE KNOWS WHO I AM"
What School Leaders Can Learn from ESL Teachers' Voices

Chiu-Yin (Cathy) Wong[*]
Monmouth University

Sultan Turkan
Queen's University Belfast

Studies have indicated that English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers face many challenges in meeting the needs of emergent bilinguals (EBs). Yet, little scholarship has addressed what actions school leaders can take to resolve teachers' concerns. Through the voices of five ESL teachers from a district with a high number of EBs, this case study moves beyond listing the challenges ESL teachers face to discussing actions school leaders can take to address the needs of ESL teachers. More specifically, the participants describe a lack of leadership in promoting collaborations between teachers, ineffective implementation of a push-in model, and issues of time and assessment policy. Suggestions of actions include collaborative leadership with ESL teachers, distributing teaching of EBs a core responsibility for all teachers, valuing multiculturalism and multilingualism, and thinking beyond standardized testing.

Keywords: collaborative leadership, emergent bilinguals, ESL teachers' voices, equitable education, school leaders

Currently, 10% of all learners in PK-12 public schools in the U.S. speak English as a second language (ESL); these students are also referred to as emergent bilinguals (EBs) (García, 2009). To provide equitable education for EBs, listening to their teachers' voices is critical because equity is not practiced when teachers' concerns are not attended to (Sánchez & Menken, 2020). Goddard (2010) also argues that "educational leaders must invite into our pedagogical discourse the voices of others, those most usually marginalized and ignored" (p. 52). However, there has been little research about the importance of school leaders paying specific attention to ESL teachers' voices and addressing their concerns. Thus, in this case study, we reported areas of concern in relation to school leaders' support for educating EBs by channeling the voices of ESL teachers from a district with a high population of EBs. The following overarching question guided this study: What do elementary ESL teachers report about school leaders' actions or inactions in relation to supporting emergent bilinguals?

Literature Review

Collaboration with ESL Teachers

Data show that EBs often face difficulties in academic achievement as compared to their non-EB counterparts (NPR, 2017). Several studies have also demonstrated that implementing collaborative leadership with ESL teachers is an effective way to ensure equitable education for EBs (Hunt, 2011; López & García, 2020; Menken & Sánchez, 2020; Sánchez & Menken, 2020). These studies show that without the input of teachers, it will be challenging for school leaders to achieve the goal of improving education for

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[*]Corresponding author: cwong@monmouth.edu

EBs. However, ESL teachers often report feeling isolated in their schools. School leaders' inclusion of ESL teachers is called for because collaboration, co-planning, and co-teaching have been identified as one of the main challenges ESL teachers face (Baecher, 2012; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). One specific historical issue has concerned how ESL teachers could work with or provide advice for content specialists who are not trained in teaching ESL (Clegg, 1996; Harklau, 1994). Ernst-Slavit and Wenger's study (2006) notes the low status of ESL teachers as the challenge as they are viewed as 'hidden teachers' and not taken seriously by certified teachers and administrators. Similarly, DelliCarpini (2009) reports that ESL teachers typically teach in non-classroom areas or converted closets without access to resources. This marginalized status of ESL teachers is viewed as an extension of the marginalized status of the EBs in U.S. public schools (Liggett, 2010).

Leadership Perspective

Focusing on equitable education for EBs, scholars (e.g., Evans et al., 2019; García et al., 2017; López & García, 2020) urge educational leaders to shift their monoglossic ideologies to viewing multiple cultures and languages as assets and advise them to transform the school environment to reflect students' linguistic diversity by developing a multilingual school ecology. Practices that do not serve EBs' linguistic and cultural needs essentially run the risk of adversely impacting their learning and educational trajectories (Evans et al., 2019). To avoid this risk, a non-monolingual English paradigm should be followed to treat culture and language as resources for learning (Evans et al. 2019; García et al., 2017). It is also important to note that a multilingual school ecology benefits all students and teachers by moving away from harmful and restrictive monolingual ideologies.

However, we argue that some school leaders, even if they are equipped with substantial financial and human resources, might risk failing to help unless they are informed about the full nature of the challenges ESL teachers face as they support EBs. Therefore, school leaders need to be foremost informed about the consequences of their actions (or inactions) through the voices of ESL teachers.

Method

An instrumental case study approach, which is used to provide insights into an issue to build a generalization (Stake, 1995), was applied to explore the challenges that ESL teachers at the elementary level face. Their voices provided insights into what school leaders need to address so that EBs are best served. The study took place in a district in the Northeastern area of the United States. The ESL teachers who participated in the study taught kindergarten to 5th grade (K-5), where approximately 60% of the students were identified as EBs. For the purpose of this study, we call these classrooms elementary school level. A push-in method was implemented from K-3, while pull-out, push-in, and self-contained models were implemented at 4th and 5th grades. All teachers in the district were required to complete a six-day professional development workshop on the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model (Echevarria et al., 2017). At the time of the study, there were a total of 10 ESL teachers who taught at the elementary school level.

Participants

We invited all 10 ESL teachers to participate in the study and five of them accepted the invitation. Using pseudonyms, these teachers are called Ave, Nancy, Jerry, Joyce, and Sue throughout this paper. At the time of the study, Ave pushed into the 1st grade classrooms, Nancy pushed into the 3rd grade classes, and Joyce pushed into the kindergarten classes. Jerry was a pull-out ESL teacher for 4th and 5th grades, while Sue was a self-contained classroom teacher for 4th-5th grades. All of the participants were ESL certified and represented a wide range of years of teaching experience: Ave (29 years), Nancy (6 years), Jerry (4 years), Joyce (9 years), and Sue (16 years).

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Data Sources

The primary data collected for this study were transcripts of in-depth, semi-structured one-on-one interviews with each participant. We also conducted two classroom observations for each participant. We then used the field notes as a secondary data source to triangulate the interview data. Below are the data collection procedures.

First, two classroom observations were conducted for each participant. The classes were selected based on the choices given by the participants. Each class lasted approximately 30-40 minutes in duration. During the observations, we took field notes with thick and rich descriptions (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) to record what was happening in the classroom as well as any questions and thoughts that came up during the observations.

A semi-structured interview with each participant was conducted within a week after the classroom observations. The interview questions (see Appendix A) focused on: a) the participants' experience in teaching ESL, b) how they taught their students, c) the support they received from other teachers and school leaders, d) their challenges in teaching, and e) support they wish to receive. Each interview was recorded for transcription and lasted approximately 45 to 55 minutes.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in two cycles. During the first cycle, the authors first individually read, coded the data, and summarized the data using a holistic coding method (Dey, 1993). Then, we each coded the data using in vivo coding (a form of qualitative data analysis which emphasizes the actual spoken words of the participants) for the interview transcripts and process coding for the field notes (Saldaña, 2016). We then compared our codes to ensure that our thought process was similar and discussed the potential categories. During the second cycle, we employed axial coding, a process of determining which codes were salient and linking the related codes to create categories (Saldaña, 2016). The first author, then, generated the categories into themes based on the research question.

Findings

Overall, all five participants voiced that they did not receive much support from the school leaders. Three themes emerged: (1) lack of leadership in promoting collaboration, (2) challenges of push-in policies, and (3) issues of time and assessment policy.

Lack of Leadership in Promoting Collaboration

All of the participants identified as a key problem insufficient communication and collaborations with their colleagues. Four participants expressed that there was no collaboration whatsoever with their classroom teachers, and that they perceived themselves as "invisible" to classroom teachers. Moreover, they stated the rest of the teachers in the schools viewed them as "a pain," especially when the colleagues had to plan school events to include the ESL teachers and the EBs in the building. Jerry said, "I feel like I'm on an island…no one knows who I am in the building. The school leaders don't know when and where I am at any time."

Limited communication with other teachers also affected the support that the EBs received because the participants could not find out from other teachers what the students needed to know academically. In our observations, we saw that all of the participants except for Joyce were teaching in the corner of the classrooms they pushed in. There was little or no meaningful communication about students' learning between them and the classroom teachers during the lessons. Even though there was a Professional Learning Community (PLC) every six days, the participants stated they could not express concerns and exchange ideas during the meetings because other instructional matters were usually prioritized. Jerry and Sue who taught several grade levels said some of the teachers were fortunate enough to have a PLC with their grade level, but Jerry and Sue did not have opportunities to participate in any of them. For this reason, they reported that they felt they did not know what was happening in the school, nor were they

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able to communicate with other teachers on how to best facilitate and maximize student learning. An alternative perspective came from Joyce who noted that conversing with her team at the kindergarten level was what made her job successful, but it was mainly because almost everyone who taught kindergarten was ESL certified. Because of this, these classroom teachers were willing to exchange information casually in the hallway. From our observations, Joyce was the only participant whom we saw have a brief communication with the classroom teacher. Before class started, the two teachers gathered in front of the white board and discussed very briefly how they would group the students for different activities. Joyce was not only able to work with the EBs in small groups, she was also asked to read a book entitled *Zim Zam Man* by Cheryl Ryan with all students, including non-EBs in the class during the last ten minutes of class time. However, Joyce's communication was limited to the teachers at her grade level, not other ESL team members. In her words, "I feel like I don't get to connect with other ESL teachers in the school."

The participants believed that administrators were unaware of the demands of their work and expressed hope that their school leaders would observe their classrooms to understand what teachers have to do to provide accommodations for each student in each lesson. In this regard, the participants suggested that there was a need for more ESL teachers for the population of the students. Sue exclaimed, "We cannot handle this amount of [EB] students only with four members on our team. We need more." In addition, three participants revealed that most of the classroom teachers do not follow the requirement of implementing the SIOP components even though all teachers in the district were SIOP trained, nor do they provide accommodations for their EBs. For instance, Sue said:

> All the teachers have to be SIOP trained, but do they do accommodations and use those SIOP strategies? Most of them don't; that's the reality. And I don't blame them because they really don't know what to do.

Nancy agreed with this and expressed that each building should have at least one coach to support the ESL teachers instead of only one coach for the entire district.

Challenges of Push-in Policies

The participants specifically expressed disappointment that school leaders, due to the lack of observations, would not see the challenges they faced while pushing into other teachers' classrooms. For example, the participants felt that their role was unclear to classroom teachers. Although we did not observe this issue during our class observations, Nancy, in particular, recalled that she was viewed as an assistant and was asked to make copies for the classroom teachers. Another challenge of pushing in was that the classroom teachers selected what the ESL teachers should teach. We heard from multiple participants that they could not serve EBs well unless they regularly collaborated or communicated with other classroom teachers to identify areas of improvement and how to best support students' learning. For example, Ave and Nancy were asked by the classroom teachers to focus on writing only, but they did not think that was the best approach for what their EBs students needed. During our observations, these participants integrated speaking and reading in their teaching even though the main focus was on writing. They explained that they could not ignore the students' learning needs.

Resources is another area of challenge. The participants expressed their wish to teach with technology and materials appropriate for students with various levels of proficiency, especially when they taught students at multiple grade levels. However, it was difficult for them to carry along all the proficiency level-appropriate materials all the time. When they forgot to bring specific materials, they would need to be innovative and use what they had on the spot rather than spending extra time going back to their offices to get materials. In our observations, four of the participants carried a suitcase or backpack with them to the classrooms. Jerry expressed his struggle, saying: "I don't have [a classroom library]. I also don't have a

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classroom. I'm not going to carry books around with me the whole time. I set it up using what I had and what I could get from other teachers." The excerpt illustrates the additional challenges that ESL teachers faced when they did not have their own space, which affected how they facilitated students' learning.

Issues of Time and Assessment Policy

The participants noted that because the school leaders did not know what work they were putting into supporting their EBs, time that the teachers spent on preparation and teaching went unnoticed. The participants who pushed in said that they were only able to see the EBs for 20-30 minutes every few days because there were not enough ESL teachers. Often, they started a topic one day and could not continue until a few days later. This hindered the participants from evaluating the students' progress. In addition, the participants stated that they were not able to implement strategies to engage and individualize instruction to support the students because of time constraints. For instance, Jerry explained, "Sometimes having 19 kids and one teacher, especially [EBs] need directions...I spend ten minutes just explaining an assignment rather than actually teaching and guiding them." Sue also found that time was a major issue. Her goal was to help her students find their voices and not to feel less of themselves, especially when the ESL group was, in Sue's words, "invisible to other teachers." However, her prep time was limited. She said, "I need time to individualize their work. We have only one prep a day, 40 minutes. I have no time...the school leaders don't know we need this...they don't see what is happening in our classrooms to understand it."

A related issue that all five participants voiced was about the unfair assessment policy. The participants reported that they were held responsible for EBs' academic improvement, as measured by standardized tests. For example, Jerry said:

> they tell us not to teach to the test, but the truth is that I get an SGP [student growth percentile], which is dependent on how well the kids do on the test. Our school report card partly is based on the kids showing improvement on the test, that's part of my SGO [student growth objective].

To prevent teachers from "teaching to the test," the participants believed it was necessary for their school leaders to encourage open communication about students' needs and strengths as well as sharing assessment feedback between teachers.

In summary, the participants hoped that the school leaders would make sure classroom teachers are aware of what their role is as an ESL teacher and what the work entails. They also wished their expertise would be valued, and that all teachers would work as a team. They reckoned that these changes could be possible through school leaders' actions and attention.

Discussion and Implications

The findings in this case study resonated with some commonly noted themes in the literature. First, teachers wish for school leadership to transform the challenges of collaboration among ESL and content teachers (Clegg, 1996; Harklau, 1994), which was also stated by the participants in this study. This frequently encountered challenge directly influences the climate of the school and inclusion of ESL teachers as well as EBs within the school community (Valdes, 2001). In supporting EBs, collaboration between ESL and content teachers is vital (Honigsfeld and Dove, 2010). However, as with Nancy, it is often observed in collaborations that there is a power differential that leaves many ESL teachers feeling as if they were aides without a full sense of serving as "real teachers"(DelliCarpini, 2009; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006). One possible way to counteract the problem of invisibility is through forming PLCs at the school, yet our data indicated that the participants either were not included in the PLC meetings or they did not find these meetings helpful. We recommend that school leaders make it a priority for ESL teachers to share their expertise and concerns during PLC meetings, which could culminate in co-planned lessons and

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assessments that focus on EBs' learning needs (Evans et al., 2019). ESL teachers could also be provided space and time to hold their own PLCs in addition to or alongside the one held with the grade level teachers so that ESL teachers could have a shared place where they can support each other frequently. Another way school leaders could help mediate the issue of invisibility and differential power dynamics is through collaborative leadership. According to our interviews and observations, the participants were not deeply included by school leaders in decision-making and felt that their expertise was not valued. Developing collaborative leadership that includes ESL teacher leaders will be beneficial for the school and EBs (Menken & Sánchez, 2020) because it enables ESL teachers to draw on their expertise and voices of the school community to make decisions that serve all teachers and students (Hunt, 2011).

In addition, studies show how school leaders' vision could make a difference in the climate of serving EBs (e.g., Evans et al. 2019; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). When leaders view language as a resource, they are better able to include the EBs' entire linguistic and cultural repertoires in the school climate, curriculum, and instructional practices. Rather than viewing these students as a burden or a demand, school leaders and all teachers should view them as an asset to the school. Having this mindset shift, according to García et al. (2017), not only will change the school culture to a more multilingual inclusive environment, but it will increase teachers' willingness to collaborate. The asset mindset also naturally lends itself to including the expertise of all the teachers and all the stakeholders into the process of educating EBs (Hopkins & Brezicha, 2020), bearing a full commitment to social justice and equity (Shields, 2010).

We also suggest that school leaders should make the work of teaching EBs a core responsibility for all teachers by, perhaps, requiring all teachers and teacher candidates to be ESL certified. Our study revealed that general classroom teachers who are ESL certified are much more inclined to collaborate with their ESL colleagues. Professional development is important, but it should be well designed and/or intentionally selected, as we found in the current study that professional development on SIOP alone was not sufficient for teachers to truly understand how to support EBs. In fact, Wong et al. (2020) demonstrate that to implement the SIOP model effectively, teachers' knowledge on how languages are learned remain key factors to meet the needs of EBs. Thus, we suggest that teacher preparation programs should require at least one course that focuses on how to support EBs for all teacher candidates.

Our participants also felt that the practice of mandated assessments for EBs was unjust. Holding the teachers accountable for the students' scores placed immense pressures on the participants. Teachers' fight against such inequitable assessment policies can affect their well-being (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011). We urge school leaders to develop strategic plans that focuses on creating an inclusive environment for all students and valuing multiculturalism and multilingualism. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to remove the monoglossic orientations to language proficiency and balance external mandates that do not represent the whole child (Leu Bonanno et al., 2020) with locally-created goals. By thinking beyond standardized testing, schools can push back on the inflexible framing of students' identities (e.g., the use of 'proficient' or 'non-proficient') and work instead to foster students' cultures and language practices (Leu Bonanno et al., 2020; García et al., 2017). To provide a just educational environment for EBs, policy makers may reconsider how school funding, which is typically based on test scores, should be redistributed with a focus on meeting the needs of students and teachers.

Conclusion

Our case study aims to bring awareness to school leaders of the existing challenges ESL teachers face daily as they are on the frontlines to support EBs. We find it most critical that school leaders implement a vision that embodies a deep commitment to serving and empowering EBs and their teachers effectively. When ESL teachers are supported, their opportunity to reach EBs expands (Baecher & Bell, 2017). Through this study, we hope to bring the urgency of supporting ESL teachers to all educators and school leaders. Thus, we suggest that strategies for teacher collaborations should be included in teacher preparation

programs. In addition to the leadership approaches that we suggested in the study, it is also important to educate a new generation of administrators about ESL instruction. Therefore, we urge education leadership programs to include coursework that addresses equitable education for EBs since the goal for all educators should be to work together across administrative levels to support EBs.

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Chiu-Yin (Cathy) Wong earned her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis on Second Language Education from Texas Tech University; she is Associate Professor of TESOL at Monmouth University.

Sultan Turkan holds a Ph.D. in teaching and teacher education from the University of Arizona; she is assistant professor in bilingual education at Queen's University Belfast.

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Appendix A
Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching? How long have you been teaching ESL?
2. How did you become an ESL teacher? Did you receive professional training? Is it an endorsement or a degree?
3. What are the demographics of your EBs like?
4. What type of ESL classes do you teach?
5. What do you consider when preparing your lessons for your EBs?
6. How do you engage your EBs? Can you give me some examples?
7. In considering your classroom on a day-to-day basis, what are the teaching strategies/methods/techniques you would say you use the most often? Why do you like them?
8. Why do you think they are effective in supporting/engaging their learning? What evidence do you see?

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9. As an ESL teacher, what do you do to support those with different levels of proficiency? How do you support them? Do you provide accommodations in your ESL classrooms? If so, what kind of accommodations do you provide?
10. What is your view on assessment for EBs? What is the role of assessment in your classroom?
11. What do you consider to be the challenges your ESL students face in their day-to-day learning? What about in their social and home lives? Do these challenges affect their learning? (Can you provide specific examples?)
12. What do you do to help them with those challenge(s)?
13. What do you consider to be your strengths as an ESL educator? Why do you think these factors are important?
14. What are the challenges you face as an ESL educator? (e.g. in the classroom, lesson preparation, district, professional development, overload…etc)
15. What do you consider to be your weaknesses as an ESL educator, if any? How do you overcome them?
16. How does your district help you, as an ESL teacher, with meeting the needs of your EBs?
17. Do you feel your school district provides enough resources for you to do your job to the best of your ability? How? Examples?
1. Do you speak any languages besides English? If so, do you use these languages in the classroom? If not, has learning a foreign language helped you as an ESL teacher regardless of whether or not you speak that language in the classroom?
2. What is the role of students' native language(s) in your classroom?
   - For students?
   - For you as a teacher?
3. From your experience, is the use of this foreign language in your classroom beneficial? Why or why not?
4. What problems and challenges do you think the ESL teaching community faces at large?
5. What is your view on teacher collaboration and its effect specifically on the ESL learning community?
6. How do you think you are viewed by other content area teachers as an ESL teacher?
7. In terms of educational policies/laws/reforms, what do you see as most detrimental to the ESL teaching and learning community?